

MAINTENANCE

A 'fair' shot at a second chance

How Fairhaven Lawn Care, a social enterprise business, turns the homeless into skilled, productive employees. *By JONATHAN KATZ*

In 2008, Fairhaven Lawn Care began operating in central Ohio with a modest goal to serve about a dozen customers. Today, the company provides landscape maintenance services to approximately 45 customers. But Fairhaven isn't your typical landscape success story. Based in Lancaster, Ohio, about 30 miles southeast of Columbus, Fairhaven is a social enterprise business launched by Lutheran Social Services of Central Ohio to help its homeless clients.

The company currently employs a crew of five workers from the agency's shelter. Fairhaven is the brainchild of Eddie Rapp, director of the company and Lutheran Social Services. Rapp decided that instead of using outside contractors to manage landscaping services for Lutheran Social Services' properties, he would hire clients to do the work.

"We're kind of building their lives back up, but at the same time producing a product and a business," Rapp says.

Fairhaven is a for-profit business under the umbrella of the nonprofit agency. This means any profits are invested back into the agency's nonprofit programs. After Rapp decided to start the company, he hired an experienced landscape professional to supervise and train the staff. Prospective employees endure multiple rounds of interviews and background checks before they're hired. Once they're hired, the company spends 10 to 20 hours training each employee on all pieces of equipment, Rapp says.

While the company's challenges are somewhat unique, the basic tenets of success remain the same: present an appealing image with a strong marketing message and quality service.

"The perception of homeless people is not good, so the first two-and-a-half years we were trying to prove ourselves," Rapp recalls. "After a while, people would drive by a property and see our truck and trailer and say, 'Wow, that looks great.' Plus, there's the selling point of this business being a way to give back."

Performing a charitable service without requesting donations is another selling point for the company, Rapp says. People don't have to wonder where their money is going. "A lot of people are hesitant to donate to charities," Rapp says. "They want to know where their \$100 is going. We can tell them that if they don't want to donate \$100, then hire us."

continued on page 34

SpeedZone
BROADLEAF HERBICIDE FOR TURF

When You Need Broadleaf Weed Control...



- ▶ **Visible activity in hours**
- ▶ **Effective, fast-acting, cool-weather product**

G pbi / GORDON
CORPORATION

An Employee-Owned Company

800.821.7925

pbigordon.com/speedzone

Checkered Flag Design®, Gordon's®, ProForm®, and SpeedZone® are registered trademarks of PBI-Gordon Corporation. Always read and follow label directions. 4/12 01809



Design PRO

On the go

Mobile design software apps improve design efficiency.

Chris Walter says design software has become like his “right hand” because he uses it so much and has come to rely on it for doing business. The Liberty, Mo.-based landscape contractor and owner of Computerized Landscape Design utilizes PRO Landscape by Drafix Software. And now that PRO Landscape is also available in mobile form with PRO Landscape Companion for iPad or Android tablets, Walter says he’s been able to greatly improve efficiency with his designs.

“With the Companion application, it’s the ultimate mobile design solution,” says Peter Lord, president of Drafix Software. “A lot of landscape contractors will go out with a digital camera and take a picture, but then they have to go back and download it to the laptop before they start any actual design work. That method works fine, but with a tablet you can take the pictures and then do the designing immediately using PRO Landscape Companion.”

Because the app is also linked to a designer’s computer, the user can start the design on the tablet and then open it on a computer and continue right away. On the flip side, the design can also be transferred from a computer to a tablet so that it becomes a mobile presentation to take directly to the client. “With everything linked, it’s a big time saver,” Lord says. “If you’re showing a client a design and they don’t like a certain plant you can delete it right there and it’s linked back to the computer so there’s no duplicating the work.”



For Walter, the software has really helped cement sales. “People think in pictures,” he says. “It’s one thing to describe a design to a potential customer but to actually show it in pictures is a whole different story. The software allows them to see something before it even exists, and that can definitely help make the sale.”

Improving flexibility, sales

Walter says that the mobile version of the software has only increased the possibilities for him. “I used to have to make one appointment with the client to walk the property and take pictures and then come back again after I design the plan,” he says. “These days it’s hard enough to get one appointment with someone, let alone two appointments. But now I can do everything at once with the Companion app. I can take a picture of the area they want done and then we can sit on their front porch and start designing together.”

In fact, Walter says that engaging the customer in the design makes the sale even more likely. “When you work one-on-one with the client on the spot, you’re getting their input every step of the way,” Walter says. “They basically sell themselves on the design. Having their help with the design makes a huge difference. They feel more attached to it and are more likely to commit. It makes the whole process easier.”

Lord says the flexibility and efficiency is what today’s software users demand in order to meet the needs of their clients. “From designing on site to presenting on site and even making changes on the fly, the mobile application allows contractors to truly meet their customers’ needs,” Lord adds. “People want to be able to see things instantly and give feedback right away. The old way of doing things with all the back and forth between the computer and the client simply takes too much time.”

In addition to being a huge time saver, the program is also easy to use. Walter says that with good tutorials, which help walk you through the process, the learning curve is minimal. “There’s also excellent tech support,” he says. “You can get up and running very quickly and start getting plans designed right away. The company also upgrades the program every year with new bells and whistles that help keep it fresh and new.”

The bottom line, says Walter, is anything that makes the selling process easier is a welcomed addition and he says this program does just that. “I’ve found that as long as you’re able to gain people’s trust, you’re going to do business with them,” he adds. “And PRO Landscape definitely helps gain their trust.”



Your Vision, Their Dream – Anywhere

Communicating your vision to prospective customers has never been easier with PRO Landscape design software. Whether your design platform is a desktop, laptop or tablet you can design and sell anytime, and now – anywhere.

PRO Landscape is not only easy to use, but feature rich including stunning photo imaging, night and holiday lighting, 2D CAD, 3D renderings, and complete customer proposals.

Bring your customer's dreams to life – starting today!

prolandscape.com
sales@prolandscape.com
800-231-8574



PRO Landscape
DESIGN SOFTWARE

continued from page 31

About 80 percent of Fairhaven's customers are commercial properties. The remaining sites are residential properties.

THE SCREENING PROCESS

The employees who work on these properties come from various backgrounds. Some Fairhaven Lawn Care workers are former factory employees who were laid off during the recession. Other crew members are younger employees with limited job skills. Many Lutheran Social Services clients struggle with drug and mental health problems as well.

The company interviews all applicants from the Lutheran Social Services homeless shelter. The process serves the dual purpose of teaching the program clients interviewing skills while assessing their qualifications. Clients who pass the initial interview earn a follow-up meeting. Once they receive a job offer, Fairhaven conducts a final interview and

then performs a background check and drug testing, Rapp says. "We run it as an official business, and part of the rationale behind that is we want employees to hopefully in six months or so leave and go to a better job, and we want to teach them the skills."

Lutheran Social Services continues to work with clients who don't get the job so they can improve interviewing skills, resumes or other job search skills for future employment.

AN EARLY START

Employees who make the cut will start working for Fairhaven as early as late February or the beginning of March. Unlike traditional landscape contractors in its area that typically begin working



Fairhaven Lawn Care is a for-profit landscape maintenance business under the umbrella of a nonprofit agency.

in April, Fairhaven starts earlier to ease new employees into the rigorous work environment. The new hires may work 10 to 20 hours the first few months before progressing to a full 40- to 50-hour workweek.

During the training process, workers learn how to operate zero-turn mowers, trimmers, edgers and equipment. They also learn how to trim shrubs and identify perennials and annuals. At the same time, the company teaches employees many basic life skills, such as managing their finances after they're paid.

Fairhaven employees may work for the company for up to a year before they're expected to find work elsewhere. About 10 to 15 former Fairhaven employees have moved on to larger landscape companies. Two ex-employees returned to school to earn turf management degrees. Fairhaven even has referred employees to competing landscape contractors, Rapp says.

Other employees have taken jobs at large retail outlets, such as Home Depot and Lowe's, or supervisory positions at restaurants, such as Subway. As for the company's overall success, Rapp says Fairhaven has made just enough to recoup its capital investments. In the next two years, he expects to be more profitable. But the company's goal is to serve a greater purpose that looks far beyond profitability, Rapp notes.

"Being a social enterprise, our goal is to employ as many of our clients as we can," Rapp says. "We don't want to lose money, but we're not in it to be a huge, booming business. If we can employ our clients and teach them the skills they need and move them on, that's our ultimate social goal."

Katz is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



For over 40 years, Air-O-Lator has been making eco-friendly, high performance products. As a 3-in-1 device, **Aquarian** aerators improve water health and quality while providing the aesthetic beauty of a fountain and deicing capabilities during winter. Backed by outstanding customer service, Air-O-Lator aerators are easy to install and maintain.

www.airolator.com

800-821-3177



LAWN/TREE CARE

Grub talk

The BugDoc answers readers' grub questions. *By DAVE SHETLAR, PH.D.*

Editor's note: In July, Dave "the BugDoc" Shetlar, Ph.D., addressed preventive and curative grub control in a webinar presented by Landscape Management and sponsored by Valent Professional Products. Here's a bit of Q&A between Shetlar and participants on this hot topic.

Q In Zone 9 do we really need to be concerned with grubs?
—participant from South Carolina

A Say what? Some of the worst grub damage I've seen has been in Texas and Florida. In these cases, not only were the grubs damaging the turf but the armadillos and hogs were tilling the turf. Yes, I've seen some pretty "good" grub infestations on Hilton Head Island, but where mole crickets were being controlled, the grubs had a difficult time surviving. On a couple of golf courses, it wasn't the actual grub damage, but the animal digging that was the problem.

Q How typical is it to get grubs in shaded areas?
—participant from Illinois

A Entomologists often have stated that shaded turf is less at risk for grub infestations. However, no one told the grubs this! If you have dense turf with lots of organic matter, there will be a grub that "appreciates" this habitat. We are seeing Oriental beetles and Asiatic garden beetle grubs in some pretty dense shade.

Q How do you recommend dealing with recurring grub problems?
—participant from New York

A Mike Villani, Ph.D., did some studies back in the 1990s where crews surveyed white grub infestation in the Syracuse, N.Y., area. What they found was simple: If you had a damaging grub population last year, you would be at an approximate 80 percent chance of repeating it the following year.

I highly recommend keeping records of insect activity. Post a big map of your operating area and have your specialists put in a colored pin for each time they find a grub, billbug or chinch bug problem. Soon, you will see clusters of these pins in certain neighborhoods. These would be the neighborhoods that you would concentrate on selling preventive treatments.

Shetlar is associate professor of landscape entomology at Ohio State.

» WEB EXTRA

Visit [Landscape Management.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) for more BugDoc Q&A.

PHOTO: ALTON N. SPARKS, JR., UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA, BUGWOOD.ORG

Think Humic Acid will bust your budget? Think again.

Diamond Grow™
organic Plant's Choice
LIQUID HUMIC CONCENTRATE

The affordable Humic Acid.

Plant's Choice Diamond Grow™ Organic Liquid Humic Acid is ideal for Turf, Hydroseeding, Landscaping, Horticultural and Agricultural Applications.



Available Packaging
2.5 US gal jugs • 275 US gal LM totes
330 US gal LM totes • Tanker loads



Also available in powder formula.

www.ThePlantsChoice.com

 **Plant's Choice**

855-335-9928

The Natural Choice for Better Plant & Soil Health

IRRIGATION

Decoding irrigation certifications

Determine which credentials may be good additions for your business.

By MIKE TEMPLE, CGIA, CIC, CID, CLIA, CLWM

For a professional landscape contractor looking to expand, one strategy is to earn a professional certification.

With so many choices, it's often difficult to determine which certifications are right for you. For example, the Irrigation Association's (IA's) Select Certified program offers four certification programs designed specifically for landscape professionals: certified irrigation contractor, certified landscape irrigation auditor, certified golf irrigation auditor and certified landscape water manager. There's also the certified irrigation system designer. Let's decode these options:

Certified irrigation contractor (CIC):

The CIC is targeted to business owners and managers who install and operate irrigation systems. CICs must demonstrate knowledge of hydraulics, precipitation rates, distribution uniformity, sprinkler spacing, controller operation and safety requirements. They also must show a general understanding of irrigation plans and specifications and business basics.

Certified landscape irrigation auditor (CLIA) and certified golf irrigation auditor (CGIA):

The CLIA and CGIA certifications are intended for those involved in collecting site data, making maintenance recommendations and performing minor repairs to quantify turf irrigation water use on landscapes and golf courses. CLIAs and CGIAs determine irrigation uniformity and efficiency and develop basic irrigation schedules.

Certified landscape water manager (CLWM):

The CLWM certification is designed for those who manage the

irrigation system.

This program builds on the skills learned in the CLIA and CGIA programs and details how to fine-tune the irrigation schedule to apply the optimum amount of water to the landscape without over watering. It also covers the financial impacts of system improvements to evaluate the benefits of water usage reduction versus the cost of the system improvements.



Mike Temple

Certified irrigation designer (CID):

CID certification offers a more advanced level of certification and goes into greater detail on all aspects of irrigation system design. Topics covered include sprinkler/pump selection, calculation of water windows, sizing of water supplies and system hydraulics.

On top of the existing programs, IA is developing a new entry-level certified irrigation technician (CIT) program, which addresses the basics of irrigation system maintenance and troubleshooting. Exams for the new CIT program will be available for the first time at the 2013 Irrigation Show & Education Conference, which takes place Nov. 4-8, in Austin, Texas. Computer-based testing will be available beginning Dec. 1. **LM**

Temple is owner of Irrigation Innovations in Waxhaw, N.C., and serves as chair of the Irrigation Association certification board.

WHERE IRRIGATION MEETS INNOVATION

We Bring it All Together.
Join Us in Austin.

Irrigation Show | Nov. 6 - 7
Education Conference | Nov. 4 - 8
Austin Convention Center
Austin, Texas

Irrigation ASSOCIATION™

ARCSA
AMERICAN ROYALTY CROPPERS ASSOCIATION

IPPCA
INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL POND COMPANIES ASSOCIATION

www.irrigationshow.org

First the neighbors will be jealous. Then they'll give you a call.

Our best-in-class products combined with the WinField Insights™ Tech Kit and WinField™ Academy classes can help you look deeper and plan smarter.



VISIT WINFIELD.COM/LAWNINSIGHTS ON YOUR
MOBILE BROWSER, THEN PLACE YOUR PHONE HERE

WINFIELD™

WinField is a trademark of Winfield Solutions, LLC. ©2013 Winfield Solutions, LLC.



PROFITING FROM DESIGN

JODY SHILAN

Shilan is editor of FromDesign2Build.com. Contact him at 201/783-2844 or jshilan@gmail.com.

The site visit proposal

Q We're a smaller landscape design/build company. Most of our projects are between \$2,500 and \$5,000 and rarely get over \$10,000, so selling design fees is really tough in our market. Any suggestions on how we can improve our closing rates without a plan?

—Jonathan Chaseman, JC Landscape Construction, Gresham, Ore.

As much as all of us want the glamorous, high-end design/build jobs, many of us don't work in these markets or have access to these types of clients. Or maybe you do work in prestigious areas but still have to go out on calls that are not "design worthy," although they're still potential one- or two-day moneymakers.

Whatever the reason, you need to create a preprinted proposal form that will help you land these smaller, less prestigious projects—or what I'm now officially calling "estimate/build" work—right then and there. I call these forms site visit proposals (SVPs) because they're designed to help you close the deal on the initial site visit or meeting.

Are we embarrassed to admit we do "low-end" work? Will our peers look down their noses at us for admitting we do smaller installations? Well, I've got some news for you, Mr. SnootyScapes Landscape & Design: Smaller or low-end projects can be just as profitable as those negative-edged, maturely planted, hardscape-dominated, high-end landscape installations, and they can be just as interesting. (OK, that last part is a stretch.) Still, the profit generated from the \$1,500 to \$5,000 projects isn't any less green than that of a so-called "high-end" project.

Think about it. If you sell enough \$5,000 installs, before you know it you'll have \$25,000 worth of work, which is pretty decent for anyone. For smaller companies this can provide you with two weeks of solid work. For larger companies you can turn your B and C crews (or enhancement crews) into profit-making machines. You know what else? By selling smaller or low-end work your newer designers and salespeople

will gain the experience and confidence they need to eventually start selling larger work in the future.

Anatomy of the SVP

So let's discuss how the SVP works. I created the SVP because, like many of you, I'd go on leads that were smaller and didn't require a design but still could make money. At the end of these appointments, I'd tell the prospects I would put together a proposal and get back to them in a few days. The reality was that once I left these calls and started getting busy with paid clients and checking on projects under construction, these estimates slowly started working their way to the bottom of the to-do pile. Time would pass and frustrated potential clients would call the office looking for their estimates. I'd apologize to them, saying how busy I was, and tell them I would get it to them that day, which oftentimes never happened.

One winter I decided that enough was enough and I created a mini proposal—the SVP—that I could complete right on site. It's a professional-looking document that's a hybrid between a blank triplicate NEBS form and a formally typed proposal. The SVP includes three sections: site work, landscape planting and miscellaneous considerations, plus materials and labor cost breakdowns for each.

The next year, instead of leaving these types of appointments with a false promise that I'd get back to the prospects with a design, I wrote up a proposal right then and there. Naturally, the homeowner couldn't be happier, nor could I. Since my SVPs are triplicates, I gave the client the white and yellow copies with a self-addressed stamped envelope and I kept the pink copy for my records.

If the clients wanted to do the work, they just sent in their signed copies with a check for a third of the price. If not, I knew I did my job and responded to them in a timely fashion. Using my SVP I sold more work, got fewer complaints and slept much better.

To submit a question for Profiting From Design, please contact Shilan at jshilan@gmail.com.

» WEB EXTRA

Download a sample SVP in the September Web Extras section of [Landscape Management.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net).

Size Does Matter.

The Z-Plug Aerator boosts an aeration width of 40", 10 more inches than our closest competitor. That's equivalent to over $\frac{3}{4}$ an acre more production per hour! Add that with the ability of spraying, spreading, seeding, de-thatching and plowing...

Why would you buy anything else?

Z-Plug Standard Features:

- 23 hp Briggs Pro-V Commercial engine
- Hydraulic Lift System with Down Pressure
- 40" Aeration Width
- Spyker
- Other Attachments Available



L.T. Rich Products

Call us at: (877) 482-2040

www.zspray.com



Water ways

Aquatic maintenance services are a must for some of Terracare's commercial clients.

FOR TERRACARE ASSOCIATES, landscape contractors based in Littleton, Colo., one way to distinguish its business is to expand the services it offers to its primarily commercial clients. One service it offers is aquatic maintenance.

Terracare, which had \$25.5 million in annual revenue in 2012, uses several methods to remove vegetation and maintain water for recreational purpose, including mechanical aquatic harvesters and herbicides to control plants and algae. The service also includes water monitoring.

Terracare's Aquatic Services Manager Stuart Perry, who's based in Northern California, says there has been an average growth of approximately 10 percent each year in aquatic maintenance. The combination of water body management with landscaping services is what attracts customers. The main customer prospects are homeowner associations (HOAs) that have lakes or large water features in common areas. Golf courses are another potential client.

"It's a specialty and it's a small market," Perry says. "They're not constructing lakes at a very steady rate and the natural water ways are varying in existence, so at times it's hard."

He notes this service requires specially trained staff. He has more than 25 years of experience in research and specialized aquatic vegetation control programs and has a master's degree in aquatic plant ecology. He recommends having at least one staff member with aquatic biology or ecology degrees or perhaps a limnology and fisheries background. For Terracare, other aquatic staff members may have biology degrees or backgrounds, but many gain experience on the job.

ROUTINE MAINTENANCE

Terracare sells and operates its aquatic service as a routine maintenance program. Two or three times a year per client, the staff mitigates aquatic weeds one of two ways: with a trailer harvester or small motorboats with spray rigs. The trailers Terracare uses are large capital investment—as much as \$100,000 apiece. The boat/spray rig set up costs about \$9,000. Chemical treatments also occur



HOAs are the primary client for Terracare's aquatic services.

two or three times annually. These include various aquatic-labeled herbicides, which combat both submersed and floating aquatic weeds. Algae are another concern; they're treated with liquid algaecides or copper sulfate crystals.

Terracare also offers monitoring of bodies of water after they have been affected by stormwater. The water is tested for dissolved oxygen levels, pH, conductivity, turbidity and nutrient levels, especially nitrogen and phosphorus.

"Preconceived ideas about how a lake should look and behave are one of the biggest challenges we face," Perry says. "Out here everybody expects the lakes to look like Lake Tahoe, but stormwater and other factors make that unrealistic. Regular communication with our clients is essential."

"It's a specialty and it's a small market."

—STUART PERRY

These communications include science-based descriptions/explanations of the biological processes that occur in water bodies and how they affect individual lakes to help the clients understand their systems.

Despite the challenges, Terracare has continued to turn a profit in this area.

Perry estimates the service's profit margin is slightly higher than landscaping. The company determines aquatic services pricing by considering the labor costs and the materials required. It offers acre and daily rates which are calculated by how much work the machines can do at a profitable rate.

Being able to provide such a distinctive service has helped Terracare's business to grow—many new customers come from referrals, Perry says.

"Expertise is something that we can offer because we have the correct biologists with the correct degrees," he says. "[Aquatic maintenance] is vital to our business. It's an important component because we can combine landscaping and aquatic services as a package and other companies can not."

Bealin is a Cleveland-based contributor to *Landscape Management*.

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: Terracare Associates

HEADQUARTERS: Littleton, Colo.

ADD-ON SERVICE: Aquatic maintenance

WHY AQUATIC MAINTENANCE?: Offering both commercial landscaping and aquatic maintenance services is an important combination for commercial clients like HOAs.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: mechanical aquatic harvesters, motorboat-mounted spray rigs and aquatic herbicides, among others.