

IRRIGATION & green industry

JULY 2018

THE BUSINESS MAGAZINE FOR LANDSCAPE, IRRIGATION AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACTORS - WWW.IGIN.COM

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GETTING THE MOST OUT OF

EVERY DROP

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THAT CAN HELP KEEP HIGH FUEL COSTS
FROM TANKING YOUR BOTTOM LINE.

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If you enjoy the reading the Close-up Profile each month, then visit www.igin.com and watch our new Close-up Videos highlighting the individual featured in the issue.





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If your business is suffering from a shortage of labor, don't sit back and hope for the best, get out there and tell your story and band together with your industry colleagues.

KRISTIN SMITH-ELY

Strength in numbers

If you had a chance to read the June issue's cover story on the labor crisis facing the green industry, you are already aware how restrictions and delays with H-2B visas have been particularly trying on landscaping businesses this busy season. There is plenty of work out there, but where are all the workers?

For years, the H-2B guest worker program has helped contractors find the labor they need to keep their businesses afloat. But what happens when they don't get the workers they need? Do companies have to raise their prices to make up the difference because they can't service as many customers? Does the quality of the job suffer if their existing workers have to work longer shifts? We may soon find out the answer to those unwanted questions.

Some might argue, if these companies just paid more, then more people would want to work for them. Blaming the pay is misleading, however, because these positions often do pay better than other seasonal jobs. The real challenge is convincing someone who is already gainfully employed full-time, year-round to take a seasonal job.

The labor pool is so small, some companies

are already having to lower the bar and eliminate drug screening and other prerequisites just to ensure they have enough labor. Should they be forced to further compromise?

I think it is abundantly clear that something has to change. A strong economy and housing market pushes up demand for lawn care services and landscaping, which is good for our industry. But without enough people to do the work, the issue is way more serious than an unmanicured lawn.

I am encouraged that the National Association of Landscape Professionals is taking action, forming an H-2B advisory committee and launching programs to encourage people to choose landscaping careers.

If your business is suffering from a shortage of labor, don't sit back and hope for the best, get out there and tell your story and band together with your industry colleagues. Join an association or write your representatives and let them know how the H-2B restrictions or other government policies are negatively affecting your business. It can make a difference. Uniting as one industry or a coalition of industries, which this new NALP committee is doing, can have an even greater impact. 🌿

IRRIGATION & green industry

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INVESTORS CORNER

BrightView makes history with IPO filing

BrightView Holdings, the largest provider of commercial landscaping services in the U.S., has filed its initial public offering with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission to raise up to \$100 million in capital. The Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania-based company says it intends to apply to list its common stock on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol BV. Multiple investor sources are reporting that the deal size is likely a placeholder for an IPO that could raise \$500 million.

After the completion of this offering, affiliates of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. L.P., and affiliates of MSD Partners L.P. will continue to own a majority of the voting power of the common stock, which categorizes BrightView as a “controlled company” within the meaning of

the corporate governance standards of the NYSE.

BrightView’s commercial landscape services range from landscape maintenance and enhancements to tree care and landscape development.

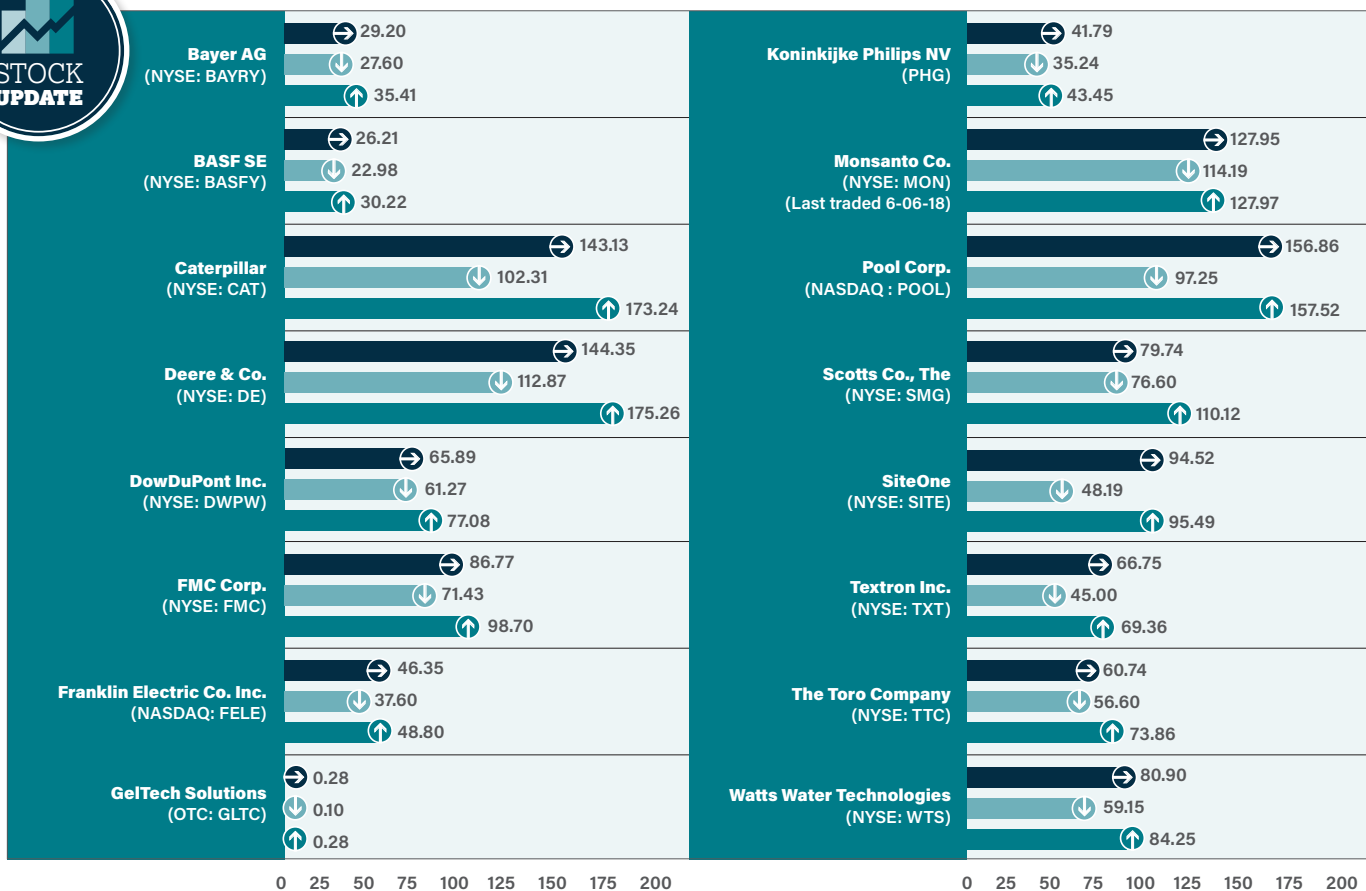
Its integrated national service model delivers services at the local level by combining its network of over 200 branches with a qualified service partner network.

“Our branch delivery model underpins our position as a single-source end-to-end landscaping solution provider to our diverse customer base at the national, regional and local levels, which we believe represents a significant competitive advantage,” BrightView stated in its SEC

filing. It notes its revenues are more than 10 times those of its next largest commercial landscaping competitor.

BrightView also says in its filing, “As the number-one player in the growing \$62 billion commercial landscape maintenance and snow removal market, our size and scale allows us to offer a single-source landscaping services solution.”

BrightView was the result of the merger between California-based ValleyCrest and Maryland-based Brickman in June 2014, which created a combined company at that time of 22,000 employees. 🌱



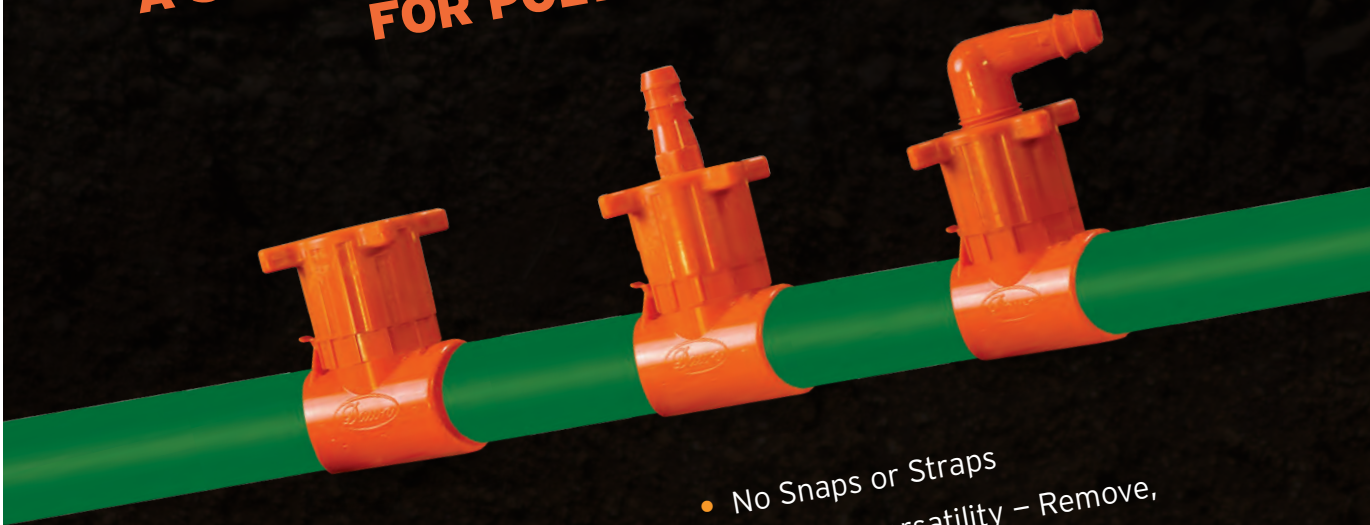
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LEGISLATION

H2-B update: Crisis continues

An increase in the number of H-2B temporary nonagricultural worker visas announced in late May by the Department of Homeland Security has done little to alleviate the worker shortage in the green industry.

Irrigation & Green Industry reported on the crisis in June with a cover story detailing the impact the shortage of workers was having on landscaping businesses across the country. Since that article, DHS announced it was adding an additional 15,000 H-2B visas to the 66,000 it already issued in 2018.

“The limitations on H-2B visas were originally meant to protect American workers, but when we enter a situation where the program unintentionally harms American businesses, it needs to be reformed,” says Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen M. Nielsen. “I call on Congress to pass much needed reforms of the program and to expressly set the number of H-2B visas in statute. We are once again in a situation where Congress has passed the buck and turned a decision over to DHS that would be better situated with Congress, who knows the needs of the program.”

But according to Missy Henriksen, vice president of public affairs, National Association of Landscape Professionals, Fairfax, Virginia, the crisis is still very real. “H-2B is a very complex issue, and it’s very important that we as an industry are relentless in our pursuit for a workable H-2B program,” she told *IGIN*.

In June, NALP formed an advisory committee to oversee the association’s



strategic leadership of this policy priority. Henriksen says this year has been particularly tough on landscaping companies due to the low unemployment rate and the high number of companies who traditionally rely on guest workers that did not get them.

Henriksen knows of cases where landscape companies have had to go out of business or have spread themselves so thin the quality of the work is at risk.

The advisory committee will work with NALP staff and its public policy team to figure out ways to work with public officials and identify meaningful working adjustments to the program. And they have joined forces with other industries affected by the H-2B program.

“We are working not just as the landscape industry, we are working in partner-

ship with other industries. Our voices will be stronger and more magnified when we work together to make sure the magnitude of the program is understood and its importance validated,” Henriksen says.

Henriksen notes that the industry is trying other avenues to find workers. There are recruiting efforts in high schools, tech schools and among people who love the outdoors and who are interested in making a career change. In many cases, the seasonality of the work can be a deterrent. That’s why H-2B workers are so desirable.

“Congress’ inability or unwillingness to further engage and authorize the release of additional H-2B visas to solve this problem for American businesses is unthinkable. It’s untenable, and we’re really encouraging Congress to take action to support American businesses,” Henriksen concludes.

Further reading: For more about how the H2-B issue is affecting landscaping businesses, read the June 2018 cover story, “Labor Crisis,” in *Irrigation & Green Industry*, available online at www.igin.com.



LANDSCAPES

LID Landscapes partners with Emergency Family Assistance Association

LID Landscapes, Boulder, Colorado, has partnered with the Emergency Family Assistance Association, Boulder, Colorado. LID Landscape crews volunteered to remove weeds, trees and dead plants from EFAA’s Louisville, Colorado, housing site, removing trash that had accumulated over the winter to make the playground area suitable for children.

EFAA offers family housing, a food pantry, a children’s program, direct financial assistance and case management to help adults and their families get back on their feet.

“Creating a sustainable landscaping plan for our housing sites has been a high priority to ensure the families living there feel a real sense of home,” says Sara Joss, development and events manager at EFAA. “LID has helped us make this priority possible.”

LANDSCAPE

Green Industry Hall of Fame honors 2018 inductees

The 2018 Green Industry Achievers were honored May 19, 2018, during a special event at Los Alamitos Race Course, Los Alamitos, California. The honor is bestowed on individuals who have made a significant impact or have a positive influence that assures the future of the green industry. Among the 2018 honorees are:

- **James A. Bethke** – Wrote over 800 technical reports during a 35-year career that has included work with the Department of Entomology at University of California Riverside.
- **Bill Cathcart** – Has owned Cathcart Associates Inc. and Cathcart/Begin Associates Inc. and has authored and published the “Landscape Architect’s Reference Manual.”
- **Cheryl Goar** – Executive director of the Arizona Nursery Association (26 years) and the driving force behind the Plant Something campaign.
- **Judy Guido** – A trailblazer for women in the green industry. Involved in more than 103 mergers and acquisitions, she now owns the Guido and Associates consulting firm, and contributes the monthly “Verdant Voice” column to *Irrigation & Green Industry*.
- **Carl Kah** – Founder and CEO of K-Rain Manufacturing, which first manufactured and marketed his patented concept for an automatic residential irrigation control system. He holds over 80 patents specific to the irrigation industry.
- **Roger Fiske** – Founded Fiske Landscaping in the 1960s. He formed an industry-wide committee to develop uniform minimum standards within the California landscape industry, which led to the founding of California Landscape Standards Committee.
- **Candy Fiske** – A partner in Fiske Landscaping, she initiated the Landscape Educational Advancement Foundation to guarantee the perpetuity of the California Landscape Contractors Association’s scholarship program.



From left to right, 2018 Green Industry Hall of Fame inductees, Roger Fiske, Candy Fiske, Carl Kah, Judy Guido and Cheryl Goar; missing from photo, Bill Cathcart

MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

Bayer closes Monsanto acquisition

Bayer, Leverkusen, Germany, completed the acquisition of Monsanto, St. Louis, on June 7.

Shares in the U.S. company will no longer be traded on the New York Stock Exchange, with Bayer now the sole owner of Monsanto Co. Monsanto shareholders are being paid \$128 per share.

J.P. Morgan assisted Bayer with processing the purchase price payment for the largest acquisition in the company’s history. According to the conditional approval from the U.S. Department of Justice, the integration of Monsanto into Bayer can take place as soon as the divestments to BASF have been completed. This integration process is expected to commence in approximately two months.

USA Today reports that Monsanto will abandon its name after Bayer acquires it. Bayer will remain the company name and the acquired products will retain their brand names and become part of the Bayer portfolio, according to the report.

IRRIGATION

Southern Nevada Water Authority incentivizes desert landscaping

The Southern Nevada Water Authority, Las Vegas, will now pay residents and business owners \$3 for every square foot of dry grass they rip out and replace with desert landscaping, according to the “Las Vegas Review-Journal.”

The \$1 increase represents the first significant change to the agency’s Water Smart Landscapes Program in three years. Agency officials say they hope raising the rebate will spark more participation in the program, which has seen a decline in turf conversions over the past decade. Program participants must apply and submit to site inspections before and after their landscape conversion.

The agency has paid \$2 per square-foot for the first 5,000 square feet of grass removed since 2015. Now participants will get \$3 each for the first 10,000 square feet and \$1.50 for every square foot after that, up to a total rebate of \$300,000. Over \$2 million in rebates have been paid out.



QUICK TAKES

Immigration agents arrest landscapers in Ohio

United States immigration agents arrested 114 landscapers at Corso’s Flower & Garden Center locations in Sandusky and Castalia, Ohio, on June 5.

Corso’s Flower and Garden Center released a statement on June 7 saying it is fully complying with the investigation.

Corso’s claims it was not aware of any mistakes or of anyone using fraudulent documents to secure employment.

Colorado governor signs snow contractor law

Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper signed the Accredited Snow Contractors Association’s model legislation into law on June 4.

Colorado is the second snow state, behind Illinois, prohibiting the use of what is considered unfair contract language in snow and ice management agreements.

This legislation specifically addresses hold-harmless agreements and indemnification language in contracts and disallows property owners from passing on their liability to the snow and ice management company.

Vandalized football field getting free repairs

Lawn Plus, West Alexandria, Ohio, is repairing a football field in Park Layne, Ohio, for free after it was vandalized last fall by a 17-year-old.

Crews will work through the summer clearing the field, adding topsoil, seeding and applying fertilizer to get the field ready for the Park Layne Pee Wee Arrows, a football league for kids in grades one through six, that plays there in the fall.

BY JEFF CAROWITZ

When they say, “I’m interested”



Don't lose track of shoppers before they convert into buyers. They're your future customers.

Not every sales prospect is ready to buy immediately. Sure, we love the ones who show up primed to make a purchase. We quickly assess their needs, make a proposal and get the deal done. We even compliment these buyers for having “done their homework” and knowing exactly what they want.

But what about the group of buyers who take a bit longer to move from interest to decision? They're still “doing their homework.”

Don't lose track of shoppers before they convert into buyers. They're your future customers. Consider this: over half of your website traffic is from browsers and learners, not people who immediately call you.

How do you stay in touch with these potential customers and make sure they don't stray elsewhere?

Implement a nurturing program. Nurturing is the marketing practice of proactively cultivating relationships with clients when they're not quite ready to make a purchase or make an additional purchase. Nurturing offers an excellent return-on-marketing investment because it focuses on clients who have already expressed an interest in what you do. Use nurturing in three ways:

1 Stay in touch with prospects who are “planning ahead:” gathering ideas, comparing features and generally deciding what they want. Communicate how you can help with their needs, challenges and goals.

2 Follow up on quotes and proposals, reminding recipients of your unique advantages. Let them know you're patiently standing by and ready to get to work.

3 Maintain relationships with existing clients to cross-sell additional services or capture revenue from ongoing maintenance needs. If you're good at keeping in touch, they'll also become advocates for your company, telling their friends about your company — another source of new business.

Many marketing organizations know the importance of nurturing but struggle with the discipline required. It does require that you plan messages in advance and follow a schedule of customer touches. Knee-jerk or sporadic nurturing will yield only mediocre results.

Leverage new digital marketing technologies to nurture automatically. Common tools include:

- A scheduled series of emails that enable the customer to learn more and to stay engaged with your brand. These can link to articles, white papers and video content that educate and inspire.
- Direct mail information packets or samples sent to the most promising prospects (often those who demonstrate the most engagement with digital campaigns).
- Retargeting programs that essentially “tag” customers when they visit your website, and then display reminder advertisements on other websites. (Yes, even small businesses can take advantage of these sophisticated tools.)

Start small. You don't need to use all of these to capture incremental sales revenue from nurturing. Even following up with a fraction of your website visitors or past quotes can yield significant results with very low effort. Often the same campaigns or messages can be used repeatedly with different customers, saving you time and effort. For example, every customer that receives a quotation could get the same series of automated follow-up messages.

Content is critical. Take care to make sure that your nurturing campaign brings value to the client. Tune your messages and the frequency of them carefully so your audience welcomes the contact rather than feels pestered by it. This can be a tightrope walk, so get professional advice from someone in your industry who is familiar with nurturing campaigns.

Take notice of the customers who engage most heavily with your messaging (clicking on things in your email, watching your video, etc.). Look for cues that tell you when to get a salesperson to follow up with that customer. Over half of the companies we've surveyed didn't have a plan to get nurtured leads back into the sales pipeline. Make sure you do. 🌱



Jeff Carowitz advises landscape industry firms on marketing and business strategy. He can be reached at jeff@strategicforcemarketing.com.

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THERE ARE A FEW TECHNIQUES
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BY MARY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS-VILLANO

Fuel — intoxicating, toxic, flammable and inflammatory, we can't work without it. It's one of the biggest overhead expenses any contractor has. Every dollar you don't have to spend on it is one more dollar you have to reinvest in your business or put into the bank as profit. Fortunately, there are things you can do to cut the cost of the stuff that makes your trucks, mowers and handheld power tools go.





WHY HE WENT BACK TO REGULAR DIESEL ...

“As more people started making biodiesel, used vegetable oil became a desirable commodity, and restaurants started selling it. At the same time, fuel prices kept going down ... it stopped making sense financially.

— Scott Walker, Pleasant Green Grass

It keeps getting better

The manufacturers of trucks, commercial mowers and handheld power tools know contractors want fuel efficiency, and they’ve made great strides in giving it to you, inventing things like electronic fuel injection.

“At this point, machines are about as fuel efficient as you can get them,” says Kris Kiser, president and CEO of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, Alexandria, Virginia. “On the trend side of the equation, we’re seeing more small four-stroke engines with high compression and electronic fuel injection, and those are delivering efficiency.”



Gasoline vs. diesel

Though there is some growing use of alternative fuels such as propane and biodiesel, most landscape equipment and trucks run on either gasoline or diesel fuel. The prices of both fluctuate. If we leave price out of it, the question remains, which one gives you better fuel economy?

Like so many things in life, the answer to this question is “it depends”—there’s no definitive black-and-white conclusion. Bennett Prosser, a fuel economy engineer for the Ford Motor Co., says a diesel vehicle will generally have higher fuel economy compared to a similarly equipped gasoline vehicle.



Scott Walker, owner of Pleasant Green Grass in Durham, North Carolina, fought high fuel prices by brewing his own biodiesel and using it in his trucks. Now he seeks fuel efficiency by other means, such as keeping his tires properly inflated, and using GPS to keep tabs on how his trucks are being driven. Photos: Diane McKinney

“But that is not to say one is strictly better than the other; each has a slight advantage over the other in a given situation.”

Diesel engines give you greater torque, last longer and need less maintenance. However, trucks and mowers with diesel engines tend to cost more at the outset, sometimes several thousand dollars more, and many landscape contractors don't think the trade-off is worth it.

Kevin Pollack, owner of Pollack's Landscaping LLC, Ironton, Missouri, runs both gasoline and diesel trucks. “When we're pulling heavy equipment it's a lot more fuel efficient to run a bigger truck on diesel. On smaller-sized jobs where we're not pulling heavy equipment around it's more cost effective to run gasoline trucks.”

“There are a lot of variables that will affect the fuel economy of a vehicle and what you get out of a tank of fuel, including the climate, the driver and the vehicle itself,” says Prosser. “We can't change the weather, but we can choose the vehicle we drive and how we drive it.”

Get the lead out

Needless to say, a pedal-to-the-metal driving style is not conducive to fuel economy. Simply instructing your drivers to lighten up on the accelerator can save many gallons of fuel. “A vehicle burns the most fuel while accelerating,” says Prosser. “Rapid accelerations and jackrabbit starts burn more fuel than gradual, smooth acceleration.”

Avoiding tickets isn't the only reason for driving at or below posted speed limits. Excessive speed, especially while towing, drastically reduces fuel economy. Prosser suggests setting the cruise control at or below the speed limit on the freeway.

A newer truck may feature adaptive cruise control, which not only helps a vehicle stay at an even speed, it also helps maintain a safe distance from other vehicles while still keeping up with the flow of traffic.

“That's great,” you may be thinking, “but I can't be in the cab with every one of my drivers telling him to slow down.” Well, that's what GPS is for. Scott Walker, owner of Pleasant Green Grass, Durham, North Carolina, has GPS in all of his company's trucks. “If there are any jackrabbit starts or stops or speeding, I'll know about it,” he says. Just knowing the boss is looking over their shoulders tends to keep his drivers in check.

But GPS isn't just a virtual back-seat nanny; it's also helpful to your drivers. Most GPS units will detect slowdowns due to accidents, construction or heavy traffic and suggest alternate routes. Not only will your crews get to their next jobs faster, they won't be sitting in traffic idling, burning up fuel.

How your drivers brake also makes a difference. Smooth, gradual braking is best in non-emergency situations. Habitual rapid braking — often caused by tailgating — can not only lead to early or excessive brake wear, but also limits the benefit of deceleration fuel shut-off, a technology some trucks have that stops an engine from burning fuel while coasting or braking, says Prosser.

More weight equals more fuel consumption, so consider what you're hauling around and why. If a piece of equipment isn't needed that day, consider leaving it in the yard. Even small items add up.

Mowing down fuel expenses

Follow these tips to keep your mowers running lean and mean.

- Keep tires at the proper pounds per square inch. Underinflated tires burn more fuel.
 - Sharpen mower blades at least once a week. Reducing resistance is the name of the game. The sharper your mower blades are, the less hard the mower has to work.
 - Clean mower decks frequently. Fighting to push grass out burns more fuel.
 - Mow more often. If a client allows it, mow his grass at least once a week. Long grass is more difficult to cut and makes your equipment work harder.
 - Do preventive maintenance. Change or clean air, oil and fuel filters regularly, and lubricate.
 - Check belts and pulleys. See if all of them are attached and working, reminds George Reister, wheeled product manager for Husqvarna USA, Charlotte, North Carolina. A frayed belt or pulley puts a drain on the engine.
-

Too much truck?

We all like to go with what we know, and that's not always a bad thing. Many contractors, faced with replacing a well-loved truck, choose to buy the same make and tonnage they bought before. It may be time to reconsider that reflex.

“Pickups, chassis cabs and vans have become much more capable over the last few years,” says David Sowers, marketing manager for RAM trucks at the Chrysler Group LLC, Auburn Hills, Michigan. “If a

contractor just goes back and buys the same thing he had before, he may be buying too much truck.”

He further explains, “For example, someone might buy a 1-ton pickup instead of a ¾-ton, or a Class 6 dump truck when all he really needs is a Class 5. Classes 1 through 5 have become much more capable over the last five to 10 years.”

Buying something that’s bigger and more powerful than you really need is counterproductive, stresses Sowers. “That’s going to be inefficient from both a purchase price standpoint and certainly from a fuel economy standpoint.”

Prosser agrees. “Choosing the right vehicles for the types of jobs you normally do is important. Consider what you need the vehicles for and how you’ll be using them. Having too much capability for a task leads to wasted fuel. Conversely, overworking a smaller vehicle can lead to excessive fuel use as well.”

Warning! Look before you pump

Many are confused about how to properly fuel outdoor power equipment, including the employees of landscape companies. People assume that whatever is safe to pump into your truck is okay to put in your jerry-can, chain saw or mower. That’s no longer true. It’s just too easy to pump an ethanol/gasoline blend higher than E-10 into a mower or small power tool, voiding warranties and ruining engines.

Why? “Congress hasn’t acted to reform the Renewable Fuel Standard,” says Kris Kiser, president and CEO of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, Alexandria, Virginia, “and because of that, the situation is worse than ever.”

“The current standard doesn’t take into account changes in the marketplace, such as the popularity of hybrid vehicles. There’s a lot of ethanol out there and no place to put it, so now we’re seeing a lot of E-15, E-30, E-40. That’s a problem for anything that sits a long time with fuel in it, such as seasonal equipment like mowers, trimmers and snowblowers.”

Ethanol is hygroscopic, which means it attracts water molecules. “The fuel phase-separates, literally pulls apart, with the water sinking to the bottom of the tank where the intakes are,” says Kiser. As the fuel evaporates, the ethanol leaves behind a tarlike sludge that can build up on fuel system components, unless you put stabilizer in or drain out all the fuel prior to storage.

“There are supposed to be required warning labels affixed to all E-15 pumps,” says Kiser. “How that’s being policed, I can’t tell you, but we believe the warning label to be highly ineffective. That’s why we started the ‘Look Before You Pump’ campaign. But we’re not budgeted to educate 100 million people. There are hundreds of millions of legacy products out in the field that weren’t designed for the stuff and nobody’s protecting their owners.”

Don’t forget the tires

Don’t underestimate the importance of caring for your tires. Check tire pressures regularly. Keep them inflated per the recommendation on the door placard or in the owner’s manual. “Underinflated tires wear faster and cause excessive drag, which uses more fuel,” says Prosser.

He also cautions against installing those big all-terrain tires unless you do a lot of jobs in remote, muddy areas. They may look cool, but they’re less aerodynamic, have increased rolling resistance and are very heavy, all of which consume more fuel.

Mowers: try EFI

What about your big commercial mowers? There are ways to lower their fuel costs as well (see sidebar on the lower left). “One of the best ways to become more fuel efficient is to buy mowers with electronic fuel injection,” says Jamie Briggs, senior marketing product manager for Exmark, Beatrice, Nebraska. “Some smaller contractors haven’t adapted to that yet.” Cost is the main factor here, as the initial upfront investment in an EFI mower is higher. They’re also a bit more difficult to work on. But the added cost may pay off in the long run.

Maximizing fuel efficiency in your power tools

Your trimmers, blowers, edgers, chain saws and other small power equipment can save fuel, too. Though battery power in this category has made great strides, most contractors are using either gasoline- or propane-powered hand tools.

“The type of fuel, throttle type and user technique all make a difference in fuel consumption and performance when using outdoor power equipment,” says Wayne Hart, communications manager for Makita USA, La Mirada, California. “Using higher octane fuel generally provides better acceleration and easier starting and may also improve fuel efficiency.”

All of Pollack’s power tools run on gasoline. To use less gas, he lubricates more. “Certain things really need grease on them once in a while, like hedge trimmer heads. They can get strings or weeds wound up in them.”

In general, four-stroke engines are more fuel efficient than two-stroke ones. They produce more torque at a lower rpm, but four-stroke power tools tend to cost more and are more complicated.

As with trucks, the way an operator “drives” a power tool makes a difference in how much fuel it consumes. “As far as technique, power equipment users tend to over-throttle,” says Hart. “But you don’t need 7,000 rpm and full throttle to cut trimmed and mowed grass. Using partial throttle can substantially improve fuel efficiency.” Teach your crew members to use only as much power as they need at the moment.

Alternative fuels

You may have considered trying out some alternative fuels such as biodiesel or propane and even compressed natural gas. How do they stack up?

Biodiesel B5 to B20 (the number refers to the ratio of biodiesel to diesel; B5 means 5 percent biodiesel) will perform about the same as diesel, Prosser says, but has the added benefit of putting out reduced emissions. Propane and CNG will deliver fewer miles per gallon, as propane and CNG contain less energy as compared to gasoline. However, propane and CNG may cost less per gallon and may be more advantageous in terms of operating cost, especially for fleets that have easy access to the fuel.

Walker was one of the first in the Raleigh/

Durham area to offer organic landscape services. He homebrewed his own biodiesel from used cooking grease he got free from a restaurateur friend. For a few years, he powered all of his trucks with it.

He's since gone back to using ordinary diesel. "Several factors changed around the same time," he explains. "When I first started making biodiesel, the price of diesel was way up, almost five bucks a gallon — but used vegetable oil, they gave away free. They were happy for you to take it away."

"Then, as more people started making biodiesel, used vegetable oil became a commodity, and restaurants started selling it. At the same time, fuel prices kept going down; diesel went way down. At that point, it stopped making sense financially."

Looking at cost-per-gallon alone, propane is usually cheaper than gas or diesel. "The national average for regular gasoline is flirting with \$3 a gallon, says Jeremy Wishart, director of off-road business development at the Propane Education & Research Council, Washington. (We spoke on May 25.) "Non-ethanol premium, which a lot of contractors use, is currently around \$3.50 a gallon, and diesel is about \$3.20 a gallon."

"Propane has always been lower in cost than gasoline and diesel, even when both of their prices were low. Right now, that cost comparison is magnified even more. We like to say that propane is, on average, 30 percent lower than gas or diesel because you're not losing fuel to evaporation, spillage or theft."

But you can't pump it. You must have the cylinders delivered, or if you have a big enough fleet, install a 500- to 1,000-gallon bulk storage tank.

A big advantage of propane is that machines using it can be operated in urban areas during the hours when anti-smog ordinances restrict the use of gasoline- or diesel-powered equipment.

Most mowers and power tools can't run on propane right out of the box but can with an aftermarket retrofit. CNG isn't much of a player in our world, although conversion kits exist for it, too.

You'll have to decide what will work best for you. Meanwhile, the makers of your trucks, mowers and power tools will keep working on getting more productivity out of every tank of fuel you buy. 🌿

The author is senior editor of *Irrigation & Green Industry* magazine and can be reached at maryvillano@igin.com.



"A vehicle burns the most fuel while accelerating. Rapid accelerations and jackrabbit starts burn more fuel than gradual, smooth acceleration."

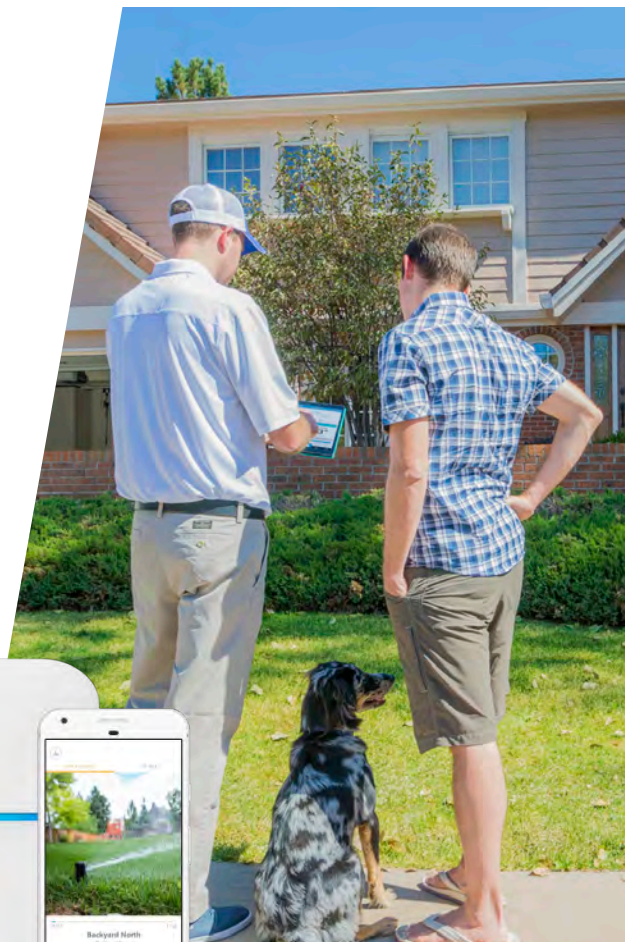
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Mike Rentz, owner of The Perfect Light, The Woodlands, Texas, has a business model that emphasizes service and a management style that helps employees become partners. Photo: Terry Halsey



LIGHTING THE PATH FOR OTHERS

Mike Rentz' desire to pass on the winning service model he has created with The Perfect Light is providing opportunities for his employees to follow in his footsteps.

BY KRISTIN SMITH-ELY

When you see The Perfect Light logo painted on the side of a pickup truck, you'll likely notice that the T in "perfect" is in the shape of a Christian cross symbol.

For Mike Rentz, owner of the Houston-based company, The Perfect Light is also "the perfect name," with both a literal and a figurative meaning. He lets his light shine for his employees and customers using Christian principles as his guide. He cites that as the reason for the business' rapid growth, having lit thousands of homes along the way, which is where the other meaning comes in.

Rentz says the company's name is no mere marketing gimmick, but a statement about who the company works for: God. "We are openly a Christian-based company," he says. "Our employees and customers can believe whatever they want but I use the Bible as my guide for how we are going to do business."

A greater plan

Rentz grew up in Texas Hill Country and attended Texas State University. Thinking that he was "destined for the feed lot,"

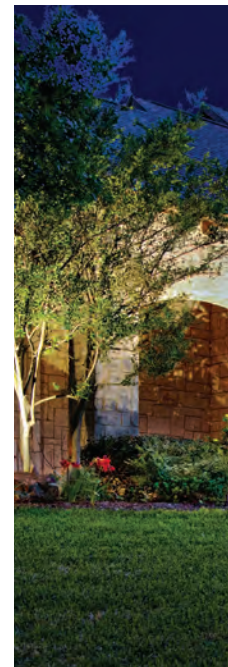
he majored in agricultural business. But it seems that God had different plans for him.

In the summers between school sessions, he worked for a landscape lighting company. There, he got some experience running crews and selling services door-to-door. The man he worked for, Tom Oviatt, started the business out of his two-car garage in 2001.

After Rentz graduated from college, he got a phone call from Oviatt. He convinced Rentz to go to work for him and help him expand the business in Houston. In 2003, the new graduate set up shop in The Woodlands, an affluent suburb.

Under Oviatt's guidance, Rentz helped expand the business across the entire Houston metro area, everywhere within a 60-mile radius of the city. The Woodlands site became The Perfect Light's flagship location. The owner rewarded Rentz for his efforts by making him a partner in the business, and when Oviatt retired four years ago, he turned the entire operation over to him. Today, he and his wife, Ashley Rentz, own and run it.

Since 2001, the company has completed around 15,000 landscape lighting projects and around 5,000 holiday lighting projects. How does a company grow from working



Since 2001, The Perfect Light has done 15,000 landscape lighting projects like the ones you see here. The company not only manufactures and installs the lights, but also provides maintenance. Photos: Cody Gilgrease

out of a garage to having more than 20,000 lighting projects under its belt? Rentz says it happened organically, via word-of-mouth references or because people see the company's trucks in their neighborhoods and call. Customers' experience with the company — and the end results of its work — get people talking.

“What we did early on was to take what was generally not a great quality product in low-voltage lighting and expand that in terms of design and in overall quality to create an economical option that allowed us to expand the market and make it affordable.”

And expand it did. In 2008, the company went into Dallas and then Fort Worth. It was then that he decided to model the new locations after what Oviatt had done for him. He set up a training/mentorship program where highly motivated and ownership-minded employees are given the opportunity to open their own locations.

From employee to owner

Rentz says the company does not follow a franchise model. Rather, “We are looking for business-minded individuals to come into our current cities and get training and support using our process and products. When we set up a new location, it is not an add-on to a landscape business or another already standing business, it's independently run as an outdoor lighting and electrical business year-round that does Christmas lights in the fall.”

We pay the employees to train, and they earn their right as partners as they open and expand their businesses. We finance them from training to opening and they work to earn their piece of that.”

Because of the mentorship program Rentz and his wife established, The Perfect Light has expanded into Austin and San Antonio, Texas, and Denver. The business mix is about 65 percent holiday lighting with the balance being landscape lighting. During the peak fall season, the company employs around 200 people across all locations.

The Perfect Light is in the process of implementing an expansion plan with several locations it is working toward adding in the Southwest and Southeast, including Scottsdale and Tucson, Arizona; Park City, Utah; Atlanta and parts of Florida.

Going above and beyond

The Perfect Light not only goes above and beyond with its employees in the opportunities it provides them, the work it does for its customers goes well beyond what many landscape lighting providers are willing to do.

While its projects certainly stand out as being far from run-of-the-mill, even more impressive is the promise that once the work is done, The Perfect Light isn't going away. This high level of service starts



heard of in some businesses.

“We have a commitment to doing all the things our competitors don’t,” explains Rentz. “Most people won’t do a demo unless they’re forced to or if they’re at risk of losing the job. But we’ll show [our clients] 400 lights completely for free.”

The demonstrations build the customer’s confidence in the project. “It’s much easier if you can show it to them,” says Rentz. “Just like a sports car, it’s much more exciting when you are in it.”

And with the advancement of LED lighting, “it became very hard to do an install poorly,” so Rentz says service can be the differentiator.

And it’s not just about the initial visit, it’s also about what happens after the work is completed. “Every landscape company has a lighting option or has a ‘brother-in-law that can do it,’” he says. “But most contractors don’t seem to realize that if you want to retain those customers, it’s going to require a



with the initial client visit, which Rentz says “gives our sales and design team and the customer all the data they need so good decisions can be made and we can proceed without speculation.”

Landscape lighting is subjective, he notes. What one customer thinks is ugly and obtrusive, another customer might find to be absolutely beautiful. “We will come out to their house to do a free estimate and try to gain an understanding of what they’re trying to accomplish. If they’re a new client, we try to assess what they like and don’t like about design.”

The company’s free nighttime demonstrations show how its products can enhance the nighttime beauty of the client’s home. Rentz describes these demos as a personalized light show. The sales and design team adds and removes lights and shows different light tones.

Before the night’s end, the number of lights to be installed and their locations have been determined, marked and an estimate given. It’s not uncommon for a meeting to last until 10 or 11 p.m. That’s un-

lot of service afterward.”

Many things can happen to a landscape light fixture. They can be damaged by a storm or an installer’s negligence. “When we started it was all new installations. Now, 50 percent of what we do is acquire someone else’s customer because that company didn’t provide the necessary service. We acquire a lot of customers whose lights we didn’t install.”

The Perfect Light carries liability insurance and warranties on its lights, a business feature it implemented early on. Customers can simply call and report that their lights aren’t working and someone from the company will go out and fix them. “No matter what the customer may have done, we take full responsibility for that system,” says Rentz.

‘Tis the season

The Perfect Light’s commitment to customer service is also evident in how it handles the holiday lighting side of the business. Rentz says the holiday installations are much different from the landscape



ON A MISSION

The Woodlands, Texas-based The Perfect Light has a mission that goes deeper than the landscape and holiday lighting it provides. It strives to achieve excellence in four main areas:

1 Honoring God by doing business in accordance with His Word.

2 To provide the highest quality, most comprehensive Christmas and landscape lighting service.

3 Maintaining a positive work environment that promotes our core values of professionalism, trustworthiness and reliability.

4 Encouraging the leadership and growth of our employees through ongoing training and mentorship.

lighting ones from a technical standpoint and are also less regulated. Here again, Rentz says The Perfect Light differentiates itself by “outworking all our competitors,” saying, “You’ve gotta be there at night to make sure it is right.”

Where other holiday lighting installers tend to put the lights up, plug them in and walk away, according to Rentz, “we have guys in trees and up on roofs well into the evening just making sure everything looks good.”

Of course, even The Perfect Light’s work doesn’t stay perfect all the time. “Once we leave, and you come home, your holiday lights will look fantastic,” says Rentz. “But at some point, they won’t. On average, we’ll receive about two service calls per customer each season. It could be that someone ran over some lights with his vehicle or a storm took out some of them. “And the thing with Christmas lights is they have zero value if they aren’t working.”

“The customer is going to focus on the 1 percent of the time they’re not working, no matter how pretty they look when they do,” Rentz says.

Going with The Perfect Light to spread holiday cheer might cost someone more at the outset, but then, he’s buying more than just the installation. The company responds within 48 hours to fix any problem with no questions asked.

Another way the company provides customer service is by storing the lights for clients after the season is over. It does this for around 5,000 customers. The ones who store their lights also get the added benefit of The Perfect Light carrying the liability on them. It may cost a little more in year one — as low as \$1,000 to as much as \$100,000 — but the price gets cut in half the next year and for all subsequent years. “As long as you renew, you can have those lights for all eternity,” says Rentz.

The heart of the business

When Rentz was asked what it takes to be successful in the landscape and holiday lighting industry, he said it all goes back to “a real commitment to own the service and carry liability on its longevity.” Be-



About 45 percent of the work The Perfect Light performs is landscape related. The company’s nighttime demonstrations are a big hit with potential clients. Photos: Cody Gilcrease

ing successful takes a willingness to work long hours and respond quickly to issues. He says the impact the business has on its employees and the greater community is important too.

With those whom he recruits to become his partners, Rentz says he tries to find the best way to do what Oviatt did for him and also instill the biblical values that he feels has helped him create a successful business. The operating partners are the heart of the business, he says, and they are not your stereotypical business partner. They often come from a working-class background.

The people who will carry on the business aren’t necessarily business school grads, but people who don’t mind getting their boots dirty, says Rentz. “We’re trying to find high-caliber people that enjoy blue collar work and give them the opportunity to be successful beyond what they might be able to achieve on their own.”

He adds if he can provide others the same opportunity that was provided to him, it will “bring me great long-term value and a sense of purpose to what I’m doing.” 🌿

The author is editor-in-chief of *Irrigation & Green Industry* and can be reached at kristinmithely@igin.com.

HEAVY TURF SMART IRRIGATION MONTH

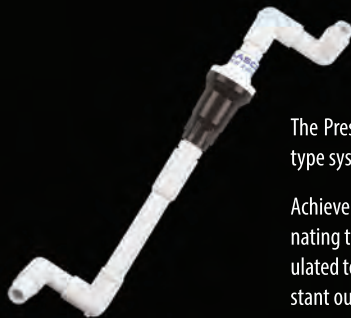
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PARTNERSHIP HITS THE BULLSEYE ON SMART IRRIGATION

CONSERVA HAD EXACTLY WHAT TARGET WAS LOOKING FOR IN A PARTNER TO HELP IT SAVE WATER AT ITS STORES ACROSS THE COUNTRY WITHOUT LOSING SIGHT OF ITS SMALL-TOWN VALUES.

BY LARRY BERNSTEIN

With more than 1,800 stores in the United States alone and over 350,000 employees worldwide, Target's famous red bullseye logo has become an iconic part of Anytown, America, right up there with McDonald's golden arches.

For Russ Jundt, vice president and founder of Conserva Irrigation, the logo symbolizes much more than a place where people can stock up on high-quality merchandise at bargain

prices. For him, the famous red bullseye has become synonymous with "team," a value almost as near and dear to his heart as saving water.

Started in 2010 in Minnesota, Conserva Irrigation is a landscape irrigation company founded on the concept of water conservation. The company now has 44 franchises throughout the United States. Increasingly disturbed by the tremendous amount of water wasted by typical irrigation systems, Jundt created Conserva to find a better approach. Using studies published by the

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IRRIGATION CASE STUDY

Irrigation Association, Fairfax, Virginia, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, he developed a proprietary process for auditing irrigation systems and arriving at a "System Efficiency Score," which rates their water efficiency according to a numerical scale.

Joining the team

In the summer of 2015, Jundt had a meeting with the Target Corp.'s operations and sustainability teams. The meeting was set up by a Conserva franchisee who'd done some snow removal for the retailer. Prior to this meeting, Jundt and his team had audited three store sites and were confident they could improve their water efficiency.

Two and a half hours into the meeting, Jundt recalls, "Someone on Target's sustainability team asked me, 'What are you selling?' I said, 'I don't know. I just want to solve your water problem.'"

That's exactly what Target had been looking for, having made a public commit-

ment. "To make sure we leave our planet in better shape for future families, we integrate sustainable practices throughout our supply chain and operations with an eye on using resources responsibly and maintaining healthy, vibrant communities," Target states. "In that vein, Target has put in policies and set goals regarding climate policy, chemical strategy and a freshwater stewardship approach."

At the initial meeting, Jundt and his team reviewed the results of the three audits and shared a water budgeting tool. He told the Target teams, "We know how much water you used and how much you need to cut it to achieve a 75 percent application efficiency score." The team's response was, "How do we obtain that score at every one of our stores?" By December of 2016, a pilot test was created for nine Target stores in Florida.

While Jundt's pitch regarding water efficiency surely grabbed the attention of Target's sustainability team, he believes

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GOAL SETTING

Target takes what it calls "a fresh approach" to sustainable water management, saying it "will focus our freshwater stewardship efforts in areas and on issues where our influence and support can help deliver the greatest impact." The Minneapolis-based retail chain has outlined several goals in the area of raw materials, manufacturing, direct operations and other areas of business where it can have an impact.

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— RUSS JUNDT

it was his closing remarks that really sewed up the deal. Jundt talked about being part of the hometown team. Both companies call the Minneapolis area home, though Conserva is now based in Richmond, Virginia.

For Jundt, who grew up in a small town west of Minneapolis, sharing a hometown conveys a sense of camaraderie. "My dad said, 'take care of the people in a small town because you'll see them around later. You have to treat them right.'" Jundt took that to mean being responsible and appreciating relationships. How often does a company as large as Target hear such sincerity from a potential business partner? Clearly, relationships matter to even the biggest of companies.

Updating the irrigation system

Even before Conserva had visited any Target stores, a number of them had already installed smart controllers to run their landscape irrigation systems. But as many in our industry know, installing a smart controller alone does not guarantee efficient use of water. The investment did however show Target's sincerity regarding water conservation.

When a Conserva franchisee makes an initial visit to a Target store site, he checks 120 different data points. The goal, according to Jundt, is to "figure out where the wasted water is going and to do that, you need boots on the ground."

Jundt uses a football analogy to explain further. "It's not complicated — it's about blocking and tackling, being out there every day, charting and identifying assets such as controllers, water sources, meters, valves, zones and heads." The Conserva employee will determine to what level assets are malfunctioning, with a focus on identifying low-hanging fruit — obvious things, such as broken sprinkler heads — and fixing those first.

Once the auditor has assessed the site, he puts a model together based on Conserva's proprietary algorithm showing what needs to be repaired. Once everything's in game shape, the auditor's focus turns toward optimizing the smart controller.

As to why Conserva focuses on fixing the hardware first, Jundt says, "Water moves through pipes, not around them. Having a beautiful high-tech system means nothing if you don't focus on the fundamentals. You can't cut corners; you need to

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methodically march down the field to get to the end zone.”

Water conservation

The number of Target stores that Conserva has worked on has steadily grown. From the original nine in Florida, Conserva will be in over 300 locations by the end of this year.

Since the partnership between the two companies began, Conserva has saved Target over 36 million gallons of water, helping the retailer fulfill its sustainability mission.

In March 2018, Target announced a new initiative: a freshwater stewardship approach, created in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund. Building on Target’s existing water management efforts, the freshwater stewardship approach aims at improving water quality, optimizing water efficiency and increasing access to clean water.

Target has expanded its water efficiency program to include its direct operations sites. The goal is a 15 percent absolute water use reduction by 2025 for its stores, distribution centers and headquarters locations. As noted in the press release, water conser-

vation work to optimize the outdoor irrigation systems at Target’s stores and distribution centers will be handled by Conserva.

Target has developed a number of key performance indicators as part of its push to reach its sustainability goals, notes Jundt. “We’re regularly asked where we are in our water savings efforts and how much is being saved on average,” says Jundt.



VALUED PARTNERSHIPS

Conserva Irrigation, Richmond, Virginia, is just one of many valued partnerships Target has formed with water conservation entities. The company recently donated \$1 million to Water.org, a nonprofit aid organization that offers smart solutions to help people in developing countries gain access to clean water. On its corporate sustainability site, Target says, “We’ll work together to empower people in the communities where our goods are produced, enhancing their lives by removing barriers to access affordable financing for water and sanitation.”

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IRRIGATION CASE STUDY

While the amount of water savings has varied from store to store, Jundt says the overall average is approximately a half million gallons per store per season. "If we could be in all 1,200 Target stores, we could save 600 million gallons of water," says Jundt.

The conservation effort doesn't end after the 120 data point check and its indicated repairs are done. As part of its

contract with Target, Conserva franchise employees return to the stores monthly to perform "wet checks."

The inspections ensure that nothing has broken in the interim, that all sprinkler heads and controllers are properly adjusted and that everything in the system is functioning as it should. These wet checks are part of Jundt's "boots on the ground" philosophy.



Russ Jundt, left, founder and vice president; and Jake Mathre, director of field operations, are among those from Conserva Irrigation working with Target Corp. to help it save on water usage at its stores and distribution centers across the country.

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For Target stores in areas with four distinct seasons, Conserva winterizes their systems in November, blowing water out of the pipes with air compressors. When April rolls around, Conserva performs spring startups. "This is a significant process," says Jundt. "We slowly introduce water into the systems, making sure everything is functional and conduct a number of tests."

Looking ahead

When Conserva crews are working at a Target store, they do not feel like outside vendors. "While we are on those properties, we are Target team members, and we treat those locations with respect. When I drive by one of the stores, I think to myself, 'that's us,'" says Jundt.

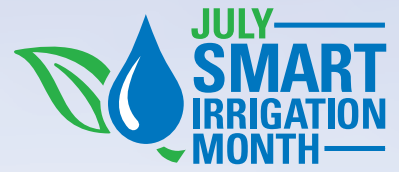
The industry also is taking notice of the special relationship. In July 2018, the project earned the Vanguard Award from the Irrigation Association, which honors collaborative execution of an innovative installation project in the irrigation industry.

As for the future, Jundt says, "We suspect that this significant and prideful relationship with Target will continue to expand." Within three years he expects Conserva to work with all Target's stores.

While the joint venture is clearly working for Conserva and Target, they aren't the only beneficiaries of their joint venture. When water is saved, it's saved for everybody who lives in those communities. Using a football analogy once again, when this team makes a touchdown, everyone wins. 🍀

The author is a freelance writer. He can be reached at larry@larrydbernstein.com.

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HAVE YOU BEEN
WONDERING WHY
CONVENTIONAL THINKING
IS NO LONGER WORKING IN YOUR
LANDSCAPE CONTRACTING
BUSINESS?



IT'S TIME TO **RETHINK** YOUR **APPROACH TO BUSINESS**

BY DON EVANS

Can you name your most profitable account? Have you performed a return on investment on the jobs completed in the last year? Do these seem like strange questions? If so, it might be time to slow down, step back and evaluate if your business' prospecting, selling, operating and business management efforts are paying off on the bottom line.

Your business might be plenty busy — the books and the backlog don't lie, after all — but an overflowing schedule can be a significant drain on profits and cash flow, as crews scramble to complete jobs within strict time and budget constraints and management and office staff struggle to keep

up with daily demands. Logic says that an abundant book of business plus a high volume of work is the ideal formula for maximum profitability.

Reality, however, tells a different story. Why? For starters, indiscriminately serving a wide customer base guarantees there will be a healthy dose of those customers who demand high-end products and white-glove service at steep discounts and bargain-basement prices. And selling primarily on volume rarely works well for small businesses because they often lack the resources to consistently and successfully deliver on that volume.

Smart businesses do two important things: they target and sell to the right customers, and they plan



Don Evans is president of Pittsburgh-based LandOpt, where he oversees day-to-day operations and provides leadership by establishing and implementing long-range goals, strategies, plans and policies. He brings a diverse range of experience, leading teams to sustainable growth in manufacturing and service industries. While he began his business life as a corporate lawyer, Evans has spent the majority of his career in customer-facing and solutions-focused roles. He can be reached at don.evans@landopt.com.

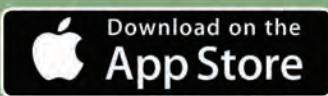
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BUSINESS TO BUSINESS

for circumstances that threaten profitability. The former involves being unapologetically choosy and running fast and far from profit-drainers such as “scope creep.” The latter involves making accommodations for high-demand seasons and events and taking measures to proactively recoup costs associated with sluggish sales seasons and non-revenue-generating activities.

When done well, both result in more meaningful, efficient work with higher profits. Here are three more residual benefits you might not have considered.

1 INCREASED ABILITY TO PRIORITIZE. Whether completing day-to-day operational tasks or striving toward goal-based initiatives, prioritization is key. As you sharpen your focus on your optimal customer profile and

with customers who return the investment of valuable time and resources, and because careful planning accounts for both expected and unforeseen factors that impact available cash, you can rest assured there will be plenty of cash in reserve during all seasons of the year for the things that bring the most value to the business.

3 CLEARER BIG-PICTURE VIEW. The whirlwind of daily operations can leave many landscape contractors perpetually in the weeds, unable to see much farther than the immediate task at hand. When the bulk of your time shifts to spending time on the business rather than in it, you’ll find it becomes easier to envision the path forward. With fewer customers clogging the books and more efficient, streamlined

SMART BUSINESSES DO TWO IMPORTANT THINGS:

THEY TARGET AND SELL TO THE RIGHT CUSTOMER, AND THEY PLAN FOR CIRCUMSTANCES THAT THREATEN PROFITABILITY.

begin to streamline processes in your business, you will discover certain things that once required immediate attention no longer hold you and your teams in the vice grip they once did.

In fact, you may find that reactive measures become a thing of the past, as being proactive helps mitigate obstacles and decrease the likelihood of events adversely impacting daily operations. This leaves plenty of room for the things that matter over the long term, such as strategic planning, personal and professional development and growth and sufficient attention paid to a healthy work-life balance.

2 BETTER USE OF RESOURCES. Many owners find that as their book of business becomes more clearly defined and their cash flow falls in line with a more profitable customer base, they no longer need to rely as heavily on lines of credit as they once did. They often no longer find it necessary to liquidate assets to pay vendors, suppliers and lenders. This frees them to use the extra cash to reinvest in and grow the business.

Cash that may have once been allocated for debt repayment can be rerouted toward the purchasing of better vehicles and equipment, improved facilities, valuable training programs and enticing employee incentives. Because a clearly defined customer base ensures that you only work

processes taking the lead, you can take time each day to revisit the business’ original mission and vision and recalibrate as needed.

As you make this a daily practice, you will find you are able to think more strategically and creatively, allowing you to better guide and mentor your team members. The momentum created from an organization’s shared goals is powerful, continually moving everyone in the same direction and preserving and refining the big picture you envisioned for your business from the start.

The primary reasons many sole proprietorships struggle to remain solvent are a lack of understanding about the customer’s role in ensuring profitability and a lack of attention to proactive planning.

Conventional thinking about prospecting, selling and financial management has done little to boost the success of independently owned landscape contracting firms as teams throughout the industry remain overworked with little in the way of profits to show for the output of effort.

But with a few simple shifts in the way you and your teams think, plan, implement and execute systems processes, you can transform your business and reap the rewards. And you’ll still have plenty of time left over to enjoy the things that matter most, like hobbies, vacations and time with family. 🌱

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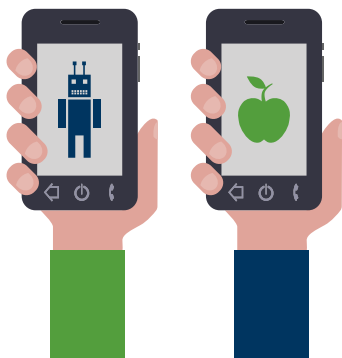


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BY MARY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS-VILLANO

It's not just staging the interior. New research shows landscapers can play a huge role in increasing the likelihood of a home sale.

WHAT'S ON THE OUTSIDE MATTERS

The real estate market in many U.S. cities is red-hot, with prices at an all-time high. Plenty of people are cashing in, putting their homes up for sale while the selling's good. Whatever the reason for planting that "For Sale" sign in the lawn, there are things to be done to make those homes sell faster and at as high a price as possible.

This is good news for you, the landscape, irrigation or maintenance contractor. No matter your company's focus, whether its design/build, irrigation or general maintenance, your services are in demand.

A report released in May from a study conducted by the National Association of Landscape Professionals, Fairfax, Virginia, and the National Association of Realtors, Washington, says that residential (and commercial) property owners looking to sell should consider undertaking an outdoor project.

The report, titled "2018 Remodeling Report: Outdoor Features," presented 13 outdoor residential project scenarios, and highlighted the reasons why property owners might complete such projects. It also assessed the rewards, both financial and emotional, that these sort of remodels bestow on homeowners.

Curb appeal

This is the two-word mantra real estate professionals repeat endlessly, saying it's essential to selling a home at or above its asking price. NAR says 99 percent of its members believe curb appeal is important in attracting a buyer.

You've probably heard of "staging," where a Realtor trying to sell a home will clean it, paint it and bring in decor and furnishings to help potential purchasers picture themselves living there. It's like preparing for a job interview, only for a house.

If you went on a job interview without taking a shower, hair askew, wearing rumpled clothing, you probably won't



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get that job, no matter how slick your resume looks. And all the interior staging in the world won't help if a prospective buyer never crosses the threshold because he's turned off by an unkempt, overgrown lawn or landscape — or a dead one.

A landscape contractor, by planting, installing, building, repairing and mowing, stages a home's exterior so that it looks in-

viting. "Realtors understand that a home's first impression is its curb appeal, so when it comes time to sell, a well-manicured yard can be just as important as any indoor remodel," says NAR President Elizabeth Mendenhall, a sixth-generation Realtor and CEO of RE/MAX Boone Realty, Columbia, Missouri.

According to this study, curb appeal

Staging the Exterior

An outdoor makeover can help a home sell faster.

You can be a big help to your clients when they decide to sell. Let them know what an asset you can be in getting their homes ready to meet potential new owners. You might want to give them a tour of their property and point out anything you could help with. It's also the time to remind them of any projects they may have discussed with you in the past but didn't get around to authorizing.

There is also a chance that you are brand new to the client. According to the report, "2018 Remodeling Report: Outdoor Features," from a study conducted by the National Association of Landscape Professionals, Fairfax, Virginia, and the National Association of Realtors, Washington, 21 percent of homeowners calling for new landscape services are preparing for a sale.

But whether it's an old client or a brand new one, almost every homeowner has outdoor projects that have been put off until "later," whenever that may be, often due to cost. Tell them that now's the time to get those projects off the back burner and into the pan, things like sprucing up the deck, removing that old shed, or covering the patio.

Explain how important it is to remove all the deadwood and excess growth on his trees and bushes and how you can trim them into pleasing shapes. Suggest replacements for struggling or dying bushes or plants in landscape beds and offer to put down all-new mulch.

If the client doesn't have an irrigation system, suggest installing one. If there is one, offer a complete inspection of the system as part of the spruce-up package, replacing broken sprinkler heads and tightening leaks. Emphasize that dripping faucets or weeping sprinkler heads just plain look sloppy and may signal to a buyer that other plumbing issues could exist on with the property.

And don't forget about the water features, if any. They should be cleaned out and in working condition or repaired or replaced if they're not. A boulder bubbler adds sound and beauty and costs much less than a bigger, more elaborate feature.

At the very least, suggest adding some bright, popping annual color or container plants to front walkways, flowerboxes and beds. After all, the house is looking for a new suitor; why not dress it up in a spiffy new outfit for its "dates?"



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needs improvement most of the time. Ninety-four percent of the Realtors surveyed have suggested to sellers they spruce up the outsides of their homes before listing them.

The interesting thing about this study is that it didn't just look at what improvements Realtors most want to see, it also looked at which ones gave homeowners the most satisfaction. To measure the pleasure

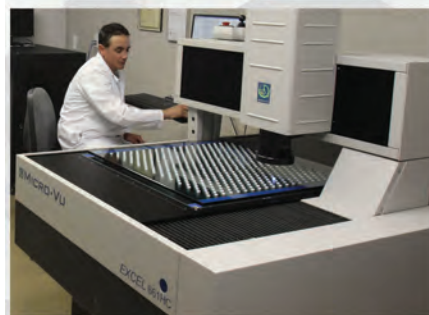
the homeowners derived from each of the projects, the report assigned "Joy Scores" of one through 10 to each of type of project. The higher the number, the greater the joy. (See sidebar at right.)

Interestingly, the types of home improvements Realtors say are important are not necessarily the ones that homeowners most enjoy having nor are they among the most exciting or "spendy."



JOY RATINGS
Landscape improvement
Joy Score

10	Irrigation system installation
10	Fire feature
9.8	New wood deck
9.8	Water feature
9.7	New patio
9.7	Statement landscape (serenity garden, bocce ball court)
9.6	Overall landscape upgrade
9.6	Landscape lighting
9.5	Landscape maintenance
9.2	Tree care
9.0	Standard lawn care service
8.8	New pool



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An example is an outdoor kitchen. A home that's so equipped is surprisingly not a hot seller according to this survey. Only 1 percent of the Realtors have suggested installing an outdoor kitchen prior to sale. As to whether an outdoor kitchen sealed a deal for them, again, the percentage was just 1 percent.

Both fire features and irrigation systems earned perfect 10s. Eighty-three percent of homeowners who installed fire features said they have a greater desire to be home since completing the project. And 69 percent of homeowners who installed an irrigation system said they feel a major sense of accomplishment when they think of the project.

However, the Realtor score for both was among the lowest. Just 2 percent of Realtors have suggested a presale fire feature installation, and only 3 percent suggested an irrigation system. Only 1 percent said the presence of either one closed a deal for them.

Pools are another example. The Joy Score here is 8.8. Ninety-two percent of

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the homeowners said they have a greater desire to be home since completing a pool; 83 percent have an increased sense of enjoyment when they are at home; and 79 percent feel a major sense of accomplishment when they think of the project.

However, less than 1 percent of the Realtors suggested a swimming pool as a pre-sale upgrade, and only 2 percent said that having one clinched a sale.

Simple over sophisticated

So, what do Realtors want to see? Return on investment in the form of money back at time of sale. In terms of spending versus reward, standard lawn care services ranked at the top. That's right — ordinary, workaday scheduled chemical application did more for the sale of a home than a big, flashy outdoor kitchen.

The sample project described in the

survey included six applications of fertilizer and weed control chemical on 2,835 square feet of lawn, at an estimated cost of \$375. That amount would come back to the home seller in triplicate, grossing \$1,000 post-sale. This makes the recovery percentage an astonishing 267 percent. No wonder over half of the Realtors, 55 percent, suggested such a service be in place before a homeowner puts a home on the market.

Next most favored by Realtors were landscape maintenance and tree care, both recovering 100 percent of their cost.

How can you grab a share of this business for yourself? Cultivating relationships with local Realtors would be a good start, perhaps through your local chamber of commerce, or simply by cold-calling a few and offering your services. Remember, these enhancements are usually made before that “For Sale” sign goes up. To find out about pending sales, you need to be on the inside track.

But your clients don't necessarily have

“This report validates that landscaping is an investment worth making, offering the immediate benefits of increased enjoyment of your property, as well as desirable long-term value that holds if or when it comes time to sell.”

— Missy Henriksen, National Association of Landscape Professionals

to be considering a sale in the near future to make this data valuable to you. As Mendenhall says, “Even homeowners with no immediate plans to sell can gain more enjoyment and satisfaction from their homes by taking on a project to revive their outdoor spaces.”

The high Joy Scores for big-ticket improvements like irrigation systems, fire features and patios mean that's what people really want. If they're planning to stick around and enjoy them, their motivation is even higher.

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Realtor rank of projects' likely added value to home for resale (highest to lowest)

1	Landscape maintenance
2	Overall landscape upgrade
3	Standard lawn care service
4	New patio
5	New wood deck
6	Tree care
7	Landscape lighting
8	Statement landscape
9	Irrigation system installation
10	Outdoor kitchen
11	Fire feature
12	Water features
13	New pool



Realtor rank of projects' appeal to buyers (highest to lowest)

1	Standard lawn care service
2	Landscape maintenance
3	Overall landscape upgrade
4	Tree care
5	New wood deck
6	New patio
7	Landscape lighting
8	Fire feature
9	Irrigation system installation
10	Statement landscape
11	Outdoor kitchen
12	New pool
13	Water features

“This report validates that landscaping is an investment worth making, offering the immediate benefits of increased enjoyment of your property as well as desirable long-term value that holds if or when it comes time to sell,” says Missy Henriksen, vice president, public affairs, NALP.

She continues, “From lawn and tree care to installing a new fire or water feature or landscape lighting, there’s no

shortage of opportunities for homeowners to enhance their landscapes and to reap the benefits of these upgrades.” ... and no shortage of opportunities for you to help them do it — and reap some rewards for yourself. 🌿

The author is senior editor of *Irrigation & Green Industry* magazine and can be reached at maryvillano@igin.com.



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ASSOCIATION BRIEFS

Smart Irrigation Month

The Irrigation Association's celebration of Smart Irrigation Month is in full swing. The initiative officially kicked off on July 10 with Irrigation Technology Tuesday.

New in 2018 was a video contest to showcase irrigation technologies, as well as new social media cover photos and graphics available for members to use on their own social media platforms. IA members also have access to numerous resources such as articles, infographics, public service announcements, press releases, logos and much more available for use and download.

The IA invites the industry to join in on this opportunity to spread the message of what smart irrigation is and to help promote its social, economic and environmental benefits.

» www.smartirrigationmonth.org

Irrigation Show

The Irrigation Association has officially opened registration and housing for the 2018 Irrigation Show and Education Conference, Dec. 3-7, in Long Beach, California.

Applications are also still being accepted for the 2018 New Product Contest. This popular feature of the Irrigation Show provides a unique opportunity for exhibitors to prominently display their new products on the exhibit hall floor, attracting the attention of those browsing at the show. Applications are due Sept. 1.

» www.irrigationshow.org

Irrigation Foundation

The Irrigation Foundation's E3 program offers students and faculty the opportunity to attend the 2018 Irrigation Show and Education Conference in Long Beach, California, in December.

A minimum of eight students will be selected to receive an education and travel scholarship to attend the conference. They will have the chance to participate in education classes, industry sessions and networking events. The deadline to apply is Sept. 1.

» www.irrigationfoundation.org/e3

IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION

Irrigation Association weighs in on hearings regarding landscape irrigation codes

Brent Mecham, CID, CLWM, CIC, CLIA, CAIS, industry development director for the Irrigation Association, Fairfax, Virginia, recently attended code hearings in Columbus, Ohio, for the International Residential Code and the International Plumbing Code.

Both codes are part of the family of codes created by the International Code Council, Washington. Mecham previously submitted written comments to propose changes to those codes specifically to rename the chapters from "Subsurface Irrigation Systems" to "Graywater Soil Absorption System."

"While graywater is certainly a reliable source of water for irrigating plants, there are many other technical considerations beyond what was specified in the chapters that need to be considered if that source of water is used for irrigation."

- Brent Mecham

The hearings provided the opportunity to verbally defend the proposed changes to the code committees.

"While graywater is certainly a reliable source of water for irrigating plants, there are many other technical considerations beyond what was specified in the chapters that need to be considered if that source of water is used for irrigation," Mecham stated. "The International Green Construction Code, for example, has numerous requirements for using graywater for irrigation. However, the technical requirements that are in the IPC and IRC were not about watering plants but only how to calculate the amount of water different types of soils can absorb."

Mecham presented his proposal to two different committees, and both committees agreed with it. The next step includes reviewing and voting by the code officials to accept or reject the committee's action on all of the proposals that were heard over the four days. Final action will take place in October. The proposed changes will become part of the 2021 codes.

Mecham also submitted modifications to the National Green Building Standard, which is an American National Standards Institute standard created by Home Innovations, a subsidiary of the National Association of Home Builders. The NGBS committee met for three days in Washington in mid-May. This is a points-based standard to reward builders for building residential properties in a more sustainable way. A minimum number of points must be earned for such things as energy use, water use, site development and design, resource efficiency, indoor environmental quality and operation and maintenance of the home. Discussion focused on how a verifier can determine if a building complies. An alternate rating system was also voted in that is based more on performance. Irrigation is one of the systems to be verified.

The NGBS has provisions for landscaping and irrigation for an entire development as well as an individual lot. While there is currently mandatory language about using a professional irrigation designer, there are also prescriptive requirements for which points are awarded for installing efficient irrigation systems, including the use of WaterSense-labeled controllers, pressure regulation, drip irrigation and for following the IA/American Society of Irrigation Consultants Landscape Irrigation Best Management Practices. One of the changes proposed was to eliminate prescriptive limits on precipitation rates and use the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers/International Code Council 802-2014 Standard for Landscape Irrigation Sprinklers and Emitters as a requirement for sprinklers and micro irrigation products used on the projects. The ASABE/ICC 802 Standard is currently part of the California Green Construction Code. The committee voted to accept many of the proposals submitted, but not all of them. The proposed changes accepted by the committee will go out for another round of public comment later this summer.



Mecham

Contact Brent Mecham at brentmecham@irrigation.org or at **703.536.7080** for information about these standards and codes.

IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION

In Memoriam: Bill Koonz Sr.

The irrigation industry recently lost long-time leader and pioneer Bill Koonz Sr. Koonz was a strong supporter of the IA and served as president in 1993.

In 1965, Koonz and his wife Marlene became irrigation entrepreneurs by establishing Koonz Sprinkler Supply Co., a successful distributor of golf course maintenance and irrigation equipment in Springfield, New Jersey. He authored an early instructional book for irrigation contractors, which included everything from marketing basics to design and installation.

Koonz was honored with a 2016 Lifetime Achievement Award by the New Jersey Irrigation Association. He was also involved in numerous areas of his community and even served as mayor of Springfield.

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

ASLA outlines blueprint for climate-smart communities

The American Society of Landscape Architects, Washington, has released a blueprint for helping secure a sustainable and resilient future. The report, released in June is based on an interdisciplinary Blue Ribbon Panel on Climate Change and Resilience which convened in September 2017.

“Smart Policies for a Changing Climate: The Report and Recommendations of the ASLA Blue Ribbon Panel on Climate Change and Resilience,” found that the U.S. needs a new paradigm for communities that works in tandem with natural systems.

“Our nation, states, counties, and cities are looking for solutions to mitigate the risks from the changing climate and extreme weather events,” says Nancy C. Somerville, Hon. ASLA, executive vice president and CEO ASLA. “With this report, landscape architects and their design and planning colleagues forward public policy recommendations that can make communities safer while taking climate change and existing natural systems into account.”

The report recommends public policies: be incentive-based; promote holistic planning and provide multiple benefits; take into account environmental justice, racial and social equity; reflect meaningful community engagement; be regularly evaluated and reviewed for unintended consequences; and address broader regional issues as well as local and site-specific concerns.

NALP IN THE NEWS

Headed to the Hill

The National Association of Landscape Professionals, Fairfax, Virginia, is planning its annual volunteer service event Renewal & Remembrance in conjunction with its annual advocacy event, Legislative Days on Capitol Hill, July 15-17, in Washington and Northern Virginia.

Legislative Days on the Hill is the association’s annual education, networking and lobbying day on the Hill.

“We need everyone in the industry to speak up about the issues that impact landscape and lawn care businesses,” says NALP CEO Sabeena Hickman. “By bringing everyone together, learning from the experts and discussing issues with peers, we’re building a formidable force that can make an impact. We strongly encourage everyone to attend.”

This year, the line-up for Legislative

Days includes panel discussions on key issues including:

- the farm bill;
- H-2B visas;
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulations;
- E-Verify and immigration reform; and
- social media and advocacy.

The popular day of service, Renewal & Remembrance, happens in conjunction with Legislative Days on the Hill. Volunteers will spend July 16 completing lawn care, tree care, and landscape and irrigation projects at Arlington National Cemetery.

Legislative Days on the Hill is free and is open to all industry professionals. Renewal & Remembrance is open to NALP members.

“Why I landscape” campaign

NALP has launched “Why I Landscape,” a national workforce campaign to promote the landscape profession and encourage students and career seekers to consider opportunities within the industry.

Introduced by the association’s Industry Growth Initiative, “Why I Landscape” builds off the success of NALP’s LandscapeIndustryCareers.org site that showcases various career paths within the industry and connects job seekers with potential employers through its national job board, visited by more than 100,000 candidates.



The national campaign includes digital advertising, media outreach and social media content promoted through its new @WhyILandscape Facebook, Twitter and Instagram channels.

“Social media is a critical component in communicating with the public as it helps shape perceptions,” notes Missy Henriksen, NALP vice president of public affairs. “Our social media efforts will ensure that the proper messages reach and resonate with our target audiences. We urge companies to follow and share our posts to amplify the strength of our voice and messaging.”


The new channels will show the breadth of the profession, advancement opportunities, compensation potential and insight into why current professionals value their careers. This messaging will come through testimonials, video content, industry statistics and news articles.




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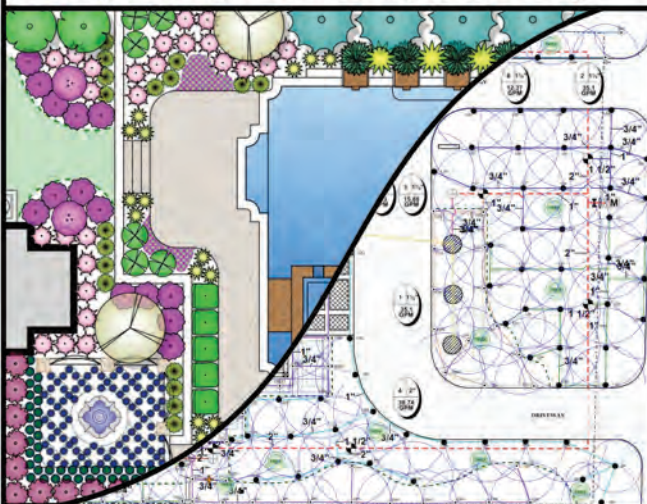


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VERDANT VOICE



BY JUDITH GUIDO

Following the “Guido Principle”

The world’s most successful companies do one thing significantly better than their competitors: they identify and understand their core customers. If ever there was a proverbial “silver bullet,” as so many people in business desire, that’s it. It’s not a secret, nor is it rocket science, yet most companies still fail to do it.

If you can stay focused on the central idea that you sell to people, not to companies, neighborhoods, municipalities or professional associations, you’ll be a big success. Remember, it’s not about B2B (business to business) or B2C (business to consumer), it’s about P2P (people to people.)

Having had repeated, firsthand success with this tactic, I’ve created the “Guido Principle.”

Based on the famous “Pareto Principle,” which says that 20 percent of your customers generate 80 percent of your business, the Guido Principle states that if you’ve really identified and understand your core customers, the Pareto Principle will no longer apply because every customer you have will yield maximum profitability.

So how do we identify and really understand our core customers? Start by collecting data. Talk with your front-line team; they know your customers better than anyone else. They can tell you who they are and why they buy.

Conduct this simple exercise: gather those team members and ask them to personify their top five best customers, writing down their names, attributes, behaviors, wants, needs and fears.

Identify what they buy and how they buy it, and see if any of them has a unique online identity. Then ask your team to describe two ideal characteristics each of those five people possess, and share that information with you.

Now watch your core customers come to life. You’ll begin to notice similarities surfacing, things like the fact that they always pay on time or are loyal to a fault.

The next time you engage with a prospect and find that he doesn’t possess any of those core customer characteristics, don’t devote any further resources to that person. 🌱

The Guido Principle states that if you’ve really identified and understand your core customers, the Pareto Principle will no longer apply, because every customer you have will yield maximum profitability.



Judith M. Guido is chairwoman of Guido & Associates, a business management company. She can be reached at judy@guidoassoc.com.

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NIGHT LIGHTING



BY KEVIN SMITH

Navigating the night with beautiful light

Illuminating sidewalks, driveways and steps is one of the most important tasks of a landscape lighting designer. Fortunately, though utilitarian, this type of lighting can be made as beautiful as it is safety enhancing.

Path lights are equipped with a side-mounted stem and a hat. The light source is usually mounted in the center facing down.

Area lights have a center stem and a reflective top hat. The lamp or integrated light source is inside the lensed portion of the fixture.

Bollards come in reflective and nonreflective styles. Reflective bollards will have a hidden light source which produces light

When designing traverse lighting, it is important to consider a site's terrain, weather conditions and architectural style.

on the ground, while nonreflective bollards are manufactured with a light source that can be seen.

When designing traverse lighting, consider a site's terrain, weather conditions and architectural style.

Cobblestone, slate and flagstone walkways naturally settle if set in earth or sand, creating uneven surfaces which can be challenging to light. You may have to use path and down lights. The down lights may have to be mounted in trees or on the eaves of a building so shadows are less likely.

It's best to avoid installing ground-mounted lights in grassy lawn areas, as fixtures can become damaged by mowers and string trimmers. If you must install fixtures in a lawn area, it's best to mount them to larger mounting posts like those used in 120-volt lighting. In some cases, a concrete pad should be poured around a mounting post for extra protection.

In colder regions, snow can cover path and area lights, so use fixtures with taller, more rugged stems. Semi-custom fixtures may be available by special order; check with your local manufacturer's representative.

Many times, fixtures are specified because of their shape and design, to harmonize with architectural elements on the property.

Always remember your customers' personal needs. Eyesight changes as we age, night vision especially. Ask your customers about their needs, but never make assumptions. A night demonstration might be required to establish a customer's comfort level.

Start thinking of traverse lighting as a requirement and not as just another option. Combine safety and beauty in every job. 🌿



Kevin Smith is the national technical support and trainer at Brilliance LED LLC, Carefree, Arizona, and can be reached at kevin.smith@brillianceled.com.

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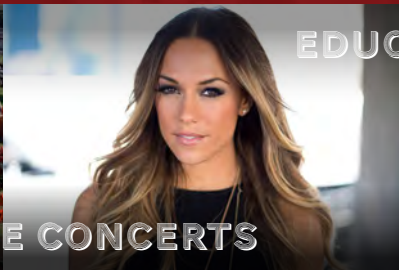
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1 Controller smart home compatibility. The Toro Company, Bloomington, Minnesota, has announced the compatibility of its SMRT Logic product with Google Home and Amazon Alexa devices.

SMRT Logic enables customers to control their irrigation and outdoor landscape lighting systems through their smartphones, tablets or computers. It uses proprietary technology to enable mobile device connection without having to access a wireless network, along with a secure platform that can be operated by either the homeowner or landscape professional.

Owners of SMRT Logic-controlled systems who have either Google Home or Amazon Alexa units can now use those smart home devices to control their outdoor systems the same way they do their indoor lighting, HVAC and security apparatus.

 **The Toro Company**
SMRT-Logic.com



2 Design software. Drafix Software, Kansas City, Missouri, has released the 24th version of its PRO Landscape Design software.

Version 24 is a complete software package offering photo imaging, accurate CAD and the ability to create thorough, professional proposals. The companion app allows it to be used with both IOS and Android tablets.

The new version adds 1,000 additional new high-quality hardscape images of elements such as light fixtures and water features, along with plant material for all climate zones, bringing the total number of objects in its library to over 18,000.

A new Intelligent Sketch command allows designers to use a stylus or mouse to create the lines they would like to draw and then have them automatically smoothed and easily editable. Version 24 adds the ability to convert generic 2D CAD lines to specific line types.

 **Drafix Software**
www.prolandscape.com



3 Battery-powered equipment line. Greenworks Commercial, Mooresville, North Carolina, has introduced a new product line, the 40-volt Elite system, exclusive to the independent dealer channel.

The 40-volt Elite system complements the company's existing 82-volt system. The Elite 40-volt tools combine brushless motor technology and a proprietary lithium-ion battery power plant to provide run time and power comparable to gas-powered tools, but with zero emissions and a reduction in noise pollution, says the company.

The tools offer pushbutton start. Bluetooth connectivity lets a user monitor the level of charge in the Elite Smart batteries with a smart phone. The batteries also track their own charging cycles for easier warranty-related service. The Elite Smart batteries are interchangeable between individual tools throughout the 40-volt system and feature USB connections to power phones and tablets.

 **Greenworks Commercial**
www.greenworkscommercial.com

SUPPLIER IN THE NEWS

Kubota Tractor completes 200-acre land purchase in Kansas

Kubota Tractor, Grapevine, Texas, has announced the completion of a 200-acre land purchase within Phase II of Logistics Park Kansas City in Edgerton, Kansas, making the company the first major tenant for the industrial park, the company announced in June.

Kubota says it plans to plant roots in Kansas to expand distribution capacity and streamline logistics processes for the timely delivery of Kubota service parts and equipment to U.S. customers.

"Kubota is ready to begin this exciting project along with our city, county and state partners to expand our infrastructure and create solid footing in the Midwest, the Heartland of America," said Masato Yoshikawa, president and CEO of

Kubota. "We are proud to make this significant investment here in Kansas, a state that shares our values and supports our ambitious goals for the future."

The current 765,000-square-foot leased facility will remain in operation in Logistics Park Kansas City until the new facilities are complete. It will continue to be the source for Kubota parts and equipment for worldwide export.

The new campus will also house Kubota's newest Midwest Division office, which is an extension of the company's existing divisional operation structure that provides regional support to Kubota dealers. Kubota's division offices are located in Suwanee, Georgia; Fort Worth, Texas; Columbus, Ohio; Lodi, California; and Edgerton, Kansas.



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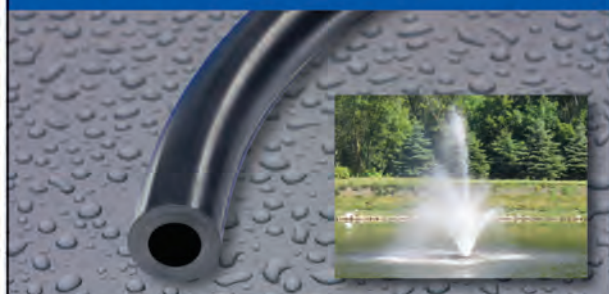
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4 Diesel mowers. Grasshopper, Moundridge, Kansas, has introduced the Tier 4 Final-compliant Grasshopper 725DT MaxTorque clean diesel mowers. They offer double the fuel economy of previous diesel mowers, reducing fuel costs by nearly 50 percent compared to gas-line- and propane-powered mowers.

The MaxTorque engines reduce emissions of greenhouse gases according to California Air Resources Board test data.

A range of attachments are available to replace stand-alone equipment. The fuel efficiency, lower emissions and longer engine can reducing the need to buy new equipment over time according to the company.

 **Grasshopper**
www.grasshoppermower.com



5 Electric mower. Mean Green Mowers, Hamilton, Ohio, has introduced ReVolt, an all-electric 48-inch by 52-inch cut dual drive wide-area walk-behind commercial mower.

With the option of up to two powerful Green Monster lithium-ion battery packs, ReVolt can get commercial lawn care contractors through a full day of mowing on one charge, according to the company.

Its low-slung, wide stance and battery packs hovering 8 inches above the ground, give it a low center of gravity compared to gas-powered walk-behind mowers. The ReVolt is designed to hug slopes without loss of control or oil starvation.

 **Mean Green Mowers**
www.meangreenmowers.com



6 Non-electric pump. Pro Products, Fort Wayne, Indiana, has introduced the GreenFeeder, a water-driven, non-electric pump that can be used below ground, and installed on any irrigation system, enabling automatic pest control and fertigation every time water flows.

The GreenFeeder is designed to draw American Hydro all-natural, environmentally friendly formulas such as Nature-Shield Pest Repellent, Rid O' Rust Preventers and GrassSoGreen Fertilizers directly through their product containers.

The installation kit can be put together in under 10 minutes and uses no glue.

 **Pro Products**
www.proproducts.com

SUPPLIER IN THE NEWS

Stihl reports boost in U.S. demand for battery-powered equipment

Waiblingen, Germany-based Stihl, with U.S. offices and manufacturing facilities in Virginia Beach, Virginia, announced in late May that it recorded a jump in sales of battery-powered products in the U.S., traditionally the company's most important market. Within just 15 months, the market share of Stihl battery-powered tools in the U.S. increased tenfold. Its product portfolio also significantly expanded over this period, from one line of battery products to three.



The U.S. market is served via six company-owned and five independent distributors. These distributors were invited to a meeting, held at the end of April at the company's Waiblingen headquarters, to discuss strategy for the U.S. market.

"Our partners and cus-

tomers in the U.S. can rely on the fact that Stihl shall remain a family-owned company based on the values of loyalty, integrity, a long-term outlook and of course, the commitment to premium quality," says Dr. Nikolas Stihl, chairman of the Stihl Advisory and Supervisory Boards.

Norbert Pick, executive board member of marketing and sales, explains, "We set extraordinarily high standards in everything we do and customize our products exactly to our customers' requirements, and have been successful for more than 90 years in a constantly changing environment."

Additionally, Bjoern Fischer, president of Stihl Inc., emphasized that sales of Stihl products in the U.S. have more than doubled over the past 10 years.

"I see enormous potential in the area of battery-powered products, particularly as we are able to offer our customers a broad and attractive range of Stihl products via our large sales network of 9,000 servicing dealers," says Fischer.

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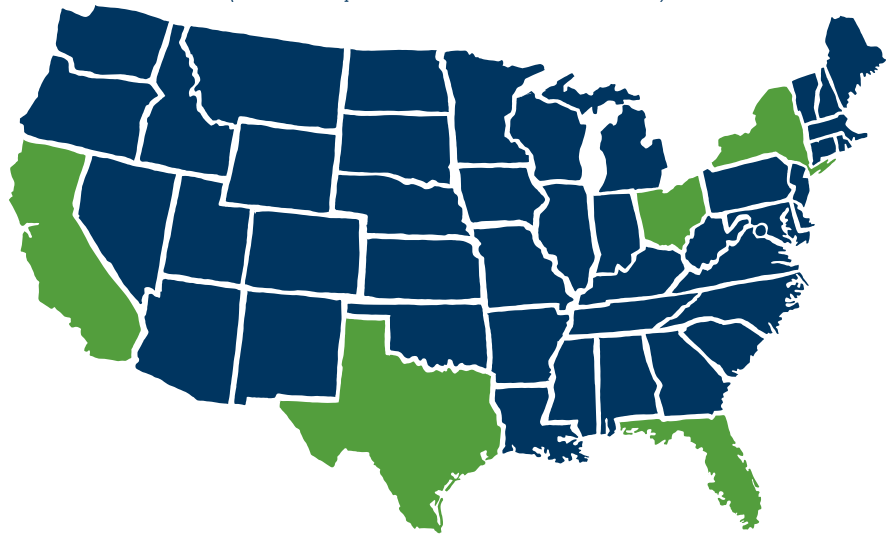
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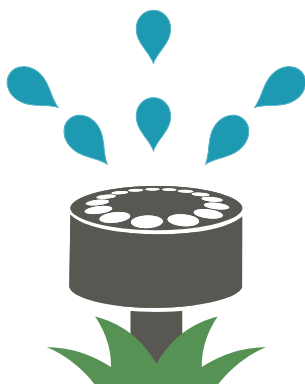
We've been telling you about July being Smart Irrigation Month, and now it's time to put its principles into practice. The following five tips from the Irrigation Association's industry development director, Brent Mecham, will get you and your customers on the right track.

1 Follow the recommendations of the local water provider. Irrigate only when the plants or the turfgrass need it.

2 Rotor-type sprinklers (sprinklers with moving stream(s) of water) need about twice as many minutes of run time to apply the same amount of water as spray sprinklers.

3 Divide the total run time into three or four cycle-starts to encourage the water to penetrate the soil more deeply and avoid runoff. For example: program three 5-minute cycles instead of one cycle for 15 minutes.

4 Take advantage of rainfall from Mother Nature and turn off the sprinkler system, or suggest to your clients that you can install a rain shutoff device or soil moisture sensor to prevent watering when the soil is moist enough.



DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

When a teenage landscape business owner had his equipment stolen, it could have spelled the end of his business. Luckily, an equipment manufacturer stepped in.

Michael Bonza Jr., 15, is the founder and owner of Bardstown Mowing Co., Bardstown, Kentucky. In June, a trailer with \$5,000 worth of his landscape and lawn maintenance tools was stolen overnight.

Having learned about the theft from local news accounts and seeing that Bonza's GoFundMe page was trending, Greenworks Commercial, Mooresville, North Carolina, replaced the stolen gas-powered tools with its battery-powered models.

"Hardworking young people like Michael Bonza should be celebrated, not victimized," says Tony Marchese, director of independent retail at Greenworks North America. "We immediately knew we want-



ed to help. Not only could we get Michael whole again with the donation of brand-new tools, but our proprietary lithium-ion battery platform means he'll never have to purchase another can of gasoline."

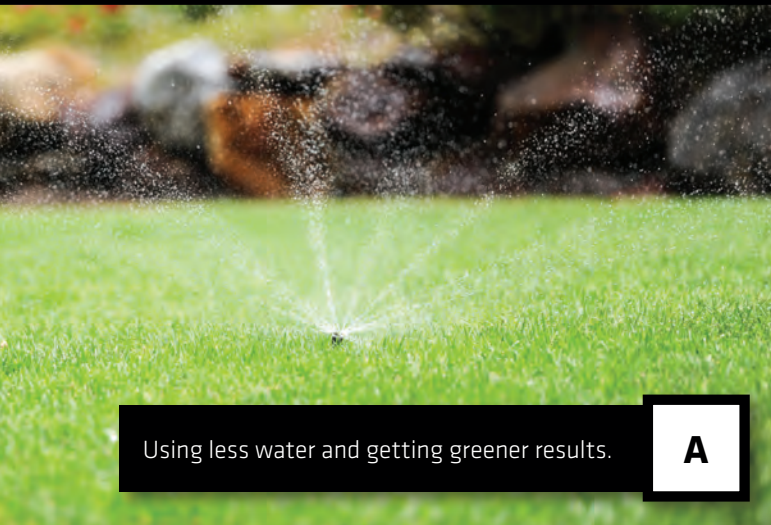
The donation included Greenworks Commercial's GM 210 push mower, GH 260 hedge trimmer, GS 180 chainsaw, GT 160 string trimmer, GBB 500 handheld blower and GBB 700 dual battery-port backpack blower and all needed batteries and chargers.

WHEN PLACING A FIRE FEATURE, CONSIDER ANY OVERHANGING TREE BRANCHES BECAUSE THE HOTTEST POINT OF A FIRE IS ACTUALLY SLIGHTLY ABOVE THE TOP OF THE FLAME.



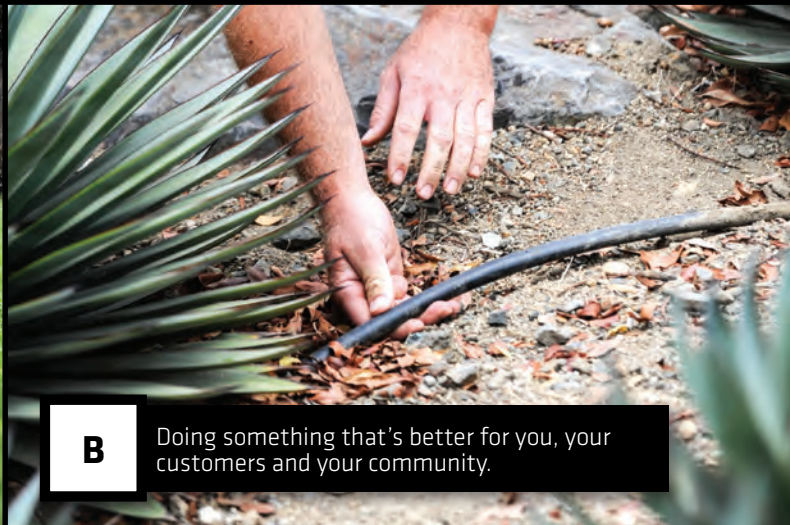
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A



B

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C



D

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