

The Ticker: LAWN CARE

quandary trickle down to his customers first-hand, saying he's seen a 30 percent to 40 percent increase in grass seed prices over the past four years.

Slightly adding to the equation of shortages is poor weather conditions, which can negatively affect yields, Wingate says.

With all these considerations working against suppliers, Laxton says, for suppliers to get their product planted, they must be in a customer-service mindset similar to that of a landscape contractor, building strong relationships with growers rather than competing on price because everyone can do that.

"We begin to think of (growers) more as customers than vendors," Laxton says. "We have to distinguish ourselves with reliable communication."

EXPECTATIONS FOR 2014

Supply, Brillman says, won't meet demand in 2014, especially for high-quality seed.

"We always say you don't know what you've got until you've got it in the barn," she says. "If we'd hit the correct amount of yield on all the species, we would not be where we are right now."

Suppliers say in 2014 landscape professionals should plan ahead for shortages of the following varieties:

- › perennial ryegrass;
- › tall fescues;
- › some Kentucky bluegrasses;
- › fine fescues; and
- › hard fescues.

To combat the shortages, Jump says customers should be placing early orders with their distributors now. Landscape contractors, he says, also should be open-minded to using varieties in higher supply.

Tell distributors what you're looking for out of the grass, he says, not the specific variety you normally use.

"What do you want your seed to accomplish for you?" Have those agronomic discussions," Jump says. "The earlier you can have those conversations, then we can get your seed locked in."

Plainfield, Ill.-based **Spring-Green Lawn Care** hired Jeff Shufelt as its new director of franchising development. He will work with new franchisees and head up efforts to continue franchise expansion. A former Barefoot Grass Lawn Service executive, he most recently worked for Blue Sky Group as a mergers and acquisitions intermediary.

Dow AgroSciences' Defendor specialty herbicide received registration in New York and Massachusetts, adding to the 45

other states the postemergent herbicide is usable in. Registrations still are pending from Arizona, California and Hawaii.

The **Oregon Department of Agriculture** (ODA) issued six civil penalties totaling \$2,886 in connection with four bumblebee kill-off incidents in 2013. Clackamas-based **Collier Arbor Care**, a division of Bartlett Tree Experts, was cited, as were several of its applicators, for two separate instances of applying insecticides to European



linden trees in bloom, an act that violates the products' labels. In addition to investigating and enforcing the state pesticide laws, Oregon has taken other measures following the bee deaths, including education and new state pesticide registration requirements for 2014.

GO FOR A JOYRIDE.



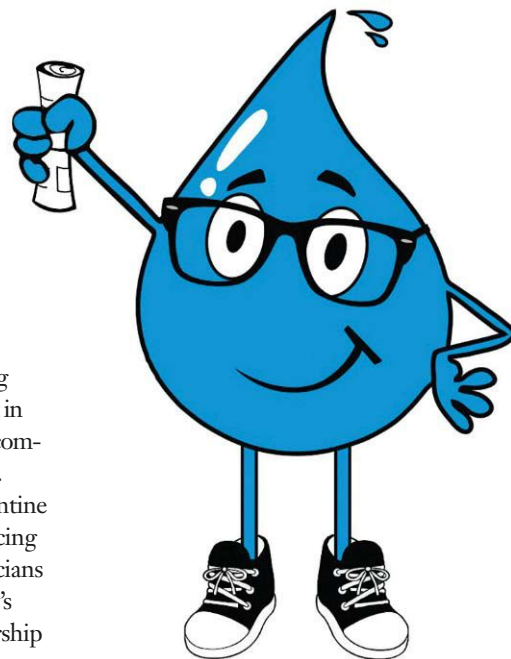
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Marketing moguls

Virginia contractor comes out on top of Smart Marketing Contest *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*



In a state where water conservation may be more of an afterthought than a leading concern, Glen Allen, Va.-based James River Grounds Management (JRGM) acknowledged the matter from a marketing standpoint better than any other contractor in the country, as seen by the Irrigation Association (IA).

The full-service company, which is 10 percent irrigation, won the contractor category of the IA's 2013 Smart Marketing Contest.

In its fourth year, the contest recognizes irrigation professionals who most creatively and efficiently promote water conservation within their companies and to water end-users during Smart Irrigation Month in July.

JRGM pulled out a marketing tactic it had seen success with in the past to get its community pepped about its campaign: Creating a mascot.

Kelly Valentine, sales and marketing administrator, designed Drip, a mascot in the form of a raindrop, who guided the company through Smart Irrigation Month.

Spearheading the campaign, Valentine kicked it off with a blog post introducing JRGM's team of six irrigation technicians and Drip as a friend to the company's mascot, Pip, which stands for partnership in planning.

Taking a content marketing approach, she called on the expertise of Roger Barden, CLIA, irrigation manager at JRGM, to get out the most pertinent information to water end-users.

Smart irrigation fundamentals, Barden says, were the most important education elements for the company.

"In Virginia, really, we're not in the stage of having to do a whole lot of water conservation just yet," he says. "We're just trying to get ahead of everyone on that theme. It just makes sense."

A chief message the company relayed, Valentine says, was about irrigation technology, such as rain sensors, precision nozzles and soil moisture sensors—products that simplify the irrigation process and save time and money.

Throughout the month, Valentine composed a total of three educational blog posts—the first, introducing the campaign; the second, providing product breakdowns; and the third, wrapping up the outreach with a video of an irrigation audit, which garnered nearly 200 views on YouTube.

She also posted multiple tips per week on smart water practices to the company's Facebook page. Some of those included:

- ▶ Creating water zones for plants;
- ▶ Adjusting watering schedules depending on weather conditions;
- ▶ Maintaining and examining sprinkler systems; and
- ▶ Ways to improve conservation habits in daily routines.

Additionally, as a play on smart irrigation, JRGM distributed to clients bottles of Glacéau Smartwater with a Smart Irrigation Month koozie and tag about Drip.

"Our efforts did not go unnoticed, that's for sure," Valentine says. "Our concept itself and our creativity helped draw more attention to the idea of Smart



Roger Barden (right) accepts James River Grounds Management's 2013 Smart Marketing Contest award at the Irrigation Show & Education Conference from Smart Irrigation Month committee chair Lowell Kaufhold.

Irrigation Month rather than increasing our contract sales for irrigation.”

Increasing sales, though, was never JRGM's reason for participating in the contest, Valentine says.

“Our goal was to educate, inform and then enable our clients to know the technologies and tactics we have to provide them with not only a smaller water bill, but a greener landscape,” she says. “It's not just cutting grass anymore. As a company, we have the ability to impact our community around us.”

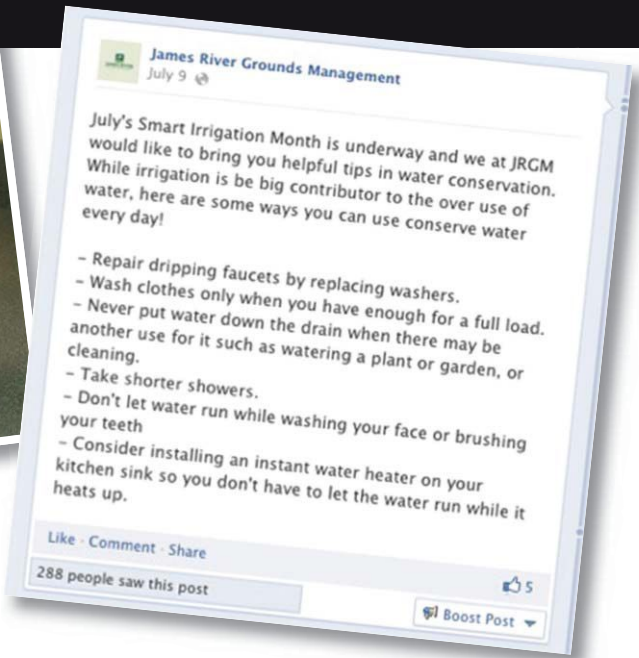
From an internal perspective, Barden says the contest boosted “team morale” within the irrigation division.

“All the production team was on board with this, helping to look for

things that could help the clients save money,”

he said at the Irrigation Show & Education Conference in Austin, Texas, where he traveled to receive the award Nov. 6.

Reflecting on JRGM's efforts, he said at the show: “Our clients now know we care. We care about our environment and we care about them.”



James River Grounds Management promoted Smart Irrigation Month through Facebook, a company blog, client gifts and a mascot named Drip.

The Ticker:

IRRIGATION

Tucor and **Netafim's** landscape division partnered to develop web-based smart control systems, which will be marketed by Netafim. The controllers will feature multifunction capabilities, including conventional, two-wire (decoder) and hybrid operation.

The **Irrigation Association** developed three new spreadsheets to assist irrigation designers and auditors: developed pipe sizing, dripline and scheduling calculators free for download by IA members at ow.ly/ruNPu.

The **Rain Bird Academy Boot Camp**, taking place now through April, is a four-and-a-half-day training program for the IA's Certified Irrigation Technician (CIT) exam. At the end of each event, Rain Bird hosts the IA CIT exam.

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Spotlighting spaces, locking in leads

Through its Outdoor Living Spaces Tour, Tussey Landscaping markets itself amid giving back. *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*

Arla Bratton had only one product in mind to add to her landscape when she set out on Tussey Landscaping's Outdoor Living Spaces Tour two years ago: Bubbling rocks.

"That's what I was interested in to begin with, just the bubbling rocks," she says. "Then I saw the pondless waterfall."

The annual, self-guided tour features about 10 homes landscaped by Tussey Landscaping, a Hollidaysburg, Pa.-based, design/build firm with a 95 percent residential client base.

By Bratton's last stop, bubbling rocks were at the bottom of her list of backyard additions.

"It turned into a total makeover," says Bratton, who became a client of Tussey Landscaping shortly after.

Walk out Bratton's backdoor today, and you'll step onto a stone porch extension complete with a fire pit, built-in pizza oven and that pondless waterfall surrounded by landscaping.

Clients like Bratton are the ROI Tussey Landscaping has earned since starting its Outdoor Living Spaces Tour eight years ago, says

Steve Martin, owner.

"The people that go on the tours, they just rave," he says. "We always see a number of calls and folks that will set up a consultation after the tour."



PULLING IT TOGETHER

Profits from the ticketed event go to The Arc of Blair County, an Altoona, Pa.-based nonprofit that serves individuals with disabilities.

Last year's tour, held Sept. 14, raised \$1,200 for the The Arc. Tussey sold more than 200 tickets at \$10 per couple and \$18 per group, with no limit to the number of people per group. The company spent about \$1,500 marketing the event.

"It's just an extra layer that goes into our marketing," Martin says, and recalls the first year of the tour, in 2006, drew about 70 people. "I think it's very effective that proceeds go to a charity. ... It's a way to give back to the community that's fun for everybody."

Martin adopted the idea for the Outdoor Living Spaces Tour from the pond tours put on by Chicago-based Aquascape Designs, for which Tussey Landscaping is a certified contractor.

Tussey Landscaping began with just pond tours as well. A couple years later it changed the name to the Outdoor Living Spaces Tour to draw better attention to hardscaping featured. Two years ago, as a callout to the landscape lighting featured, it tagged onto the tour a "Moonlight Walk."

The tour typically runs from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., allowing attendees to begin and

About 10 homes, landscaped by Tussey Landscaping, are featured on its Outdoor Living Spaces Tour.

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Steve Martin

LANDSCAPE



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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

DATE	SPECIAL GUEST	PROGRAM TOPIC	SPONSOR
1/8	Kathryn Dager , Consultant, <i>Profitivity Inc.</i>	How to Create a Profitability Team	
1/15	Tim Hionis , Vendor, <i>Hionis Greenhouses</i>	Growing with your Grower	
1/22	Gene Stickley , Vendor, <i>Ball Horticultural</i>	Annuals - Selecting, planting, growing	
1/29	Vinnie Stigliano , Vendor, <i>Fleet Track</i>	Fleet Management and Tracking	
2/5	Maria Semple , Consultant, <i>The Prospect Finder, LLC</i>	Leveraging LinkedIn for Prospecting	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>
2/12	Matt Moskowitz , Vendor, <i>American Profit Recovery</i>	Diplomatic Debt Collection	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>

ABOUT THE HOST

Jody Shilan, MLA is an award-winning landscape designer and former landscape design/build contractor, who has sold tens of millions of dollars of design and installation work throughout his career. He now uses his 35+ years of experience to coach other landscape contractors how to easily and dramatically increase their sales by following his unique landscape design/build/sales process. He does this through public speaking, private consulting, group workshops and his "exclusive" members-only website www.FromDesign2Build.com.



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MARKETWATCH

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end at their leisure and swing by as many homes as their schedules allow.

"It is totally self guided. They can start wherever they want to, end up wherever they want to," Martin says. "At any point in the day, there's people at all locations. That's how it works."

Tickets are sold on Tussey Landscaping's website and over the counter at its supply center Tussey Mountain Mulch. Upon purchase, ticketholders may print off directions to the featured homes as well as descriptions of the landscaped properties.

Included in the tour stops every year are Martin's home and the Tussey Mountain Mulch facility, where chefs prepare food for visitors throughout the day. Martin aims to debut a range of landscapes and will cycle out three to five new homes every year on the tour.

"We send a letter out or ask clients if they're interested," he says. "Normally these kind of people would like to showcase their backyard."

Bratton's home made the list of tour stops last year and, as a customer, she says, it was flatter-



Profits from the Outdoor Living Spaces Tour benefit The Arc of Blair County. Tickets are sold at \$10 per person or \$18 per group.

ing to be asked to open up her space to the public.

"It was a compliment that they wanted to feature my house because mine is more family-oriented landscaping," she says. "It made me feel very good."

The concept of homeowners opening up their spaces is pleasing to Martin as well—especially from a sales standpoint.

"Some (homeowners) actually have refreshments out and they just tell everyone all about their project and how it went," he says. "They turn into our salespeople."

The Ticker:

DESIGN/BUILD

John Deere added two skid-steer models, 318E and 320E, and two compact track loader models, 319E and 323E, to the E-Series line introduced in 2013.



Aquascape Designs opened two new educational portals this month: Aquascape Academy Online and Aquascape Academy Hands-On. The online training includes video sessions, iPad tutorials, PowerPoint presentations and quizzes. Hands-On is free, instructor-led classroom and training sessions held at the company headquarters in St. Charles, Ill.

Bobcat Co. released its first Tier 4 loaders. These machines debuted with new Bobcat-branded, non-diesel particulate filter engines. The new engines, used in 500 frame-size loaders, have a 4 percent to 12 percent increase in torque over previous models.



The 2013 Outdoor Living Spaces Tour drew more than 200 people and raised \$1,200 for The Arc of Blair County.



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WORKING TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

Together with key industry partners, Project EverGreen has established the following programs to help make a greater impact, sooner:

GreenCare for Troops SnowCare for Troops



- Project EverGreen connects military families with lawn and landscape companies, as well as snow removal companies to receive free services while their loved one is serving overseas.
- More than 3,500 contractor volunteers and 12,000 military families have signed up for GCFT, while 1,100 contractor volunteers and 1,500 military families signed up for SCFT.
- These popular programs have garnered attention on TV and in newspapers across the nation including Mike Rowe's *Dirty Jobs* and NBC's *Nightly News*.

Community Based Revitalization Projects

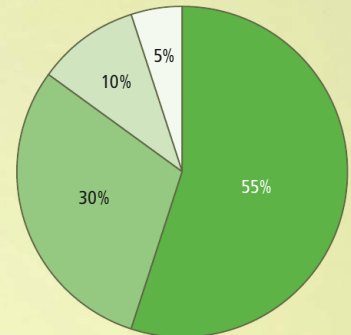
- Focused community revitalization and renovation projects across the United States encourage industry professionals, consumers and anyone who's passionate about healthy green spaces to work together to improve their city and surrounding areas.
- Over the last seven years, our message has made a positive impact in: Akron, Ohio; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Greensboro, Raleigh and Charlotte, North Carolina; Ft. Myers, Florida; Toronto, Canada; and San Antonio, Texas.
- Maintained green spaces generated community engagement, involvement and communication among residents, city leaders and visitors.

GreenCare for Youth

- By reaching out to children of all ages, we can create a greener tomorrow.
- The Art of Green Spaces Competition, sponsored by Birds and Blooms, encourages students to use all forms of art to share how they feel about the green spaces in their lives.
- Golf bag tags, featuring messages on the benefits of green spaces, are given to participants of the GCBAA Sticks for Kids program.
- Youth sports field renovations make playing surfaces better and safer.

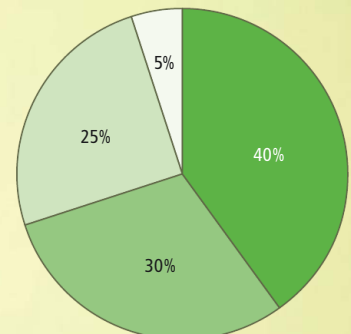
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Fields of green

A contractor uses crop-sensing technology to save money and improve athletic turf conditions.

By JONATHAN KATZ

The athletic fields Pat Hester's Clintar Landscape Management franchise maintains near Barrie, Ontario, have never looked greener, thanks to technology commonly used in agriculture. Last spring, the company began using GPS and crop-sensing equipment to record data about turf health each time it mows a field.

The data allow Hester to analyze turf conditions remotely, eliminating extra on-site visits. The company also uses the GPS-enabled location information to target areas that require fertilizer rather than performing blanket applications.

The system has helped Clintar save about \$1,800 per fertilizer application on athletic fields, Hester says.

"Before, we would fertilize the whole field and apply the same amount every time," Hester says. "Now, before we go out fertilizing we'll pull out the readings, print them and outline the areas where

we're going to direct our fertilizing and areas where we're going to go lighter."

Fuel expenses have declined as well, with fewer trips to the sites, though Hester has not tracked those exact savings. The system cost approximately \$13,000. Hester says he expects to see a return on the investment within three years.

SENSING A PROBLEM

Hester first heard about the technology at sports turf seminars. He wanted a way to more efficiently manage his properties, some of which were three hours apart.

"For me to check on them was a full-time job, which I don't have the time to do," says Hester, who purchased a system called GreenSeeker from GPS technology provider Trimble Navigation. The system comes with a sensing unit, which the company mounted to a mower, and software.

The sensing unit shoots a beam of light from the front of the mower, takes a reading and stores information about the field. Hester downloads the data into the software program, which plots the readings on a satellite image. From there, he can see any stressed turf areas. The readings are color coded and graded on a scale of zero to one. For instance, a dark green reading of 0.9 indicates healthy turf. A yellow reading of 0.4 represents unhealthy turf.



"It's a critical heads up that allows us to tailor the care of that field," Hester says. "I know I have to do something to get that grass growing properly, whether it's fertilize or treat for pests or adjust the irrigation schedule."

He says the system has had a positive impact on customer satisfaction. The ability to quickly address problems reduces the need for his clients to conduct costly field renovations.

"We learned a lot about the condition of our fields and were able to put together a proper maintenance plan," said Rick Mutuchky, central operations supervisor, Simcoe County District School Board, for whom Hester maintains 18 fields. "The technology is very impressive."

The only challenge Hester says he's faced with the system is the number of steps required to read the data. "It's a lot of clicking to get the info from the tractor into where I can see it," Hester says. He expects the system to become less complex in the future with software updates. **LM**

Green, healthy plants reflect light differently than stressed plants do, resulting in different data readings.

The Ticker: MAINTENANCE

Polaris Industries will supply **Ariens Co.** with a work vehicle under the Gravelly brand. Polaris has executed similar partnerships in the past, such as its ongoing partnership with **Bobcat Co.**

Texas landscape firms **Greater Texas Landscape Services** (GTL) and **Hadden Landscap-**

ing merged. Terms weren't disclosed. The firms will exist as individual corporate entities and will share resources. Tucson, Ariz.-based The Groundskeeper will be the parent company of both. Hadden has locations in Plano and Fort Worth. GTL is based in Lewisville and has other service locations in Waco, Austin, San Antonio, Rio Grande Valley and Houston.

Katz is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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PROFITING FROM DESIGN

JODY SHILAN

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

Do more sales calls = more sales?

Q I worked with a consultant who told me the best way to improve my design/build sales was to go out on more sales calls. What are your thoughts?

A I've heard this theory for many years and used to believe it—it seems to make sense. But let's assume on average you meet with 30 new clients a month and close with about 10 of them, around 33 percent. Not a great closing rate. Now let's also make the assumption your average sale is \$6,000 on the jobs you close, thus your total sales for the month are \$60,000. Therefore, if you want to increase your sales by 20 percent and make \$72,000 a month instead of \$60,000, you just need to make two more sales at \$6,000 each. Seems easy enough. But wait: To make those two additional sales you will need to see six more customers or 36 total, based on your closing rate.

Before we go any further, let's do the math another way. We'll make the same assumption that you see 30 customers a month. Instead of dividing the \$60,000 in sales by 10, giving you an average of \$6,000 per customer, divide the \$60,000 by the total amount of customers you saw for the month (30). Your average sale per lead is only \$2,000. You see, those 20 customers who didn't buy anything from you still count. You still had to meet with them, invest time in an estimate and possibly a design, plus you had to have a minimum of two meetings (the initial consultation meeting and the follow-up or sales meeting). That's quite a bit of time per lead. To be honest, 30 design/build leads a month is a lot for anyone, let alone setting a new goal of 36.

Next, let's look at how much time each lead takes you. Once again, we'll start with 30 new leads a month. If we assume each lead takes six hours of your time, we come up with 180 hours a month or 45 hours a week. Some leads may just be a one-hour meeting and others may require a design and proposal plus two or three meetings. Once you add everything up, this process can take up to 20 hours (or more). Six hours per lead is conservative.

Now, let's consider you want to increase your sales by 20 percent. Using your consultant's "more is more" theory, you'll need to see six more clients a month, which is an additional 36 hours a month or nine hours a week. This brings you to a total of 216 hours a month or 54 hours a week. Still doable, but we're getting pretty high in man-hours. Don't get me wrong, during busier times of the year 54 hours a week is not unheard of for a salesperson, especially considering many appointments are on weekends and evenings when most people have finished their regular eight- or nine-hour workdays.

This brings up another point. Every salesperson I know does not just go on appointments, do design work and sell. Many do the estimating, some do job costing, but all of them are required to go out in the field during the installation to make sure the design is being installed as they envisioned it. This means painting out patios and walkways, laying out bed-lines, confirming elevations, moving plants around and making field changes as needed. Plus, time is required to meet with your clients during the project to make sure they're happy with the work.

Factor in all of that time, and your 54-hour week becomes 70 or 80 hours. And what about next year when you want to grow another 20 percent? How many hours a week will that be, and is it humanly possible to work that much?

By now I think you realize I whole-heartedly disagree with the "more is more" theory from a logical perspective and personal experience.

The better solution is the contrary. Reduce the amount of calls you go on and increase your sales per customer. This approach can be achieved by having a better client-screening process, charging for your design work and servicing your paying customers better. Instead of working 80 hours a week, you'll be doing 40, and selling more work than ever before. You might even go on a vacation.

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