

[ ADVERTORIAL ]

# Talkin' Tech

JERRY CORBETT » TECHNICAL SERVICES MANAGER, QUALI-PRO



## Q What trends are you seeing in the lawn care market?

As I've heard many times in my life, "The only thing you can count on is change." In my opinion, how successful you become depends on how well you adapt to the change. There's a growing change in information technology that lawn care operators (LCOs) can and should be taking advantage of to be more successful. The new modern information technology can at least make life a bit easier. We now have social media, iPhones or Androids, iPads, Skype and the Internet at our disposal at all times.

For example, I see LCOs out in the field and if they're having trouble identifying a weed, disease or insect, they can snap a picture on their cell phones and send into the office, extension agent or university professor for proper identification. Within minutes you can get several opinions on the pest you're dealing with. If you really think about it, we have amazing tools that can help us with our jobs today.

Another thing I find very cool is that leading turfgrass universities have lots of information on their web pages. For example, at [turffiles.ncsu.edu](http://turffiles.ncsu.edu), North Carolina State University researchers publish weed, disease and insect alerts when the pests are first seen in their area. It's a lot easier to find information about our pests these days.

## Q What pests are lawn care operators most concerned with these days?

In the past LCOs could plan to deal with the same pests year after year. You could almost count on it. Today we're all dealing with pests that may not have been a problem before. In my area we have red imported fire ants that were certainly

less of a problem 10 to 12 years ago. I have heard entomologists claim we have more pests because we're now using insecticides that are safer to the environment, so these insecticides do not offer the broad-spectrum insect control like the old chemistry (organic phosphates or carbamates, etc.).

Today we're treating for more specific insect situations. In the past, when spraying an insecticide with the old chemistry we actually controlled several other insect pests. Now when we're treating fire ants using fipronil we may control a couple of other insects like mole crickets, but we don't control everything.

Today we're now having issues with pests like billbugs, armyworms, sugarcane beetles, nematodes and more ants than I have ever seen before. Also, in my area I can say that we have seen more ticks, fleas, spiders and mosquitoes than ever before.

Because of the increase with insect pest pressures and the limited insect spectrum of our insecticides, I predict that combination products will be more handy in the future.

## Q What's new with Quali-Pro in the lawn care market?

We recently launched ENCLAVE™ flowable fungicide for horticultural disease control (for greenhouse, nursery and landscape applications). ENCLAVE provides broad-spectrum control of many foliar, stem and below-ground diseases on a wide range of horticultural plants grown or maintained under a variety of conditions. It's university tested, providing superior results.

Another product we offer for LCOs is Fipronil 0.0143 G broadcast insecticide. It's one of the best fire ant products available, providing residual control. It can be

used to control existing mounds and prevent new fire ant infestations in residential, commercial, golf courses, recreational turfgrass and landscape beds. It can be applied any time of the year as a broadcast application.

For the LCOs dealing with broadleaf weeds in southern turfgrass situations, we have Quali-Pro MSM herbicide. MSM contains Metsulfuron, which is a powerful sulfonylurea herbicide that can be used on southern turfgrass cultivars and will control several broadleaf weeds.

Quali-Pro also offers 3-D herbicide, which is a phenoxy-based combination product that can be used on warm season and cool season turfgrass cultivars. It will control several broadleaf weeds including chickweed and dandelions.

With regard to insect control, I really like our Cyonara 9.7 insecticide. It contains Lambda-cyhalothrin, which is a synthetic pyrethroid. This product can be used by LCOs around buildings, lawns and landscapes. It is my favorite insecticide for controlling fleas, ticks, spiders and mosquitoes.

## Q What's different about Quali-Pro?

One thing that I can say about Quali-Pro is that we are dedicated to supporting the industry. All of our products are tested internally as well as by the leading university cooperators. Our promise is to deliver an economically competitive product with superior formulation technology.

Another thing that I tell folks all over the country is that if you have a question about a Quali-Pro product with regards to rates, issues or performance, you can contact me at [JerryC@quali-pro.com](mailto:JerryC@quali-pro.com).



# BUILD A BETTER BUSINESS WITH *generosity*



Why companies are pitching in to support charities and their communities.

BY STAN CRAIG

A full-page ad in a Sunday edition of *The New York Times* stated boldly that \$60 million was received in 2012—more than \$1 million a week—by a variety of recognized charities and community causes. The ad was not from a charity or fund-raising organization. It was from one of America's largest retailers with multiple stores all across America. Why run full-page ads announcing charitable giving? Why not a sales ad or holiday offers? Because statistics prove over and over that customers, if given a choice, prefer to buy from those who provide support to charities and causes they see as valuable to their community.

More companies understand the balance sheet is more than numbers and have developed values that are stated, respected and carried out. Generosity is one of those values. The buying public has made clear that they prefer to buy from good corporate citizens. Generosity demonstrates a genuine corporate value that benefits the company, employees and the community. It comes in all sizes. It will fit nearly every business. How is true generosity recognized? Generosity is noticed if its goals are visible and more than a sales or a morale booster. If your company is looking for ways to give back, consider the following options.



## Volunteers matter

Businesses that encourage employee volunteer days at a local nonprofit of their choice get a double bonus. Employees enjoy serving and local non-profits see your company in a very different light. With employee verification, write a check to an organization representing the value of an employee's work if a paid day-off can't be granted. Schedule an employee generosity day for all employees to sign up for a community or team project.

Helping build a house for Habitat for Humanity, spending a day at a soup kitchen or shelter or helping in a local community center are all team-building events as well as acts of generosity.

Here are just a few of the dividends that corporate generosity creates, according to a VolunteerMatch.org survey. It:

> **Raises employee morale.** 94 percent of companies surveyed believed employee volunteering provides a way to raise employee morale.

> **Boosts employee health.** 92 percent of people who volunteer through their workplace report higher rates of physical and emotional health.

> **Provides skill development.** 88 percent of employee volunteers report that volunteering provides networking/career development opportunities.

> **Increases employee loyalty.** 66 percent of employees reported a greater commitment to the company as a result of their experience as volunteers.

There are many more examples of creative ways to be generous. Look around your community. How can what you do every day become more evident and beneficial to others?

## Little things count

"Giving" actually multiplies what you are "receiving." Walk into most Sam's Clubs or Costcos at 1 p.m. on almost any weekday and you can basically have a free lunch—and not by ordering at the lunch counter. Just walk down the aisles and you will find hot foods

**92** percent of people who volunteer through their workplace report higher rates of physical and emotional health.

from pizza to burgers, cold beverages, hot beverages, sweets and treats of all sorts—freely and gladly handed out. Whole Foods and Trader Joe's are doing the same for their customers.

Why this generosity? The truth is, even if the goal is not necessarily to be generous (as we think of it), generosity can build sales. Coupons for free items, free bonus gifts and prizes have always worked to gain attention and build sales for products from cereal and soap to jewelry and big ticket items such as automobiles and even homes.

But how can you be generous when your cash is low, your business consists of products or services that you can't give as samples—or you have few employees to volunteer? What then?

- > Offer discounts to charitable organizations;
- > Give time or funds to community projects;
- > Participate in a community event that's not business-related;
- > Offer your place of business for community use, seminars, calling-marathons or a meeting room;
- > Lead a class on your specialty for the chamber of commerce or any local organization or non-profit; or
- > Speak to senior citizens clubs, retirement communities, schools and PTAs and let the group charge participants for your valuable information and keep the revenue.

Customers and potential customers will take note. You will generate positive publicity. Commit to generosity in the true sense of the word and it will make a difference that can pay dividends for years to come and build your balance sheet in ways that simply can't be quantified.

Remember, your bottom line may not only be measured by revenue received but by resources shared. Generosity is a business vitamin that will build a healthier bottom line. **LM**

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*Craig is a financial planner, executive coach, keynote speaker and author of "ForeTalk: Taking Care of Tomorrow Today." Reach him via ForeTalkSeminar.com.*

## GREEN INDUSTRY gives back

**Volunteers tackled 140 projects nationwide during PLANET's fifth annual Day of Service.**

The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) held its annual Day of Service on April 22, Earth Day. The event is a grassroots effort by individual landscape industry companies to create volunteer projects in their own communities. This year's theme was "Come Alive Outside" to showcase the positive effects green spaces have on peoples' lives.

This year, more than 1,900 volunteers from across 36 states, Canada, and Trinidad and Tobago, participated in approximately 140 projects that had an estimated value of donated time and services of \$660,000.

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# VOLUNTEERISM

## GREEN INDUSTRY gives back

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"Our industry has the ability to make people's lives better by improving the community green spaces, gardens, parks and ball-fields that people use every day," says PLANET President Norman Goldenberg, LIC. "It's so inspiring to see the incredible projects that these companies do in their own communities, at their own cost, without question, out of a desire to help people."

Event sponsors included Belgard Hardscapes, Blizzard Snowplows, Fisher Snowplows, Include Software, John Deere, Nature Safe, Western, TruGreen, Shindaiwa, CNA, Stihl, Snapper Pro, Turf Appeal, and HighGrove Partners and The Greenwood Group. Many sponsors including Stihl, Shindaiwa, Turf Appeal, The Greenwood Group, and HighGrove Partners organized projects in addition to providing financial support for the event.

Here's a look at a few projects:



**Kane Landscapes**  
STERLING, VA.

**Project:** Construct a memorial patio at Langley Residential Services, a home for disabled adults in Dunn Loring, Va.



**Gachina Landscape Management**  
MENLO PARK, CALIF.

**Project:** Build an educational garden at Marin Day Schools in Redwood City, Calif., including irrigation upgrades, amending the soil with organic compost, planting a variety of vegetables and planting annual and perennial flowers.



**Belknap Landscape Co. & New Hampshire Landscape Association members**  
GILFORD, N.H.

**Project:** Lead a three-day cleanup effort to restore the yards and landscapes of nearly 200 homes ravaged by Hurricane Sandy in Lindenhurst, N.Y.



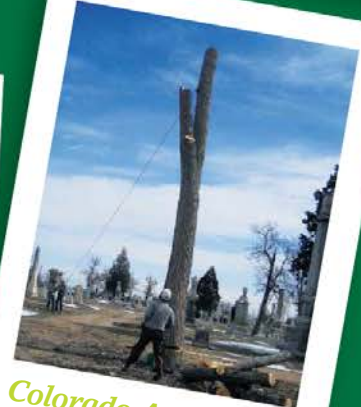
**Hemlock Landscapes**  
CHAGRIN FALLS, OHIO

**Project:** Clean up the grounds at the Ohio Army National Guard's 135th Military Police Co. armory.



**Ammons Landscapes**  
PAMPA, TEXAS

**Project:** Clean up, replant, paint, aerate and more at the Pampa Optimist Youth Club.



**Colorado Association of Lawn Care Professionals**  
DENVER

**Project:** Remove approximately 60 large, medium and smaller dead trees from the Riverside Cemetery in Colorado.



**HighGrove Partners**  
AUSTELL, GA.

**Project:** Install landscape elements at Calvary Children's Home in Powder Springs, Ga.



# MARKET WATCH

## MAINTENANCE

### Blade runners

Handling mower blades with care preserves quality and productivity at Mainscape.

By MARISA PALMIERI

**A**t Mainscape's Naples, Fla., branch, the staff handles mower blades with care to give its military, homeowner association and commercial clients the best quality of cut without any dreaded "streaking."

If quality is subpar and callbacks occur, Branch Manager Jim Spano cringes at the thought of lost time.

"If there are streaks, we have to go back out and re-mow if it's a priority customer," he says. "Then we're just wasting gross margin dollars by going back out to an area that should have been treated correctly the first time."

To prevent such an instance the company is picky about its mower blade selection and maintenance to ensure success when handling blades for the 60 to 80 John Deere and Exmark mowers it runs daily.

#### RIGHT BLADES FOR THE RIGHT GRASS

Most of the turf Mainscape handles is St. Augustine grass, as well as Bahia and other varieties of *paspalum*. "Currently we like the high-lift Gator Mulcher blades," he says, noting the blade thickness is superior to many other aftermarket blades, resulting in a good quality of cut for the Mainscape clients' turf. "If we

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**MAINTENANCE** How to handle mower blades with care

PG 36

**IRRIGATION** Adding value with irrigation audits

PG 38

**DESIGN/BUILD** Co-op showroom concept presents opportunity

PG 42

**LAWN/TREE CARE** Some LCOs turn to organic soil amendments



Mainscape mechanics store extra sets of mower blades on racks (left) and disinfect them daily in a wash station.

don't order new mowers with the high-lift mulching blade, I'm willing to pay to have get them instead of trying out whatever they're putting on."

Spano notes it's a premium product—sets of three cost about \$50—but it's worth it not to have to have blades that cause "streaking."

#### MAINTAIN WITH CARE

Sharp blades are key. "Every day our mechanics get underneath, take off and put on new blades," Spano says, noting there are two sets of blades for every mower, which buys the mechanics some time with the sharpening process. "When we buy a new mower we just go ahead and order the second set of blades so it goes into our inventory."

Each mower has slot on a rack where its spare blades are stored before they're rotated back onto the mower. In addition to being sharpened daily, the mechanics disinfect them with a bleach-water mixture.

"That way we don't run the risk of spreading diseases from one property to another," he says.



Mainscape's Naples, Fla., branch upgrades its mower blades to improve its quality of cut.

# Finding 'liquid assets'

Contractors can add value to their irrigation services by identifying cost-saving opportunities for clients.

By JONATHAN KATZ

Over the past century, advancements in irrigation technology have created more efficient and accurate systems. Still, many irrigation system users are unaware their systems are outdated or inefficient.

For irrigation contractors, this presents an opportunity for upgrades, replacements and other maintenance needs.

The challenge is identifying these needs and then communicating them to customers. Irrigation audits can be an effective way to upsell customers on solutions for irrigation systems.

Turftenders Landscape Services, based in Raleigh, N.C., began offering commercial customers irrigation audits more than two years ago as a money-saving service.

While the audits haven't become a major revenue generator for Turftenders, the company views the offering as a potential market differentiator, says Chase Erwin, Turftenders' business development manager.

"Our company tries to be a solutions provider," Erwin says. "It's very competitive in Raleigh, and there are a lot of companies that are great at landscape maintenance. They try to maintain what's existing. For us, we try to take more of an outside-the-box approach."

Being a solutions provider means helping customers find long-term savings in an environmentally friendly way through water conservation, Erwin says. Turftenders

President Steve Hill created the irrigation auditing program after attending an annual water symposium in North Carolina about two years ago. One of the main conference topics was the subject of irrigation-related water conservation. The discussion touched on water scarcity in the region and the rising cost of water. Seeing an opportunity to help customers reduce costs and save water resources, Turftenders decided to offer irrigation auditing services, Erwin says.

Turftenders markets the irrigation audits primarily to homeowner associations, condominiums and other commercial clients rather than smaller residential properties. That's because a property with few irrigation zones will likely find less value in an audit that can cost between \$500 and \$2,000, based on the number of zones, Erwin says. Turftenders charges separately for the audit and any additional work related to the audit findings.

## HOW IT WORKS

Turftenders markets the program by mailing a cover letter explaining the audit portion of its irrigation efficiency program, which it calls Liquid Assets, to select customers. This year, the company plans to send the letter to

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At left: Josh DeMoll, irrigation technician, sets an irrigation head. Below: A Turftenders' account undergoes an irrigation audit.



PHOTOS: TURFTENDERS LANDSCAPE SERVICES





**JERRY GAETA**  
Landscape Solutions



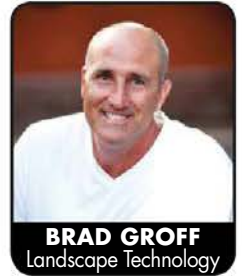
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To download a Liquid Assets case study and a sample of the irrigation audit letter Turftenders sends to commercial clients, visit the Web Extras section of [Landscape Management.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net)

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approximately 200 commercial clients. Turftenders conducts the audit to map the irrigation system to pinpoint design flaws and identify leaks or broken heads.

The company begins the audit process by turning on every zone and then observing the system in operation to identify performance problems. The technicians look for obvious signs of malfunction, including sunken sprinkler heads, misaligned spray patterns (identified by brown spots in certain areas) and misting or fogging, which can be a sign of overpressure.

From there, Turftenders conducts performance testing to calculate the precipitation rate, so the company can determine uniformity of the application. The process helps Turftenders technicians know how long the system should operate. Measuring the precipitation rate is less sophisticated than it may sound. Turftenders conducts the process by placing red plastic cups along a mapped-out grid system in the landscape. After allowing the system to run for several minutes, a technician measures how much water was collected in the cups. Using this data, the company

can determine how much water per hour each area is receiving, Erwin says.

Turftenders enters the data, including usage information from the client's water bills, into a spreadsheet provided by Rain Bird. The spreadsheet calculates savings and the payback time frame. With the audit complete, Turftenders follows up with a report detailing a plan to potentially save water at the property. The letter includes estimates of potential gallons and money saved if the customer follows through with the suggested actions. Some of the recommendations may include retrofits, capping off certain heads or eliminating zones, as well as ensuring the controller is properly scheduled.

## THE RESULTS

One housing development already has realized significant savings from the program. The housing community encompasses 71 homes on 11.5 acres, including nearly 74,000 square feet of fescue turf. After the first full year in 2011, the Turftenders' client realized a decline in landscape water consumption of 638,792 gallons from the previous

year and a water cost savings of \$5,950.

Turftenders installed new pressure-regulating heads to improve water distribution and eliminate misting.

The company also cut the total number of heads from more than 1,000 to 880. Turftenders expects the client to recover its initial capital investment in three-and-a-half years and save more than \$71,000 over the system's lifespan.

So far, Turftenders has achieved some success with the audit program, including a client who agreed to a \$20,000 retrofit. Typical projects in the current economic climate have been a few thousand dollars, Erwin says. He's optimistic that as water prices continue to rise, more customers will recognize the value of irrigation audits.

"It's something that differentiates us from our competition, and everybody wants to save some money, Erwin says. "It's also good for the environment. Here in North Carolina water rates are going up, and these irrigation systems are too valuable to these properties to just abandon them."

*Katz is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.*

## DESIGN/BUILD

# One-stop shop

A Florida outdoor living co-op presents opportunities and challenges.

By JONATHAN KATZ

**S**ome homeowners envision their backyard as a secluded paradise with a pool, patio and fire pit. Others seek a Zen experience with koi ponds and water gardens. Yet sometimes these dream

backyards are beyond the capabilities of a single landscape designer or company.

In November, a group of businesses opened a showroom in Ellenton, Fla., less than 20 miles north of Sarasota, as a type of one-stop shop for outdoor living. The four companies that make up the co-op called Backyards N More joined together to create synergies that would lead to better landscape designs and more referral-based business.

Backyards N More includes a landscape design/build company, a pest control and lawn care firm, a pool and spa installer and a heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) firm. The building is owned by Backyards N More founder Philip Yetzer, who's the president and CEO of the pool and spa

installation firm Drips 'n' Puddles. The partnership has increased revenue by approximately 20 percent to 40 percent for Prime Environmental Landscaping (PEL), says owner and founder Chris Lockhart. PEL is a design/build contractor that partnered with Drips 'n' Puddles last spring to form the co-op.

PEL already has benefited from job leads generated by Drips 'n' Puddles. In some cases, the partnership has reduced installation times for PEL, resulting in more satisfied customers, Lockhart says. Before joining Backyards N More, PEL often faced design, timing and budget challenges because the company didn't have the opportunity to coordinate with the pool contractor.

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## ABOUT THE HOST

Jody Shilan is an award-winning landscape designer with more than 35 years of experience in the green industry. In addition to hosting FD2B Talk Radio and managing [FromDesign2Build.com](http://FromDesign2Build.com), Shilan is a regular presenter at industry events and writes the "Profiting from Design" column for *Landscape Management* magazine.

Shilan earned his Bachelor of Science in Landscape Architecture (BSLA) from Rutgers Cook College and his Master's Degree in Landscape Architecture (MLA) from the University of Massachusetts.



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*continued from page 38*

“When we can sit down with the client from the get-go and have an overall idea of the design and not just pieces of it as it comes,” Lockhart says, “the whole project is much easier to tie together, construction is smoother and the design goals are easier to achieve by pre-planning.”

The collaboration with Drips ‘n’ Puddles has cut the amount of time it takes to complete some projects, Lockhart says. In addition, when the Backyards N More affiliates refer business to each other, they receive a commission for the referral, Lockhart says. He eventually expects to generate 60 percent to 70 percent of his sales through Backyards N More.

PEL’s involvement with Backyards N More began about eight years ago after a client introduced Lockhart to Yetzer. Yetzer was seeking a landscape designer to help him establish a full outdoor design operation, Lockhart recalls. After Yetzer reviewed Lockhart’s work with PEL, the two discussed creating a one-stop shop that could handle multiple backyard needs.

PEL and Drips ‘n’ Puddles together invested approximately \$100,000 into the Backyards N More showroom, which Lockhart characterizes as a type of village setting with sidewalks and meandering paver walkways. Some of

the features include a pondless waterfall near the showroom entrance and outdoor fireplaces and kitchens. Eventually, Yetzer added a pest control and lawn care company and HVAC firm to round out Backyards N More’s offerings.

The showroom provides the co-op companies with marketing opportunities they may have missed, Lockhart says.

“There are a lot more elements to the outdoor landscape than just plants,” Lockhart explains. “It’s stone, wood, water, topography, sound—all kinds of things other than just plant material, and it’s helping us get all those other services out there and get our name out there as clients are coming in to see one of the other businesses.”

## THINGS TO CONSIDER

Being associated with multiple businesses has its advantages, but companies considering similar ventures should exercise caution, Lockhart says. Make sure potential partners have solid reputations, Lockhart says.

“It can be a good thing to have your name behind another company, and it can be a bad thing if they’re not doing their job,” Lockhart says. “As long as you’re partnering with a company that’s equal or better than you are, then you can’t go wrong.”

Backyards N More, a co-op of several different outdoor-related service businesses, operates a showroom featuring aspects of all its members’ offerings.

PEL only associates itself with Backyards N More partner Drips ‘n’ Puddles, Lockhart says. The other companies are primarily building renters Yetzer brought on board as a source of rental income, according to Lockhart. That presents another potential drawback that companies interested in a co-op should consider, Lockhart says.

“Another challenge is making sure you’re not too associated with those companies that you don’t really know about,” Lockhart says.

For instance, organic landscaping is a major part of PEL’s offerings. The lawn care company in Backyards N More provides chemical pest treatments, Lockhart explains. That could send a confusing message to clients if they begin associating PEL with a chemical-treatment provider, Lockhart says.

“You don’t always agree with every idea that the other contractors have,” he explains. “When that happens, you have to make sure you can separate yourself and keep your company identity unique. That’s really the challenge.”

*Katz is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.*