

# IRRIGATION & green industry

MARCH 2020

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## INSIDE

- Develop quality workers with education, p. 26
- This year's top 4 landscaping trends, p. 28
- Technology improves pumps and valves, p. 34

## EDUCATION

Learn how to talk with customers about water restrictions (pg. 38).

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March 2020 | Volume 24 | Issue 3



22



28



ON THE COVER  
16

## Features

- 16** **Cover Story: Help wanted**  
Bring in new and qualified employees by focusing your hiring efforts.
- 22** **Close-up Profile: William Cruz**  
The director of operations at Gachina Landscape Management works to give others opportunities to develop in the green industry.
- 26** **Encourage education**  
Keep quality workers by investing in learning and development.
- 28** **The top 4 landscaping trends for 2020**  
Try these new ideas to make an impact for your customers.
- 34** **Go with the flow**  
Learn how new technology improves pumps and valves.
- 38** **Talk it out**  
Protect your business by being upfront with your customers about tightening water restrictions.
- 42** **Small but mighty**  
No matter its size, a water feature can make a big splash.



## In this issue

- From the editor ..... 6
- Market Watch ..... 8
- Green Business Brief ..... 10
- Industry Insights ..... 12
- Night Lighting..... 14
- Associations in Action..... 44
- Product Spotlight..... 46
- Classifieds..... 49
- Ad Index ..... 49
- Branching Out ..... 50

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Educating customers opens their eyes to how much your day-to-day work is actually saving them.

KYLE BROWN

Photo: Nikki Avramovich

## Keep clients educated

In the past week or so, I've been dealing with a bout of insomnia. Before you start worrying, I'm fine. For whatever reason, insomnia shows up every few months for a couple days before my sleep schedule fixes itself. I've worked with it long enough to know how to adjust as I need to. It's amazing how much of my Netflix queue I've gotten through. I've also been spending a lot of time thinking about what keeps green industry professionals up at night.

On top of the constant pressure of worries like dealing with labor issues, contractors have dozens of water management issues to consider for every job.

While making sure you're using the right pumps or sprinklers for the situation is important, it's equally crucial to make sure that the client understands how the work you are doing will impact them. It's tough for a customer to appreciate how much you're saving them in water bills or how watering less might improve plants' health. There are several resources that can help solve this problem.

Blog posts can be an easy way to spread information to clients, and they have an added bonus of raising your online profile in search engines while showing potential customers

that you know what you're talking about. A monthly print or digital newsletter is another cost-efficient method to keep your message in front of customers.

Another accessible option that's popular right now is podcasting, which you can directly record with your phone using an app like Anchor. Podcasting doesn't mean you have to have a regular daily radio show. It might just be a short episode recorded once a month or so about landscaping and water management topics that customers should be thinking about.

Beyond developing your team as water management specialists, educating customers opens their eyes to how much your day-to-day work is actually saving them. Keeping that in front of customers can make it easier both to justify what you're charging and make them more willing to pay for your expertise.

There are lots of approaches to educating customers about water management and lots of reasons to make it a priority for your team. Hopefully you're able to find something that works for you so you aren't staying up nights like me. On the positive side, I still have about two more seasons of *The Good Place* to get through. 🌱

# IRRIGATION & green industry

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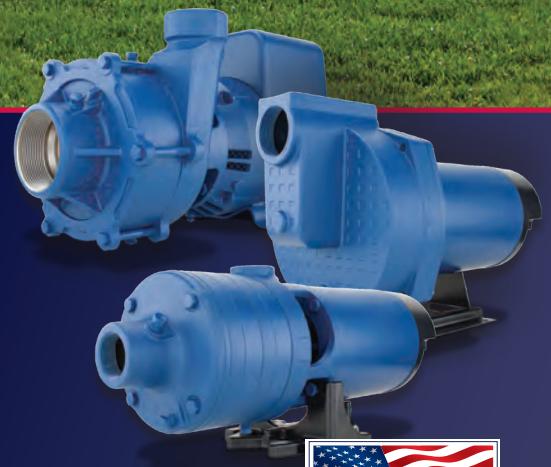
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INVESTORS CORNER

# The Toro Company to acquire Venture Products

Bloomington, Minnesota-based The Toro Company has entered into an agreement to acquire privately held Venture Products Inc., the manufacturer of Ventrac-branded products, for \$167.5 million in cash. The transaction is anticipated to close before the end of Toro's fiscal 2020 second quarter.



Photo: Ventrac

Based in Orrville, Ohio, Ventrac is a manufacturer of articulating turf, landscape, and snow and ice management equipment for the grounds, landscape contractor, golf, municipal and rural acreage markets. For calendar year 2019, Ventrac generated net sales of about \$100 million.

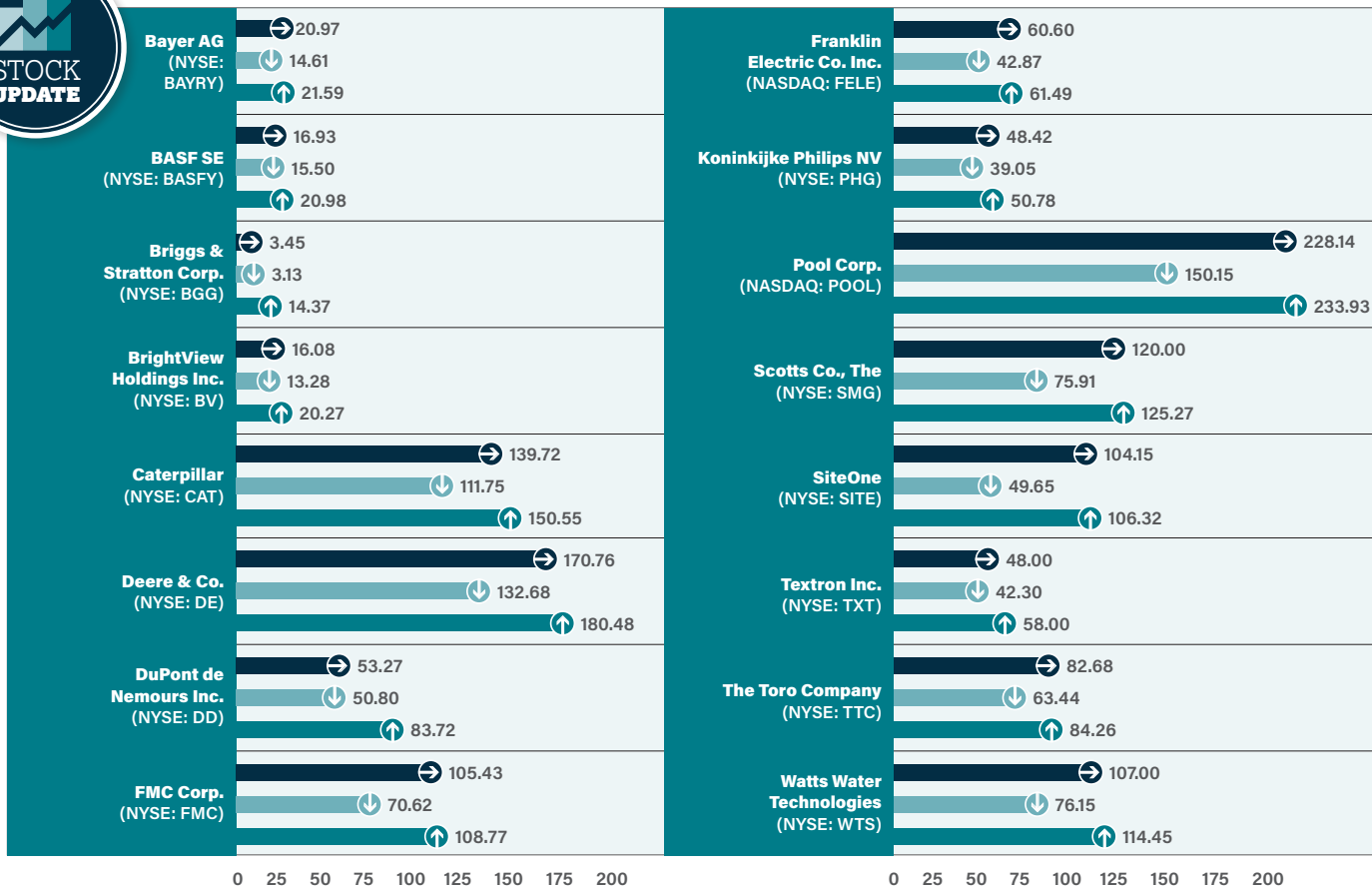
"Ventrac is well recognized in the industry for its market-leading innovation and commitment to meeting the diverse needs of customers," says Richard M. Olson, Toro chairman and CEO. "We have long respected and admired the Ventrac team, and we look forward to helping them

grow on the successful foundation they have built in Orrville, Ohio."

"We are excited to become a part of The Toro Company and its family of leading brands," says Dallas Steiner, CEO of Venture Products Inc. "The Toro Company is committed to a culture that aligns with our employee values, has a rich history of success in the marketplace and a proven track record of growing their brands. By joining with The Toro Company, it allows us to continue to serve our customers with authentic experiences and trusted products." 🌱

**"We have long respected and admired the Ventrac team, and we look forward to helping them grow on the successful foundation they have built in Orrville, Ohio."**

— Richard M. Olson, The Toro Company chairman and CEO



↔ Last trade (2-17-20) ↓ 52-week low ↑ 52-week high; Source: Bloomberg.com



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## QUICK TAKES

### SavATree acquires Wasatch Arborists

Bedford Hills, New York-based SavATree has acquired Wasatch Arborists, located in Park City, Utah. In addition to being its 39th branch, this will be SavATree's first location in the state of Utah.

Wasatch Arborist's owner and ISA certified arborist Ryan Torricollo, business partner Jessica Torricollo, Operations Manager Caleb O'Brien, ISA certified arborist Charlie Haer and the valued field specialists will remain throughout the transition and beyond to serve clients.

### Ruppert Landscape opens new branch in Delaware

Laytonsville, Maryland-based Ruppert Landscape has expanded its landscape management operations to include a new branch in Delaware on the Delmarva Peninsula. It serves Lewes, Bethany, Millsboro, Rehoboth Beach and Fenwick Island in Delaware, as well as Ocean City, Maryland.

The Delmarva branch will be led by Garth Jorgensen, a 20-year Ruppert employee.

### Loving acquires H&H Sod Farm

Gastonia, North Carolina-based Loving, a company that performs landscaping, hardscaping and sod farm operations, has purchased the business division of H&H Sod Farm, while allowing Danny and Lois Hall to maintain ownership of the 3,500-acre tract of land located right outside of Orlando, Florida.

In addition to the acquisition, Loving has created a strategic relationship with both Scotts and Bethel Farms to join in the production and distribution of ProVista Turf in Florida.

## Equipment

### Arkansas State University uses robotic mowers in pilot program

The open spaces of Arkansas State University's campus have a new creature competing for the attention of the squirrels and students — autonomous lawn mowers.

Deployment of three Husqvarna automowers began over the holiday break as a way to efficiently and effectively keep the lawns maintained, according to an article by the university.

Vince Patterozzi, the new director of Landscape Services for Arkansas State, expects the program to expand in the coming months.

The mowers operate continuously for four and a half hours of mowing with one hour of charging, Patterozzi says in the article. "It creates a number of efficiencies and savings. Since they are electric there are hundreds of gallons of fuel saved. They also reduce the amount of air and noise pollution on campus. They cost between \$10 to \$50 per mowing season to operate, depending on how much electricity costs to charge the batteries," he explains.

Three are deployed now, with three more set to join later this spring. The automowers use a GPS wire-guided technology to navigate the area they are assigned to mow. Each unit has a home docking and charging station. A mobile app allows Patterozzi and his team to communicate with the units.

"Let's say we have a severe weather alert," he says. "We can pull up the app and tell the units to 'go home' to their base station, shut down and wait until the weather passes. Then we can tell the units to resume their mowing sequence."

Curious campus residents are encouraged to not disturb the mowers, but if one gets into a bind or is picked up, it will immediately "phone home" to Patterozzi through the mobile app.

"Each unit has an anti-tampering/anti-theft alarm that goes off if the unit hasn't been shut down appropriately," he says. "They also alert us if the unit has stopped more than 90 seconds. So if anyone sees a unit stalled, one of our trained ground crew is probably already on the way to resolve whatever issue stopped the mower."



## Landscape

### SingleOps report reveals green industry economic benchmarks

Atlanta-based SingleOps, a business management software for outdoor service companies, has completed a study of the North American green services industry.

The SingleOps Green Industry Economic Report includes data from hundreds of thousands of one-off landscaping and tree care jobs proposed by companies using SingleOps' platform in 2018 and 2019. Examples of one-off jobs include the removal of a fallen tree, storm cleanup, a flower bed installation or the construction of a retaining wall.

A key takeaway from the study is that proposals sent to customers by landscaping and tree care companies in the U.S. and Canada are accepted on average 63% of the time. In 2019 alone, green industry companies across the tree care and landscaping industries bid a total of 398,223 jobs for a total value of \$817,830,550. Of those jobs, 225,496 were accepted by customers, for a total value of \$443,760,817.

In the tree care vertical, 55% of proposals were accepted by customers, representing 46% of the total proposed job value. Tree care jobs in 2019 had an average value of \$1,759 and a median value of \$800 compared to an average value of \$1,980 and a median value of \$708 in 2018.

In the landscape vertical, which includes general landscaping, landscape design/build, landscape maintenance, landscape supply and lawn care, proposals were accepted by customers 64% of the time, representing 44% of the total proposed job value. Landscape jobs in 2019 had an average value of \$1,558 and a median value of \$577 compared to an average value of \$2,324 and a median value of \$1,000 in 2018.



**Irrigation**

**UAFS grounds team earns Water and Sustainability Innovation Award**

The University of Arkansas, Fort Smith's grounds management team Southeast Service Corporation Services for Education was presented the Ewing Irrigation and Landscape Supply and Audubon International Water and Sustainability Innovation Award Jan. 15 for their overhaul of UAFS irrigation systems and their continuing commitment to sustainability on campus.

"Sustainability is more than money savings or water use reduction; it is a way of life," says Matt Rich, grounds manager for SSC Services for Education at UAFS. "This national award proves our collaborative efforts in sustainability and water conservation. Our commitment to this work shows in everything we do at UAFS."



Photo: University of Arkansas - Fort Smith

SSC took over grounds management at UAFS in 2017, when water use was rising, leaks were prevalent and issues with installation and scheduling caused a bottleneck of resources. "We started with the basics and fixed all the leaks over the first few months," says Rich. He and his team continued to implement creative and impactful changes, performing an extensive overhaul of the irrigation system.

"We involved many student groups at our university. We educated and built systems together in a collaborative effort to understand the problem and to create the overall solution," says Rich. "After identifying all of the irrigation on our 168-acre campus, we started to change the way irrigation was discussed."

"We are using our creativity to maximize the efficiency on our campus. We are combining new integrated technology, such as automowers and smart controllers to control the irrigation system and original practices like xeriscaping," he says.

Thanks to the sustainability efforts, the campus has reduced irrigation water use by 42.6%, saving the university nearly \$90,000.



**Irrigation**

**Conserva Irrigation adds 7 new territories in January**

Richmond, Virginia-based Conserva Irrigation has added seven new territories in January. The brand will welcome three new franchisees to the system and will open territories in the following locations:

- Pasadena and Burbank/Glendale, California
- North Indianapolis and central Indianapolis, Indiana
- North Charleston, south Charleston/Hilton Head and west Charleston, South Carolina

With the addition of seven territories in three states, Conserva Irrigation has now grown to 91 territories in markets throughout the country.

"We're excited about the fast start to 2020 and are eager to begin servicing clientele in our seven new territories," says Russ Jundt, founder of Conserva Irrigation. "Since launching our franchise program in 2017 as part of Outdoor Living Brands, we've welcomed like-minded entrepreneurs that recognize the importance of water conservation.

**Landscape**

**GreenScapes Landscape Company transitions to employee ownership**

Columbus, Ohio-based GreenScapes Landscape Company Inc. has announced it has transitioned to employee ownership, according to an article on [www.bizjournals.com](http://www.bizjournals.com).

The landscaping company has transitioned to an employee stock ownership plan placing control in the hands of its 90 employees, a succession plan initiated by founder Bill Gerhardt. Since opening in 1977, the company has expanded to a full-service landscape and design company for both commercial and residential real estate, as well offering snow and ice management.

"I've been looking for a way to pass the company along to the people here," says Gerhardt. "I've been approached by buyers over the years, but it didn't seem like a good fit for the employees, or I was worried they'd want to change the culture here. This way the employees will be able to take the ball, and they can run with it."

Gerhardt is still planning to remain with the business as president for at least five years, eventually handing over the reins but in a way that lets the company maintain its current client base and culture and allows it to continue to pursue the kinds of clients it wants.

**Landscape**

**BrightView acquires Summit Landscape Group**

BrightView Holdings Inc., Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, has acquired Summit Landscape Group LLC, a commercial landscaping company headquartered in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

Established in 2011, Summit serves four regional markets, including Charlotte, North Carolina; Charleston and Hilton Head, South Carolina; and Nashville, Tennessee. The team of about 180 landscape professionals holds certifications to offer a full suite of landscaping services including turf management, agronomics, tree and plant care, landscape design and install, irrigation install and repair, outdoor living (hardscapes), landscape lighting, erosion control, storm water control and inspection, soil stabilization, grading, and snow and ice removal.

"Today we are welcoming Summit Landscape Group to the BrightView family," says Andrew Masterman, BrightView president and CEO. "We look forward to working with this team of talented landscapers who will apply their broad experience and capabilities to help us strengthen our mid-Atlantic region by expanding our existing footprints in Charlotte, Hilton Head and Nashville, as well as entering the attractive Charleston market."



BY GARY HORTON

# How to win friends and increase your business



**E**ighty-five years ago, Dale Carnegie wrote *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which went on to become one of the most successful books in American history. The book teaches exactly what its title says, and if you gain nothing else from this column, go read the book! Everyone in your company's customer sales and retention chain can benefit tremendously from this practical read.

Here are some key truisms from Carnegie's book about winning people over:

- Be a good listener. Listen more, talk less.
- Be genuinely interested in other people's interests and concerns.
- Try to speak in terms of the other person's interests.
- Make the other person feel important by knowing their name, family members and important life details.

It sounds obvious. Looking at this short list through your business's eyes you see the key elements of great customer service and customer retention. Your clients want you to be interested in them and with their concerns. They want you to give them attention proactively. They want your relationship to be about their needs and their objectives.

But you've got dozens, hundreds and perhaps even thousands of clients, if you've been really killing it. How can you stay close to all of them? How do you make a football-field-sized group of needy clients feel satisfied and "well fed" with your company's attention?

Ken Blanchard, author of *Raving Fans*, talks about creating a company culture of regularly exceeding client expectations to keep them feeling looked after and special. Small things, like a note on the door explaining your service that week, or perhaps adding flowers in a conspicuous spot, "just because." Special actions make clients feel ... special. And, everyone on staff should know to start conversations with, "Hello, (personal name), how can I help you?" Almost every conversation or communication should contain some

aspect of reaching out to address customer concerns. This attitude should be culturally glued to all your employees.

At Landscape Development Inc., we have one superintendent who's made it his practice to answer every phone call with, "Hello, this is Vicente. How may I help you today?" He says it every single time. Vicente's is a good practice to emulate.

Ken Blanchard also speaks of creating "nifty systems": processes that help automate the otherwise overwhelming work of providing regular and memorable touches to your customers. We know people like it when you know their names and know basic family details. Building a simple database to send out birthday cards for clients and their spouses is one such easy but nice touch. The same database may store key client info, like when their kids will graduate school or when Little League starts, so you can write a card, send a gift or offer to help support them.

Many companies make it a requirement that account managers must, without failure, personally visit or call each client for a short update on what they've accomplished on the client's sites and check to see if there is anything else they can or should be doing. Systematic client calls, letters and emails go a long, long way toward letting clients know that you have them on your radar and that they are important to you. And how much easier is it for clients to express concerns to you when you reach out first, proactively — rather than them having to chase you down?

You may develop other nifty systems to keep clients connected. There's a world of great ideas out there. The important thing is to remember the basics of winning friends and influencing people: People want to know they are important and they like having their interests discussed and addressed.

It's not enough to mow a lawn or plant a tree. To grow successful landscape companies, we have to grow successful relationships. Put your customers' concerns front and center and regularly, systematically, show them you care — personally. 🌱



To grow successful landscape companies, we have to grow successful relationships.



**Gary Horton**, MBA, is CEO of Landscape Development Inc., a green industry leader for over 35 years with offices throughout California and Nevada. He can be reached at [ghorton@landscapedevelopment.com](mailto:ghorton@landscapedevelopment.com).



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BY KEVIN SMITH

## Read the fine print



Manufacturers write these specifications for the protection of their contractors and customers.

**W**e all pride ourselves in providing high-quality installation work for our customers. One of the ways to do this is to sell products at a higher price and still win the business. Many contractors have done a great job of doing this by distinguishing themselves as a quality company with a quality brand. These contractors have put much time and effort in working with the high-end customer. These customers demand the best, so in many cases price is no object. Creating a quality company can lead to more prosperous job opportunities.

Do I really need to take the time and read the fine print? Were these specifications written by engineers who have never worked in the field and installed such products? In the lighting industry, many manufacturers' products are designed and developed by contractors or people with contracting experience. So, stop and read all the installation instructions, especially if this is the first time you have used a certain product. If your job deadline is looming, trust me, taking the time to read and understand the manufacturer specifications will help you meet your deadlines in the long run. Below are some examples of manufacturer specifications that often get overlooked.

**Gel-filled wire nuts** – These wire nuts can work well when installed properly. Often, contractors insert too many cables into a gel-filled wire nut. This creates a potential fire hazard. This also can cause the gel cavity to expel the waterproofing material from within the cavity, causing a potential short, corrosion and wicking.

**Low-voltage rope and strip lighting** – Both rope and strip lighting can enhance your hardscape jobs. Most manufacturers have specifications for maximum run lengths and field cut marks. If you do not adhere to maximum run lengths, you could get dimming at the end of the run and lighting inconsistencies. When field cutting, be sure to cut right on the line. Failure to do so could break the circuit. LED

drivers can also be required for DC-only products. This will convert the AC power from the landscape transformer to DC at the connection point. Failure to use it could make the rope or strip pulsate. Most of these products will also require some type of sealant and heat shrink tube for all connection points and fittings. Failure to seal the fittings properly could result in water intrusion.

**Transformers** – In the field, I have seen wall-mounted transformers lying on the ground. Most manufacturers require a low-voltage landscape transformer to be installed a minimum of 12 inches above grade to avoid water intrusion. This is measured from finished grade to the bottom of the transformer. When wall-mounting a transformer, it should be installed within 3 feet of a ground-fault circuit interrupter-protected receptacle. An outdoor weatherproof bubble cover and a drip loop should be installed to protect the receptacle from water intrusion as well.

**Well lights** – One of the most-ignored manufacturer specifications pertains to the installation of well lights. Manufacturers suggest that all subsurface fixtures be installed in a way that allows moisture to drain away from the fixture. Most recommend that a hole is dug twice as deep as the overall height of the fixture. The width of the hole should be the same as the height of the fixture. Pea gravel or sand can be poured into the lower portion of the hole. After the fixture is installed, the pea gravel or sand can be used to fill the cavity around the fixture. This will provide proper drainage.

Manufacturers write these specifications for the protection of their contractors and customers. Following the specifications will keep your factory warranty valid. Manufacturers are quite good at identifying when their products have been installed incorrectly; this will void the warranty every time. Better to be safe than sorry! 🍀



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

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BY KYLE BROWN

Starting a small business in the professional landscaping industry is not that difficult. All you need to get started is a mower, a truck and the drive to bring in clients. But as soon as that business starts growing, you'll run into one of the biggest obstacles facing everyone in the current market: bringing in new employees.

In our 2020 Industry Outlook Survey, finding qualified employees was consistently listed as the top challenge for a developing business. A full 65% of respondents said that their region didn't supply enough workers to meet the company's needs. Hiring is a time-consuming process, and it's wasted effort if your new employee doesn't show up for work on the first day.

But it's impossible to grow a business without making team development a core focus, according to Larry Ryan, president of Ryan Lawn and Tree of Merriam, Kansas. He remembers receiving an early lesson in business when he was just starting out, originally as a region manager in the restaurant business. At the time, a team leader asked Ryan and a group of colleagues to name their first priority as managers.

After the group's responses, "[The leader] said 'Guys, until you figure out that recruiting and hiring great people and then keeping them is your No. 1 priority, you'll never have a consistent second priority,'" says Ryan.

But even with a business owner's full attention, bringing on good team members is a struggle. The difficulty of finding reliable workers is a continued issue for Scott Chatham, owner of Chatham Landscape Services in Atlanta. In the offseason, Chatham keeps a staff of about 65, with plans to bring on another 35 in April for the season, he says. While his need for labor is only going up, so is the amount of work that goes into each new employee.

"To get to one person that will stay, we have to hire two," says Chatham.



Team-building is a major effort at Myatt Landscaping. Some of the company's best hires come from a robust referral program that pays the referring employee a total of \$1,000 over the course of a year if the new employee stays on, according to Clineff. The company sees more long-term employees from referrals than from online recruiting. Photo: Myatt Landscaping Concepts



The centerpiece of keeping quality employees is making sure they're happy in their job, says Clineff. When an employee feels good about the workplace, they're more likely to recommend it to skilled friends looking for work. Photo: Myatt Landscaping Concepts

## **GATHERING POTENTIAL**

Online job-hunting services like Indeed are major sources of new labor leads for Chatham, he says. It's a low-risk approach that's similar to how a business owner would place newspaper ads or use word-of-mouth to bring in hires. As online resources have become more popular with workers, it's important to meet them where they are.

"It seems like in this workforce, that's a great tool we have," Chatham says.

The downside is that workers often don't take down their resumes and information once they do land a job, and sometimes that results in a hire getting what looks like a better offer just as the employee is starting off behind a mower.

Caitlin Clineff, recruiting specialist at Myatt Landscaping Concepts in Fuquay Varina, North Carolina, uses a system that posts open jobs to about 15 job boards. While she does get regular responses from those, the respondents there haven't been as reliable as from other sources.

"What we found was that a lot of the time, people that we hired from online applications typically didn't stay as long as those from referrals," she says. It's still useful as a source, but it's not the focus. One thing that Myatt did to improve its visibility online and the overall quality of online applicants was to update its website to a more modern, accessible look.

For many job applicants, checking the company's website is the first step after seeing an online job posting, and a more professional look influences how applicants respond to the opening. Clineff has also built up the company's presence across other social media platforms to raise visibility.

"I think people can get a better sense of the company from those types of things, and that has helped overall with getting people interested who might not have thought about it otherwise," she says.

But even with those options, employee referrals make up the number one source of quality job candidates for Clineff.

"We have a very, very strong referral bonus program, so our current employees have been doing a really great job over the last year of finding other great people to come work here," Clineff says.

Myatt has about 130 employees between its two branches in North and South Carolina, working both residential and commercial clients year-round for maintenance, construction and installation. The company's current referral bonus program has been a big success, but didn't start out that way, Clineff says. Originally, it was a single payout of \$500 if the referred employee stuck with the company for six months.

Those terms seemed like a faraway goal for employees, and referrals were limited until Myatt re-

vamped the program. Now, employees receive \$100 for the first month that their referral sticks around, then an additional \$400 if the referral makes it to six months. Once a full year of employment is reached, the referring employee gets another \$500, making a full-year total bonus of \$1,000, Clineff says.

“Since we changed that up, it’s made a huge difference,” she says.

## KEEPING EMPLOYEES HAPPY

The other part of the referral program is close attention to making sure that current employees like their workplace, Clineff says.

“It’s making sure that our employees that are already here are that happy with their jobs and the company overall that they feel comfortable bringing in their highly skilled, pretty sought-after friends to come and work here as opposed to any other company that’s around,” Clineff says.

Providing the right amount of pay and benefits for the work is another big way to draw in qualified employees, Ryan says.

“You have to pay enough that they’re interested,” he says. “We have a full benefit package for all jobs, 12 months a year.”

Ryan Lawn and Tree, an employee-owned company, keeps about 300 employees across locations in Merriam and Wichita, Kansas; Springfield and St. Louis, Missouri; and Tulsa, Oklahoma. The company provides irrigation and turf fertilization along with tree care services year-round, with no seasonal-only positions. The reasoning behind keeping all the positions year-round is partially thanks to the moderate regional climate, but it also works to bring in quality employees for Ryan.

“The problem is, how do you raise a family?” Ryan says about seasonal positions. With that kind of pay in mind, the company has to drive to get enough income out of the 10 available months of work to cover the rest of the year. But that lets employees worry less about being able to pay bills and opens them up to more varied day-to-day jobs to make sure that the company is bringing in what it needs to sustain the team.

“We share labor. The advantage of not being a straight irrigation company is at times, it’s so wet that it’s hard to pull pipe or dig in the ground or whatever. Maybe they can help pruning for a day, and the guys don’t mind doing that a little bit,” Ryan says. “It gives them a little bit of variety in their work, and I think sometimes it kind of lifts them up a little bit.”

It’s important to move away from the idea and terminology of starting jobs as “funky jobs,” Ryan says. “Every single job has to be looked at as a priority job, an important job. ... The CEO is not more important than the guy that’s out there dealing with the customer, and the pay can’t be 20 times higher than [that employee’s].”

## DIRECT APPROACH

Another major part of bringing in qualified employees is having a recruiter on staff, says Chatham. He created the position at his company in 2009 when it took on a huge new client and needed enough staff to handle the project. Faced with the prospect of growth in a tough economy, he wanted his managers focused on the job rather than constantly cycling in new workers.

“I went to my general manager and said, ‘This economy looks like it’s turning around, right? And our most important asset is our people. We’d better have somebody out there constantly making sure that we have good people coming in the door.’”

He needed someone constantly reaching out to potential new employees and connecting with local sources like regional colleges, he says. Initially the job was focused on combating the constant attrition in the work force.

“They’re making sure that we’re not hiring people that just fog a mirror, that will stay here,” Chatham says. “We judge them on attrition rates and the quality of hire.”

The labor crisis is the entire reason that Clineff’s position was created, she says.

“It had just gotten to the point that everybody else had so much on their plate, nobody had the time to dedicate the amount of effort it takes in this climate to find enough people,” Clineff says.

Chatham’s recruiter takes the time that his managers would ordinarily be using to do a phone screening of potential hires, then schedules multiple interviews daily. Out of those who show up, he goes through the interview process and passes his recom-

**“What we found was that a lot of the time, people that we hired from online applications typically didn’t stay as long as those from referrals.”**

**– Caitlin Clineff, Myatt Landscaping Concepts**



The irrigation leadership team at Ryan Lawn and Tree makes it a point to do regular training as a way to develop new employees’ skills and teamwork with experienced crew members. Managers with a willingness to work in the dirt alongside new employees encourage camaraderie and loyalty, says Ryan. Photo: Ryan Lawn and Tree

mentations on for the couple that meet approval. Even if only a few show up the first day of work, it saves huge amounts of effort for Chatham's staff.

In the past few years, Chatham had to reduce his overall employee count to match his business, but he couldn't bring himself to remove the recruiter's position, he says. "If we would have cut that position,

**"Every single job has to be looked at as a priority job, an important job."**

– Larry Ryan, Ryan Lawn and Tree

then I would've been asking my managers, who need to be out in front of clients as much as possible to keep them coming in, to be setting up meeting times with future employees, only to be stood up," Chatham says. "Then, they've missed an opportunity to be with a client and upsell. We've got to keep this position, because of the way the job market is."

The recruiter's job goes beyond just setting interviews. It also involves developing new potential labor

markets and the company's regional presence, says Clineff. She organizes field trips for local high school students to help foster a curiosity about professional landscaping and maintains connections with local universities to develop them as sources for potential new hires. She's trying to get Myatt more involved in community events this year. While career fairs and school events are possibilities, she's more focused on being visible at local events such as a cultural festival held by an area immigration nonprofit.

"We just want to be at those events so people can see, 'Oh, OK. They're hiring and they're interested in supporting me,'" Clineff says.

Even if Myatt was a smaller company and she didn't have as many resources to work with, staying involved and visible in the area would be her major focus in bringing in new hires, she says. Being connected in the community gets people talking, giving you a better chance when people are looking for work.

If he were working with a smaller company, Ryan would have a similar approach to hiring as he does now. Even with the help of a recruiter handling screening and interviews, his managers examine the



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resumes that come across their desks and make local college visits.

“Continually, their number one priority is to recruit great people,” Ryan says.

When he’s hiring, Chatham initially looks for experience working outdoors, especially considering the Georgia heat, he says. But that experience isn’t as important to him as just seeing an attitude that the potential hire is ready to work hard and be a team player.

“That means that you’re committed to the team every single day,” Chatham says. “And that you know that if you show up late or don’t show up, you’re hurting your teammates. That’s what attitude means to me.”

That kind of drive is a major focus for Ryan as well, who says he doesn’t particularly care about past education or experience.

“We almost don’t care what your degree is,” Ryan says. “We can teach horticulture if you want to learn it. But we can’t teach heart.” 🌱

The author is editor-in-chief of *Irrigation & Green Industry* and can be reached at [kylebrown@igin.com](mailto:kylebrown@igin.com).

★ ★ ★ **GROWING INTERESTS** ★ ★ ★

When Caitlin Clineff took on the role of recruiting specialist at Myatt Landscaping, she helped develop a field trip program that invited students interested in horticulture from regional high schools to see the landscaping industry up close. Students come to the Myatt facility by bus and are introduced to employees who talk about their jobs and why they got started in the industry. Then students are walked through the daily jobs and materials and see the trucks and equipment up close.

The field trip includes some hands-on activities such as a paver-laying challenge with prizes for the winning group of students. They also do a plant identification quiz, followed by an activity where students plant a small container garden to take home.

While the program is too new to see results in direct hires, it’s generated more local interest in Myatt and shown students that a career in landscaping is a viable future.

“That’s really what our goal is,” Clineff says. “Not really to hire every student that comes here, but just opening that door to them and letting them know that there are a lot of opportunities in the industry, and they can make a good living at it.”

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## WILLIAM CRUZ

# Invest in others

**The director of operations at Gachina Landscape Management works to give others opportunities to develop in the green industry.**

By Sarah Bunyea

**W**hen William Cruz earned his bachelor's degree in industrial engineering, he never imagined that one day he'd be working as the director of operations at one of the country's leading landscaping companies. Born and raised in El Salvador, Cruz worked as a quality assurance engineer and maintenance manager for a regional airline in his home country for seven years. When he moved to the U.S. 20 years ago, it was a difficult time to find a job in the airline industry.

At that time, his friend who had a small landscaping company offered him a job as a gardener. "I thought it was a good temporary option while I searched for 'real employment,'" says Cruz.

As Cruz learned to use landscape equipment and techniques to create beautiful gardens, he enjoyed the work. "Being outdoors and enjoying nature was a new adventure for me," he says. He liked building relationships with both his co-workers and the clients they worked for. And when he saw how much money people in the U.S. invest in their landscapes, he realized there was a lot of financial opportunity in this industry.

He soon discovered there's more to this work than simply mowing and blowing leaves — there's a science behind why a specific plant needs to be in a certain spot and why yards need to be mowed a specific way, he says.

As a lifelong learner, Cruz saw landscaping as an opportunity to pick up new skills and concepts. He began earning different landscape certifications and licenses and visiting nurseries to learn about horticulture.

Cruz worked for The Villages Golf and Country Club in San Jose, California, where he used his management skills as a supervisor of five crews. This role gave him the opportunity to pass on the knowledge he was learning through his own professional development, he says. It also gave him the chance to encourage the employees he worked with to study and develop their own skills, something he continues to do to this day.

### Envisioning a career

Cruz moved on to an account manager position at Gachina Landscape in 2004 that he learned about through a friend who worked there.

Located in Menlo Park, California, the company was founded in 1988 by John Gachina, who ran the company until he passed away five years ago. Today, the company remains family-owned under the leadership of John's wife, H. Jaclyn Ishimaru-Gachina, who serves as its president and CEO.



Cruz joined Gachina Landscape Management as an account manager in 2004. Today, he serves as the company's director of operations overseeing its 430 employees. Photos: Hagop Istanbulian



No matter what an employee's role is at Gachina Landscape Management, training takes first priority. In addition to participating in company training programs, employees also have the option of getting training outside Gachina with full company reimbursement.

**“I told my managers, ‘Anytime you see somebody doing something good, we need to bring it up in front of everyone every morning.’**

— William Cruz

It was the company culture that made Cruz envision a career at Gachina. He began advancing through the company, becoming an enhancement project manager and then a branch manager. “It was then that I had the privilege to work directly under the company owner, John Gachina, for almost five years,” says Cruz.

The biggest lesson Cruz learned working with John Gachina was to always put team members first. “His number one priority was his employees,” Cruz says. “He knew everybody by name, and he would greet every single one every single day. He made you feel that you were part of the family.” John Gachina created an environment where his employees could enjoy their work and have fun while doing it.

Today, Cruz serves as the company’s director of operations where he oversees the operations and finances of five branches and three departments, totaling more than 430 employees.

**Principles in action**

Putting employees first is an idea Cruz applies to everything, including when he was tasked with helping an underperforming branch that was steadily losing money because of mismanagement, he says.

“There wasn’t good communication — the team members weren’t even aware the branch was losing money,” he explains. The branch manager hadn’t disclosed the situation to them, and there was no accountability for anyone’s actions. Employees were leaving early and working overtime without authorization. “The atmosphere was really polluted,” he says.

But his primary concern wasn’t the money, it was the morale of the team. Cruz explains, “I knew that if we regained the trust of our employees first, they would be willing to join the efforts to improve clients’ relationships and the financials of the branch.”

He started by explaining the situation to the employees and asking for their help. “I had to do a

revision of the role for every single person on the team so that they knew what was expected of them,” he says.

Positive reinforcement was also necessary in changing the branch’s culture. “I told my managers, ‘Anytime you see somebody doing something good, we need to bring it up in front of everyone every morning.’ And then people started feeling like, ‘Oh, they’re paying attention to the good things that I’m doing.’ And that will encourage them to continue doing it.”

This approach paid off. The same team that was there when the branch was losing money helped make it a healthy branch again. In six months, they turned things around and the branch ended up having a positive net profit that year.

“We didn’t have to lay off anyone; we just put order in the house,” he says. “When you focus on your employees first, they take care of your clients, and the financial part just falls into place naturally.”

**Empower your team**

Taking care of employees means mentoring, promoting and empowering them so they feel appreciated, says Cruz. When you do that, your crews will put in the extra effort for clients.

An important guideline for Cruz is to make certain he doesn’t micromanage his team. “We provide clear expectations and tell them what we want,” he explains. “We provide all the tools and the support that they need, and we let them use their imagination and their creativity on how to reach that specific goal.”

If this means his management team doesn’t spend eight hours a day in the office, Cruz doesn’t mind. He knows if someone is not doing the work, the results will show in the form of complaints or a goal not met. He views his role as monitoring and supporting his team, a management style that’s worked quite well for him.

The people Cruz works with make his job worthwhile, he says. From the crews out in the field to the management team he works closely with every day, he says he's been with the company long enough to be able to know and care for each of them personally. "I certainly feel I am blessed to have this team," he says. "I am very proud of what each of them has accomplished."

**Prepare for opportunities**

Gachina puts a major focus on employee training, Cruz says. The company provides training programs for employees at all levels, including a certification program to train new hires for up to two months before they are sent out into the field. Employees also have the option of getting training outside Gachina with full company reimbursement.

"Everyone needs training to succeed, to be more efficient and work in a safe manner," says Cruz.

The green industry provides many great career opportunities, says Cruz, but you do need to gain the necessary skills for what you want to do. He gives the example of a Spanish-speaking landscape technician who wants to become an account manager. He would encourage this technician to learn English to better communicate with clients and learn the necessary computer skills for this type of role.

"Sometimes people feel that they can be given an opportunity just because they've been in the company for a long time," he says. "But the opportunities go to people who are capable, who have the potential and who have the willingness to learn new things."

Cruz is proud of the success he's had in this industry, and encouraging people of all backgrounds to educate themselves to advance in their careers is what's most important to him.




Cruz says the people he works with make his job worthwhile, from the crews out in the field to his management team.

"I want them to see an example of where they can be, the potential that they have to also be a director one day, or a branch manager one day, or a senior account manager one day. It's possible." And Cruz would know, he's living proof that if

you work hard in this industry, you can rise to the top. 🌱

The author is digital content editor of *Irrigation & Green Industry* and can be reached at sarahbunyea@igin.com.

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# ENCOURAGE EDUCATION



By Kate Kjeell

## KEEP QUALITY WORKERS BY INVESTING IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT.

**H**ave you heard any of these phrases? “Don’t go swimming right after you eat, or you may drown.” “It takes seven years to digest a piece of gum.”

“If you cross your eyes for too long, they will get stuck that way.”

Most people know or even have said these statements, but they are, in fact, inaccurate. Swimming after you eat at worst just causes a cramp, gum does get digested and your eyes don’t get stuck when crossed for too long. Here’s another phrase that you might’ve heard:

“If I invest in my employee’s learning and development, I am encouraging them to leave my company.”

This is not only factually incorrect, but the opposite is actually true. According to LinkedIn’s 2019 Workforce Learning Report, 94% of employees say that they would stay at a company longer if it simply invested in helping them learn.

While this may surprise some business leaders, the desire for learning and development has been a recurring theme of job

satisfaction and importance among younger workers. LinkedIn’s research found that 27% of young employees say the No. 1 reason they’d leave their job is lack of opportunity to learn and grow, which is opposite of the above misconception.

With the average of cost of hiring a new employee significantly more than the average budget for learning and development, investment in helping employees learn and grow more than justifies itself. Not only does this attract and retain the best talent, it yields a range of other benefits including improved company culture, increased productivity, less supervisory oversight and higher overall work quality.

Here are four suggestions you can use to increase your investment in employee development.

### LEVERAGE ONLINE AND MICROLEARNING

Learning no longer requires long hours in the classroom. There is a wealth of alternative learning modalities and approaches

that are often more effective than the “butts in seats” training programs of the past.

A quick search of the internet will reveal rich offerings of online training courses from well-known companies and top-tier universities and sought-after certificates that are available virtually. Check out the site [www.coursera.org](http://www.coursera.org) for a range of suggestions including some renowned college-level classes that are free of cost to audit.

Microlearning is another trend worth noting. Research has shown that learning broken down into small bite-size chunks has a higher chance of being used. Technology has made this easier than ever with the vast array of YouTube videos, podcasts and audible books to provide manageable learning opportunities.

### LOOK INTERNALLY FOR SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

Learning doesn’t always have to involve outside resources. Organizations have internal subject matter experts that can be leveraged to great success. Get managers



involved in helping develop their employees through informal mentoring programs, job shadowing, rotational assignments and stretch projects.

The green industry is known for its fast pace, especially during the busy season. It is critical to prioritize learning alongside the demands of daily work. An organization that embraces cross-training of employees and carves out time for developing new skills will outperform the competition.

**CONSIDER BOTH HARD SKILL AND SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

When looking to invest in learning, there are great options to gain new skills that are both beneficial to employees and companies. Hard skills are typically acquired through technical knowledge and are more measurable, such as certifications or qualifications. These skills provide a competitive edge and credibility to organizations. NALP and the Irrigation Association offer a broad range of certifications and educational courses to consider.

Soft skills are harder to measure and considered more subjective. These are personal habits and traits that shape how you work, whether independently or with others. Examples of these include leadership, communication, creativity and collaboration. In the past, soft skills were not considered as important as hard skills (note even the terminology). However, anyone who has worked with a “brilliant jerk” knows that technical skills alone are not enough to be truly effective. There is compelling research showing that soft skills are now equally, if not more, important to success in the workplace as hard skills. Furthermore, customer service depends upon strong soft skills. This can truly be a game changer for companies looking to lead in a service industry.

**CREATE PERSONAL LEARNING PLANS**

In today’s business climate, nothing gets done that isn’t intentionally planned, measured and monitored. Creating personal learning plans for each individual will ensure that learning goals are achieved.

These plans should be employee-driven and manager-supported. Enlisting employees to give input into what areas they would like to develop is an important aspect of any plan. In addition, employees should be empowered and held accountable for achieving their learning goals.

Get managers excited and supportive about learning as well. Make sure that all levels of leadership are aligned in the priority and importance of learning. For managers that are hesitant to get on board, help them understand the compelling business case for learning as a competitive edge in today’s market. If you fuel management’s passion and interest in making learning a priority, that will ripple throughout the organization and be woven into company culture.

In 2019, we hit another milestone in the job market. People left their jobs at a record rate. The “quits rate,” as it is called, reached an all-time high last August topping out at 3% of the workforce, according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics. The increase has been widely attributed to the hot job market and competition for candidates. These sobering statistics have moved investing in learning and development from a “nice-to-have” to a business imperative. With 94% of employees saying investing in learning would make them stay longer, companies that are uninterested or unwilling to invest in employee development are going to get stuck, and it won’t be from crossing their eyes!



**Kate Kjeell** is president of TalentWell, a recruiting firm that specializes in helping small and midsize businesses thrive by finding and hiring the right people. The firm’s approach can be described in three words: find, fit, flourish. She can be reached at [kate@talentwellinc.com](mailto:kate@talentwellinc.com).

**94%** OF EMPLOYEES SAY THAT THEY WOULD STAY AT A COMPANY LONGER IF IT SIMPLY INVESTED IN HELPING THEM LEARN.



# » The **TOP 4** Landscaping **Trends** for 2020

**Try these new ideas to make an impact for your customers.**

By Lee Chilcote

**S**maller lawns are big news, and living large outdoors is in. Homeowners want more native plants, but they also want their yard looking good year-round. And they want to use new technology to better manage their outdoor water use.

These are just a few of the trends that irrigation and green industry experts identified when we asked them what's hot and what's not in landscape design, as well as how these latest developments affect irrigation work.

Here are four trends they identified as becoming more popular in the past year, as well as tips for how landscape and irrigation contractors can work with them.

## **1** **LIVING LARGE OUTDOORS**

Probably the biggest trend contractors mentioned was outdoor living spaces. People want to connect with nature while still enjoying the amenities of the indoors and with less yard to care for. This means more hardscapes (especially higher-end ones such as stained or polished concrete); more outdoor furniture; more outdoor lighting, kitchens and fireplaces; and of course, more technology such as outdoor TVs.

Customers want to be able to stay connected to the outdoors while keeping some indoor comforts. Outdoor kitchens and technology bridge the gap to more natural spaces. Photos: Blanchford Landscape Group

## LANDSCAPE TRENDS



Hardscaping, furniture and fire features can bring the elements of indoor life outside in a big way. Customers want to be able to enjoy their outdoor spaces year round.



For landscape designers and contractors, this may require increased coordination with irrigation subcontractors as they seek to ensure these progressively more nuanced outdoor living spaces stay beautiful year-round.

Andy Blanchford with Blanchford Landscape Group, a residential design-build company that focuses on the Big Sky ski resort market near Bozeman, Montana, says that he's seen a big shift in recent years. Whereas he used to install a lot of softscapes, that portion of his business has precipitously fallen off while installation of "really fantastic outdoor living spaces" has risen dramatically.

These outdoor spaces have become an increasingly important way for people to decouple from the technology that dominates our lives, yet that doesn't mean people want to leave it behind entirely, Blanchford says.

"We invite people outside to connect with nature right in their backyard, maybe inclusive of the technology too," says Blanchford. "What that means is more indoor-like amenities outdoors, such as furniture, a nice firepit or heat source and maybe a fireplace. We make it more inviting at all hours of the day and even for two to three seasons. Then, in some cases, for us it's also bringing some of the technology outside — an outdoor TV or nice lighting, things like that."



With larger houses on smaller lots, customers are adding more flower variety and planting beds to get the most out of a compact space. Irrigation designs have to adjust to take on the additional beds.



**“We make it more inviting at all hours of the day and even for two to three seasons.”**

– Andy Blanchford, Blanchford Landscape Group

Close coordination with irrigation contractors is essential in order to ensure that the project comes off right. “There’s got to be a lot more planning with the irrigation team, whether they’re subcontractors or not, because you’re putting in all these hardscapes,” he says, citing the need for subsurface drip work when watering three-inch turf joints between precast slabs, for example. “These are a lot more intricate, detailed spaces than just sprinkling a large area of turf.”

To focus on his outdoor living business, several years ago, he sold his irrigation business to another company and began hiring them as subcontractors. That was a good business decision, but it’s added complications.

“It’s teamwork,” he says. “And it doesn’t really matter if they’re a company or a crew, we’re all on the same team trying to get the work done.”

**2 SMALL CAN BE BEAUTIFUL**

Another trend is larger homes on smaller lots. Landscape architect Deborah Finch of Land Aspects LLC, in Denver says that people are shifting away from large yards to smaller spaces with more beds and an increasing variety of plantings. “People just don’t want to be out there mowing these huge yards anymore,” she says.

One of the things people are doing is replacing bluegrass with planting beds.



Native plants are showing up in more landscape designs even where water isn’t as much of an issue. They hold up better in rough weather than some non-native choices, says Noonan.

“You lose the ability to say, ‘I want you here today and tomorrow,’” says Blanchford. “You can, but they have their own scheduling issues. So, we sat down with the contractor and worked it out to where we made a very strong commitment to being 100% ready for them.” In working with subcontractors, he recommends using one point of contact to streamline communication, sharing equipment if needed to get the job done and ensuring that interactions with the customer come across as seamless.

Reducing the amount of grass goes hand in hand with efforts to reduce water usage, says Finch, especially in Colorado where water is a major concern. “We’re a headwater state with very strict water laws,” she says. Because there is tiered water pricing in her area, Finch says people are much more aware of how much water is used.

With more bed areas to water, drip irrigation has to be especially fine-tuned to the specific needs of the landscape. For

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example, Finch says, trees typically have different water requirements than shrubs and perennials. “Depending on the plant materials, you have to understand how many different irrigation zones you need,” she says. “I may need to specify that they need to add a separate zone for pines, for example.”

Another trend that Finch sees is smaller spaces in urban environments.

Condo and townhouse dwellers want to green their small yards and balconies with pots and raised planters. She’s seeing an increasing number of smaller drip irrigation systems that attach to balconies or small planters, a trend that contractors can take advantage of.

“They’re more intimate spaces, where you can gather a few other people and friends and have a barbeque outside,” she

says. With these smaller irrigation systems, owners and renters are now able to enjoy landscape features in more compact spaces.

These drip systems irrigate efficiently by releasing water slowly and allowing it to penetrate the ground rather than running it off the surface.

Her advice to irrigation contractors? Fine-tune your approach. “By knowing your plant materials, the water requirements of each of them and different soils, irrigation techs can focus on conserving water,” she says, something that will also help them grow new business.



Customers living in condos and townhouses use elements like pots and raised planters, creating an opportunity to incorporate drip irrigation in a design.

### 3 GOING NATIVE

Native plants are increasingly popular in landscape design, and not only in places where water is an issue. Hillary Noonan of Syntax Land Design LLC, in Kansas City, Missouri, says that her state has more naturally occurring springs than any other state in the country, but she still uses irrigation because it keeps the soil healthy.

She recommends native plants because they’re more resilient to weather changes. However, keeping in mind aesthetics, she also tries to design with native plants in a way that looks good year-round.

“I use native plants but as a designer would use them,” she says, mixing native with non-native plants to get the form, color and design that she wants. “It’s a delicate balance — most plants don’t grow in a line in nature. You don’t want it to look messy, and some natives, once they finish blooming, they really look

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messy. So, I put them in a place where the next thing that comes up shelters them from your view.”

Designing with natives and non-natives allows Noonan to save water while maximizing aesthetic considerations. “It also means I can be really water smart with it,” she adds. “I can put plants that need more water at the bottom, because the water goes downhill. I can implement a plant palette because I know the irrigation can change with what we do.”

For irrigation contractors, Noonan says, this means designing an irrigation system for plants’ different water requirements. “You don’t want to mix together things like dry soil and wet soil,” she says. “Your irrigation plan can change where you’re using particular plants.”

#### 4 SMART TECHNOLOGY

Smart irrigation controllers are another increasingly dominant trend. Bret Eastberg, reclaimed water systems coordinator with the city of Westminster, Colorado, a suburb of Denver, says that his community is beginning to require them.

“We see more in narrow turf areas that require subsurface irrigation, like tree lawns, parking lots and medians, instead of pop-ups with fixed or vent nozzles,” says Eastberg, whose city has the second largest reclaimed water system in the state, of the trend. “We require smart controllers on everything. We’re moving toward requiring master valves, too, in order to do flow sensing.”

A flow sensor manages water flow so that a user can set a maximum flow for a given zone. If a main line breaks, the system will automatically shut off. Similarly,



A small outdoor area can still include several landscape and hardscape elements with seating areas, providing the experience of a larger space.

if someone kicks off a head in a zone, it will shut the zone off before alerting the owner or property manager with an email or text.

Eastberg, who used to own a landscape company, says it’s imperative that contractors and irrigation technicians get up to speed with the latest technology. “The industry is moving that way, but the city is also pushing it,” he says. “It

still surprises me that contractors who have been doing this for 20 years don’t know what a rain sensor is, or evapotranspiration. More and more cities are doing trainings to get info out to the end users.”

Lee Chilcote is a contributing editor to *Irrigation & Green Industry* and can be reached at leechilcote@gmail.com.



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# GO WITH THE FLOW

BY MARY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS-VILLANO

## LEARN HOW NEW TECHNOLOGY IMPROVES PUMPS AND VALVES.

**W**hen one thinks of “trendy” items, irrigation components don’t pop immediately to mind. Nonetheless, there are some identifiable trends in terms of two major ones: pumps and valves.

### **PUMP TREND #1: VARIABLE FREQUENCY DRIVE**

Variable frequency drive is much more than a trend; it’s the biggest innovation in pump manufacturing in the last 20 years or so, as it’s vastly improved the way irrigation pumps operate. “In a VFD pump, the power ramps up slowly instead of all at once,” says Calvin Hale, director of education at Gicon Pumps and Equipment, Haltom City, Texas. “This is a lot easier on a pump’s motor, and as a consequence, they last much longer.”

There are other benefits to this slow ramp-up besides greater pump longevity. “VFD gives you constant pressure, not an up-and-down cycling,” says Hale. “So, when you’re using matched precipitation nozzles, you get full coverage all the time.” You also get a constant flow.

“VFD gives you constant pressure at a wide range of flows versus the old style of all-or-none,” says Lar-emy Kamas, commercial pump station sales manager, south region, for Rain Bird Corporation, Azusa, California. “With the older style pumps without VFD, you’d have to add pressure regulation devices because of zone flow and pressure changes across a system.

“For example, with a constant speed pump, if you were putting out 100 gallons a minute at 70 psi, then



Valves are being designed with materials meant to stand up to tough usage and reclaimed water, such as Hunter's PGV-100G. Non-potable water tends to include more chemicals such as chlorine, which can wear down valves, says Kowalewski. Photo: Hunter Industries

turned on a zone so that now you're putting out 20 gallons a minute, the pump would have more horsepower available to produce more pressure," says Kamas. "The result would be misting."

VFD does add a bit to the cost of a pump, but few pumps today are sold that don't include this feature. "We just discontinued the one non-VFD series we were still selling for light commercial and large estate homes because the control and efficiency are just not there," says Kamas.

A VFD can also be retrofitted to an older pump that doesn't already have it.



Variable frequency drive has improved operation for irrigation pumps across the industry, providing a constant pressure over a wide range of flows without the need for pressure regulation devices, says Kamas. Photo: Rain Bird

### **PUMP TREND #2: WI-FI AND SMARTPHONE CONTROL**

Today, everyone wants to control everything via smartphone, including irrigation contractors and site managers. "Fifteen or so years ago, the only type of remote notification you could get would be a page sent by a pump station on a golf course, and all that

would say is, something's wrong, come check it out," says Kamas. "Now we have technology that lets us log into a pump station remotely from any internet-capable device. You can be notified that a pump is out of commission right away, not five days later when the mowing crew finally comes and sees that thousands of dollars' worth of landscape material has burned up from lack of water."

"Remote monitoring capability also saves a lot of money in labor costs," says Hale.

### **PUMP TREND #3: MORE HOUSES, MORE PUMPS**

Pumps are more popular than ever before, particularly the horizontal centrifugal type. Bill Rosser, district sales manager at SiteOne Landscape Supply branch in Plano, Texas, has personally observed this trend.

Plano is a suburb of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, a tech-boom area with a lot of new housing developments. "We're seeing a lot of demand for booster pumps here, more frequently today than we did 10 years ago, primarily because of population growth and the increased demand on the municipal water supply to maintain water pressure," says Rosser. "A pump is often required because the pressure from the mains is not sufficient to operate home irrigation systems."

### **VALVE TREND #1: LESS BRASS, MORE GLASS-FILLED NYLON**

"Valves have traditionally been made out of brass," says Joe Holohan, director of sales at Buckner Superior, Torrance, California. "But that market is

Controlling a pump via Wi-Fi or smartphone has opened up possibilities for better pump management. It can also save money through reducing labor, says Hale. Photo: Gicon Pumps and Equipment





Glass-filled nylon and PVC in-line valves are becoming more popular compared to brass valves in some regions, especially Southwest California, says Johnson. Brass valves can have a higher cost due to the material. Photo: Rain Bird

becoming smaller and smaller and has been moving rapidly toward plastic (glass-filled nylon and PVC) in-line valves. When you get outside of the western part of the United States and specifically California, the brass valve market gets considerably smaller.”

“However, there is still a strong market for brass master valves from public agencies and water purveyors,” adds Richard Greenland, technical service manager at Buckner Superior. “They’re also desired for use in large commercial applications.”

Brass valves are durable; many that were installed 50 years ago are often found to still be operating. Their decline in popularity is mainly due to



**IN A VFD PUMP, THE POWER RAMPS UP SLOWLY INSTEAD OF ALL AT ONCE.”**

— CALVIN HALE, GICON PUMPS AND EQUIPMENT

the material’s much higher cost. But it’s not as if the newer types lack quality. “Higher-end nylon valves are equal to and, in some cases, better than brass,” says Jeffrey G. Johnson, PE, senior product manager, commercial rotors and valves, Rain Bird, Azusa, California.

He adds that the choice of brass over nylon or PVC is also a regional preference. “The majority of brass valves are sold in Southern California, the southwest U.S., and in some rugged-use pockets internationally like the Middle East.”

**VALVE TREND #2: EPDM DIAPHRAGMS**

Traditionally, valve diaphragms have been made of black rubber. Now, many are being made of ethylene propylene diene monomer, a synthetic rubber. Robb Kowalewski, product manager, valves and micro irrigation at Hunter Industries, San Marcos, California, says the trend toward EPDM diaphragms is being spurred by the increasing number of splash pads, padded nonslip surfaces fitted with various nozzles that shower, spray, mist and shoot streams of water being installed in parks and playgrounds as a safer alternative to pools. “These things use a lot of chlorine, and that chews through black

**WHAT ABOUT WIRELESS VALVES?**

Even though all the major irrigation component manufacturers have started making wireless valves, we can’t really call them a trend yet, even though contractors are asking for more of them. “When I entered this business about 13 years ago, everyone was talking about how wireless valves were imminently about to take off,” says Peter Lackner, product manager for Irritrol and Toro valves at The Toro Company’s Riverside, California, irrigation division. “But I’ve yet to see any real traction in that area. There are a lot of technical hurdles to get over, like the limited range of Bluetooth and Wi-Fi signals.”

Wireless valves are useful in places such as highway medians or other places where wiring can’t be extended due to hardscape barriers. But powering them is a problem. For instance, Hunter’s wireless valve, the Node, runs off a 9-volt alkaline battery that lasts from two to five years. But a whole yard or campus full of 9-volt-battery-powered valves sounds like a maintenance challenge, at least for right now.

“You can run two sets of wires for two miles and operate a valve,” says Jeffrey G. Johnson, PE, senior product manager, commercial rotors and valves, Rain Bird, Azusa, California. “But Wi-Fi and Bluetooth signals have a much shorter range. And then you still need a connection to a power source.”





There's still a strong market for brass valves, especially in public agencies and large commercial applications, says Greenland. Photo: Buckner Superior

rubber components," says Kowalewski. "EPDM has chemicals in it that make it much more resilient to chlorine."

The increasing use of reclaimed and recycled nonpotable water for irrigation is another reason manufacturers toughened up valve inner components. "Reclaimed and recycled water tends to be much higher in chemicals, notably chlorine," says Johnson. "We have to make sure the materials that are inside the valves can withstand those chemicals. When you have nonpotable sources, almost any manufacturer will go to using EPDM for the diaphragms."

### VALVE TREND #3: MORE FILTRATION

The increased use of reclaimed and recycled water has also brought with it an increased need for filtration, as this water can contain solenoid-clogging dirt, debris and algae. "We have something at Hunter called Filter Sentry for our ICV valves," says Kowalewski. "This works by scouring the filter clean with a wiper that slides up the screen when the valve opens. It continues to scrub the filter's upper part during valve operation."

All the other major valve manufacturers have similar scrubbing devices attached to their filters. These scrubbers sometimes can be added later, after a valve has been installed. 🌱

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# Talk it OUT

BY  
LINDSEY  
GETZ

**W**hen it comes to water regulations, landscape and irrigation contractors across the country are challenged to find ways they can continue to maintain and grow their businesses and manage customer expectations while facing the demands of bureaucracy. In the past few years, many contractors say that they've seen water go from mostly unregulated to increasingly regulated in various ways. Everything from water restrictions to a growing interest in less water-intensive landscaping to traditional water alternatives are all issues arising from this shift.

There's no doubt that water is a regional issue, as rainfall varies dramatically from one area of the country to the next. Of course, restrictions can even differ from one municipality to the next.



water restrictions will ultimately be lifted,” he says. “So, we are lucky in that way as compared to a state like California, where they are living with those conditions more consistently.”

However, DeNinno says that what does grind his business to a halt is when water restrictions stop landscape contractors from doing new installation work.

“We rely heavily on the landscape professionals in our area to install plant material, but they often shut down when restrictions go into place saying they don’t want to install anything because it can’t be watered,” he says. “That trickles down to us. When they stop working, we feel the impact. The green industry and irrigation go hand-in-hand, and there’s no doubt that what they do drives our business.”

This bed of mixed plantings watered with drip irrigation was installed to reduce water use for a lawn, says Severson. Photo: Down to Earth Irrigation

Marty DeNinno, owner of Pinnacle Irrigation and Nightlighting in Haddonfield, New Jersey, says some of the areas the company services can have water restrictions as tight as only two permissible watering days per week. Other areas in the same region have hardly ever seen restrictions. Each year, it seems to run the gamut.

“We’ve been doing this a long time and we’ve seen it go from no restrictions to total restrictions,” explains DeNinno. “It’s an ever-changing thing for us here.”

DeNinno says that water regulations tend to come and go, and that’s relatively manageable for business because people still request work.

“Even when we’re in a drought, we’ll still get irrigation work because people do recognize that those

### **MANAGING A CHANGING BUSINESS**

Just keeping up with what’s going on can be a job in itself, says Rodney Krumnow, owner of Pro Irrigation in Marlin, Texas. He says water regulations are constantly changing, and it’s not always easy to keep up with the latest information.

But he says he does not feel particularly challenged by water regulations. He focuses on educating the customer and recognizes that there’s not much more he can do beyond that.

Krumnow is also committed to maintaining a high level of quality, no matter what.

“Sometimes, that means I lose a job, but I’d rather lose a job than compromise,” he says. “A job done poorly always comes back to haunt you. That’s why



“I would say that five to 10 years ago, 99% of irrigation clients were overwatering.”

— Kenny Shiflett, CLIA, Foothill Irrigation

we have to find ways to work with regulations and restrictions while still maintaining the best quality.”

It’s a tall order but one that can often be accomplished by keeping the client educated, says Krumnow.

**EDUCATING THE CUSTOMER**

Education is a vital part of the solution when it comes to managing customer expectations. Kenny Shiflett, CLIA, owner of Foothill Irrigation in Charlottesville, Virginia, says in order to be successful, education has to be an ongoing part of the conversation. More specifically, customers need to understand what is in your control and what isn’t.

Shiflett says a lot of the conversation around water regulations can also open the door to talking about new weather-based technology and smart controllers. Naturally, water restrictions make people more aware of smart water usage, and this is the time to talk to them about how the industry has advanced. This is one way that Shiflett says that he’s working with the everchanging industry instead of trying to go against it.

“I would say that five to 10 years ago, 99% of irrigation clients were overwatering,” Shiflett says. “But now, as technology has advanced and more people are using weather-based controllers, there’s been a big shift. But people still need to be educated on why this upgrade matters. They need to understand that while upgrading a system might be costly on the front end, it’s going to save them a lot of money in the long-run.”

Having industry accreditation helps a lot when it comes to conducting these conversations.

“I have my CLIA and I do think credentials like that help when you are in front of a customer,” he says. “It helps them view you as an expert and gives credibility to what you say. I believe it’s import-

ant to give information upfront, to be honest and to explain any numbers that you throw at them. If you provide an understandable explanation, it’s going to work in your favor.”

Phil Severson, president of Down to Earth Irrigation LLC in Portland, Oregon, says he’s lucky they don’t deal with a lot of water restrictions. However, water conservation products are heralded in the region. After all, Portland is regularly named one of the most environmentally friendly cities in the world.

“Our goal is always to put the most water-conserving products out there,” Severson says. “We use a lot of drip. In fact, that probably comprises around half of our business now. While we don’t have a lot of water regulations here in the Northwest, they do push water-conserving nozzles and offer rebates for them, so that undoubtedly helps us sell jobs.”

In terms of educating the client, Severson admits that most of his customers are already environmentally savvy, so that eases a lot of the burden. “As a rule of thumb, people in the Northwest are pretty in tune with wanting to be water-conscious,” he says. “I would say that most of my customers get it. Water is a finite resource and we need to be as conservative as possible. Most people want to be part of that solution.”

But that’s not the case everywhere. In Lincoln, Nebraska, Judson Byleen, owner of Judson Irrigation, says trying to talk to folks about water conservation often feels like a losing battle. Because water restrictions are basically a nonissue in his region, it’s just not something that is on his clients’ minds.

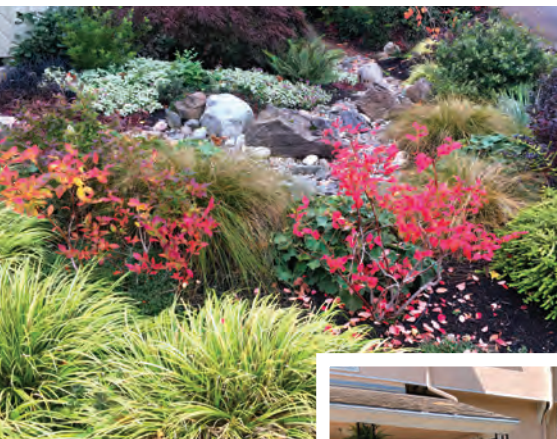
“In 45 years, we have had one year of water restrictions — and that was really a tough year — but it’s just not something we deal with here,” Byleen says. “And that year that we did, it almost had the reverse effect on peoples’ mindset. If they were only allowed to water on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, you can be sure that they watered those days whether their lawn needed it or not.”

Last year, Byleen says that the extensive flooding in Nebraska posed its own set of challenges.

“Trying to talk to people about water conservation when there were homes in our area being washed away just wasn’t effective,” Byleen says. “I definitely think that the conversations around water conservation are regionally driven. There are still a lot of people that don’t see the value.”

**DIVERSIFYING BUSINESS**

Sometimes, the best solution to being successful in an increasingly regulated industry is to find ways to work with water restrictions. In Virginia, Shiflett says they have dealt with various temporary water restrictions over the years along with rising water costs. Since water costs are tiered in his area, water bills can suddenly skyrocket. As a result, they’ve



Above: Drip irrigation makes up about half of Down to Earth’s business, even without heavy water restrictions. Photo: Down to Earth Irrigation



Right: Nebraska customers aren’t eager to discuss water conservation, says Byleen. Photo: Judson Irrigation



Managing customer expectations comes down to ongoing education of the client, says Shiflett. Water regulation can open discussions to smart irrigation technology. Photo: Foothill Irrigation

We don't drill the wells, but we have expanded into pumps, reservoir tanks and rainwater collection."

Shiflett says they started looking into well work in 2003, following a significant drought in 2002, when regulations first began to have a serious impact. Since then, the cost of water has continued to rise and that's put this effort at the forefront. Shiflett says that he sees interest in this type of work only growing.

"It comes down to the fact that trying to fight regulations will always be a losing battle," he adds. "How can we continue to be successful when we know regulations will continue to come? The answer is by evolving and adapting our business." 🌱

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"Most people want to be part of that solution."

– Phil Severson,  
Down to Earth  
Irrigation

continually sought ways to be innovative and keep up with whatever is coming down the pipeline. Currently, that seems to be transitioning into more well work.

"Because people are drilling wells on their property as a result of water restrictions and overall high water cost, we've recognized that we have to diversify and expand into more segments of the industry.

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//////////////////// BY KYLE BROWN



# Small **BUT** MIGHTY

No matter its size, a water feature can make a big splash.

**A** water feature can add a powerful element to a landscape design, but bigger doesn't always mean better when it comes to delivering the right experience for your customer. Sometimes, a smaller water feature can provide just as much of an impact while also reducing both the overall installation bill and water-use costs.

Choosing a water feature should begin with a talk about what the customer is willing to pay, says Nicholas Tate, owner of Up-percut Property Services in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

"When I get approached for a water feature, I'll start with the budget to see what exactly that will let us get," Tate says. "I'll talk about what's available in that range."

Tate says he stays connected with his local suppliers to make sure he has plenty of options for customers that come at a reasonable cost. That way he can offer the best possible price for a water feature that won't break the customer's bank and still make enough money to make the job worthwhile.

That conversation should also include some discussion of what the customer wants out of the water feature, says Sam Pole, operations manager at Lawns of Texas in Woodway, Texas.

"Is it just a visual, is it auditory?" Pole says. "It depends on a client's aesthetic needs with their landscapes."

With that information in mind, it's time to talk to the customer about options. Pole says water restrictions in Texas can make it more challenging to provide a high-impact water feature, but providing the client with details about costs of installation and its water use is the right approach.

"You need to educate them," Pole says. "That's the best customer, an informed customer."

## REDUCE EVAPORATION

The installation bill isn't the only place where a more conservative water feature can make an economic difference for customers. Tim Brucks, owner of Total Landscape Concepts in Roseville, California, typically does much larger water feature installations, but the water restrictions in his region cause some customers to look for more water-smart options.

"We're a drier climate and we deal with a lot of evaporation," Brucks says.

Higher amounts of evaporation mean a more expensive water bill over time for customers, so Brucks' goal is to reduce that rate in the water feature. One of the best ways he's found to do that is to focus on a pondless feature, such as bubbling rocks and urns that catch the water in a basin underground. That minimizes the amount of splash and prevents large amounts of water from exiting the fountain.

"Limiting splash or even channeling the water a little bit — that's the biggest thing you can do," he says.

When designing a landscape with a water feature, Brucks utilizes plants around the feature that can make use of any extra water that might splash.

"Obviously we don't plan on any water being outside the parameters," Brucks says. "But we try and put some plants, maybe some grasses, around the feature. We use Virginia creeper around the fountain on the edges. We'll utilize plants that are going to really like that water. That gives it the potential to use it without wasting it."

Photos: Total Landscape Concepts

Waterfall-style features are always popular and can still be an option for smaller installations, says Pole. A waterfall feature doesn't have to have a huge splash at the bottom to provide both strong visual and auditory aesthetics, and it can be constructed with a small basin area to reduce the amount of water.

In some designs calling for a pondless waterfall, Brucks has used a trough from a farm supply store, depending on the budget, he says.

Any part of a feature that has exposed running water is an opportunity for evaporation, though, says Pole. Another popular look is a stream bed-style feature with circulating pumps taking water over a longer distance as compared to a pond or basin.

"If you've got that moving water, you've got more of an evaporation situation present," says Pole. "We will steer them away from that or give them a short run that gives them the stream but then keep most of the basin water protected, hidden in a larger basin or under gravel."

Water feature placement can also affect evaporation, with full sun causing the most trouble, says Pole.

## THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

An important part of designing a smaller water feature is choosing the right pump, says Brucks.

"You need to make sure that your pump is matched to what you're doing," he says. In the same way that he wouldn't put a 6,000-gallon pump in a 10,000-gallon feature, he wouldn't put a huge pump in a project that doesn't require it.

"We're always trying to be conservative, and thinking about the electricity used comes along with that," Brucks says. Using a larger pump turned down on a smaller water feature not only wastes electricity, it can strain the pump and damage the parts more quickly.

The pump is also one part of the water feature where Brucks doesn't suggest using less-expensive alternatives.



Using rocks or plants to protect a basin can help reduce water loss through evaporation. Pick plants to place around the feature that can use any water that splashes out.

"Never go cheap on the pump," he says. "A good pump is going to be quiet; it's going to be efficient. It's going to be less likely to break or have issues. They last a long time, and a good pump will use less electricity overall."

The type of pump should be determined during the design phase of the project. An above-ground pump is what Brucks prefers because it's much easier to service than a submersible pump. If the pump is above ground, it's important to consider the pump's suction and total dynamic head, or how far the water will be pushed. Determining the correct amount of flow for a water feature takes some trial and experience, he says.

"I always say that even though you don't want to crank down a pump too much, you can always turn it down," Brucks says. "Too small of a pump is going to be lackluster."

Working with smaller projects doesn't mean that the water feature has to have a smaller impact, says Pole. Using a water feature in concert with other landscape elements can deliver the experience of a larger installation.

"If they want big features, then I would accent more around those features with elements not necessarily anything to do with the hydro feature, but accent it," Pole says. "So you would have a tropical look around that or even a hardscape that accentuates it, but you're not using a larger amount of water."

Using a water feature as a centerpiece of a hardscape installation can bring a lot more energy to the feature, says Brucks. He uses rock along with additional landscaping elements to really make an impact.

"The landscape is key, because you can really create that focal point by complementing it with some color and other foliage," Brucks says. It's important not to go overboard in bringing those additional elements, but finding that balance point takes practice. The overall goal is for all of the elements to feel incorporated and natural in the design, even with the more modern look of a feature like a water blade.

Using hardscaping like a bench or walking path can make the feature feel even more inviting, regardless of its actual size. "It gives the client the best of both worlds," says Pole. 🌿

//////  
**"You need to educate them. That's the best customer, an informed customer."**

– Sam Pole,  
Lawns of Texas

//////



Choosing the right pump for the size of the feature will use less electricity over time and help parts last longer.

The author is editor-in-chief of *Irrigation & Green Industry* and can be reached at [kylebrown@igin.com](mailto:kylebrown@igin.com).

## OPEI announces planned ownership change of GIE+Expo



The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, Alexandria, Virginia, will move into 100% ownership of the GIE+Expo trade show, the international landscape, outdoor living and equipment exposition, in 2022.

“GIE+Expo has had an extraordinarily strong run since 2010 — posting records in attendance and booth space. Last year’s show was the biggest ever, setting record attendance levels,” says Kris Kiser, president of OPEI and managing director of GIE+-Expo. “With this change in ownership structure of the show, OPEI will own the show in its entirety. We look forward to the continued evolution and dynamic growth of GIE+Expo in Louisville in the future.”

Last year was the sixth record-breaking year in a row for GIE+Expo. The industry’s largest show hosted more than 1,000 exhibitors and more than 20 acres of outdoor demonstration area for attendees to ride, drive, dig and cut with the industry’s latest equipment. More than 26,500 contractors, dealers and exhibitors attended from all 50 states and more than 40 countries.

GIE+Expo 2020 is set for Oct. 21-23. Attendees can expect hands-on drone training, expanded tree care demonstrations, a UTV test track, and continued co-location with Hardscape North America.

“OPEI has signed an extension agreement for the show from 2022-2024 with the Kentucky Exposition Center and area hotels in Louisville for the future. GIE+-Expo has always been the industry’s family reunion and the place to be if you’re in this business,” Kiser says. “We’re looking forward to continuing to work with our partners to provide the best training, education and hands-on learning for the entire industry.”

## IA honors annual award recipients

The Irrigation Association, Fairfax, Virginia, honored the recipients of its annual awards during the general session at the 2019 Irrigation Show and Education Week in Las Vegas on Dec. 5. These awards honor those who have made unique and meaningful accomplishments toward furthering the industry and promoting efficient irrigation. Among those winners are two individuals who are active in landscape irrigation.

### 2019 Board of Directors Award

**Carl Kah Jr.** of North Palm Beach, Florida, was named the recipient of the 2019 Board of Directors Award. This award recognizes an individual’s lifelong contributions to the advancement of the irrigation industry.

Kah founded K-Rain in 1974 and continues to serve as the company’s CEO. With more than 100 patents to his name, Kah began his innovation in irrigation technologies with his father in a garage in West Palm Beach, Florida, in the 1940s. Since then, Kah built K-Rain into the company it is today, an “engineering first” company that employs more than 400 people worldwide.

Kah’s devotion to engineering was not limited to irrigation. After serving in the U.S. Army artillery corps in the 1950s, Kah joined Pratt Whitney, where he served as a program manager for the Air Force’s reusable rocket engine program. The technology developed during this time was the basis for the engines then used in NASA’s space shuttle program.



From left to right: 2019 IA President Ed Santalone Jr.; Carl Kah Jr.; IA CEO Deborah M. Hamlin, CAE, FASAE; and 2020 IA President Jon Topham, CAIS, CID. Kah was honored with the 2019 Board of Directors Award at the 2019 Irrigation Show.

### 2019 Excellence in Education Award

**Marcus Duck** of Michigan State University was named the recipient of the 2019 Excellence in Education Award. This award recognizes a person who teaches irrigation, water management or water conservation in affiliation with a two- or four-year institution and has a commitment to not only elevating the level of education but also promoting the field of irrigation as a viable and sustainable career to students.

Duck joined Michigan State University in 2002 and currently serves as an advisor and instructor in the department of horticulture. In addition to his duties as an instructor, Duck also serves as the program coordinator for the department’s two-year certificate programs, which include the Fruit, Vegetable and Organic Horticulture Management Certificate and the Landscape and Nursery Management Certificate.

Duck’s commitment to excellence in education extends beyond East Lansing, Michigan. He is a regular attendee and contributor to the IA’s Faculty Academy as well as the National Association of Landscape Professionals’ National Collegiate Landscape Competition. Through these partnerships, Duck affords the opportunity for his students to have unique access to industry information and knowledge, thus setting his students up for success in the field of irrigation.



From left to right: 2019 IA President Ed Santalone Jr.; Marcus Duck; and 2020 IA President Jon Topham, CAIS, CID. Duck was presented with the 2019 Excellence in Education Award at the 2019 Irrigation Show.

The nomination period is now open for the 2020 Irrigation Association awards and will end on March 31. More information about the awards can be found at [www.irrigation.org/awards](http://www.irrigation.org/awards).



## Project EverGreen and STMA pitch in to renovate Florida ball field

Project EverGreen, Cleveland; the Sports Turf Managers Association, Lawrence, Kansas; the City of West Palm Beach Parks and Recreation Department; and local volunteers teamed up at Howard Park in West Palm Beach, Florida, to give the 13-acre park's softball field a makeover.

The field needed a renovation to keep it a vibrant part of the community. Because the field receives heavy usage, the multiuse outfield needed enhancements to enable it to become a safe, sustainable playing surface. Volunteers, including sports field managers, lawn care professionals, landscape contractors and groundskeepers, assisted with the transformation valued at more than \$50,000.

"Neighborhoods deserve healthy parks or community green spaces they can call their own," says Cindy Code, executive director of Project EverGreen. "Thriving parks create a community hub for neighbors — young and old — to connect. Parks help to build community pride and confidence in residents and create spaces to safely exercise and enjoy the great outdoors."

"We were thrilled to be a part of this important project and bring a well-managed and playable ballpark to a deserving community," says Kim Heck, CAE, CEO of the STMA. "To use our professional expertise and know-how and bring a plan like this to life is a win-win for everyone."

## SNOWCARE FOR TROOPS CELEBRATES A DECADE OF SERVICE

Cleveland-based Project EverGreen's SnowCare for Troops program delivers a helping hand and peace of mind for the families of deployed military personnel.

The SnowCare for Troops program, which is supported by Boss Snowplow, Iron Mountain, Michigan, is more than clearing driveways and sidewalks of snow and ice. It's a means to help military families maintain their independence and go about their daily routines taking care of family, work, school and more.

Celebrating its 10th year, the need for SnowCare for Troops volunteers is still tremendous. With military deployments occurring regularly across the U.S., new volunteers are needed to provide snow removal service to the families of deployed military personnel. Volunteers are matched with families within their service area.

"SnowCare for Troops provides military families in need with peace of mind and lifts a significant burden from their plates," says Cindy Code, executive director of Project EverGreen. "We're very grateful for the commitment of our dedicated volunteers and the continued support from Boss Snowplow."



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**1 Light fixtures.** WAC Landscape Lighting, Port Washington, New York, has unveiled its LED Hardscape Quick Release fixtures with screwdriver-adjustable brightness output ranging from 50 to 350 lumens and 0.5 to 8.5 watts of LED power. The patent-pending invention allows for a watertight male-to-female connection at the fixture.

Removable stainless-steel capstone and rotation mounting brackets are included to help achieve the proper angle, eliminate glare and ease cleaning and replacement. These IP66-rated luminaires are factory sealed and watertight for exterior settings and adapt into existing 12V systems.

Sizes range from 3 to 18 inches in length, with the controllability features available on the 6-, 12- and 18-inch models. They are available in marine-grade brass or corrosion-resistant aluminum. Finish colors include bronze, graphite or sand.

 **WAC Landscape Lighting**  
[www.waclandscapelighting.com](http://www.waclandscapelighting.com)



**2 Rotary mowers.** The Toro Company, Bloomington, Minnesota, introduces its new ProLine H800 direct-collect rotary mowers that mow and collect grass and leaf clippings in a single pass. The 50-inch cutting deck has a Smart AirFlow system that transfers debris directly into a hopper and tilts for easy cleaning. When the hopper is full, the deck automatically shuts off to prevent overfilling. A dump-from-the-seat system with a 77-inch-high lift allows an operator to deposit clippings directly into the truck bed or dumpster.

The mowers' 57-inch width and high ground clearance of 5.9 inches allows easy movement in confined areas. The 24.7-horsepower Yanmar diesel engine with Smart Cool system is capable of 9.3 mph. Other features include a 4-wheel-drive transmission with a locking differential and hydrostatic drive and a 1-cubic-yard high-volume collection hopper.

 **The Toro Company**  
[www.Toro.com](http://www.Toro.com)



**3 Tool box.** Milwaukee Tool, Brookfield, Wisconsin, has added a Compact Tool Box to its Packout Modular Storage System, one of 20 different versatile components that enable users to customize their own storage solutions. All of the Packout storage components, including the Compact Tool Box, feature an intuitive quick-attachment mechanism that allows users to stack and lock the system's organizers, totes and bags of different sizes in numerous configurations that best suit their needs.

The Compact Tool Box features an interior storage tray and quick-adjust dividers that let a user change its interior layout to accommodate various tools.

It has a 75-pound weight capacity and is made of impact-resistant polymers that can withstand harsh work environments. The IP65 rating weather seal protects contents from rain and other jobsite debris.

 **Milwaukee Tool**  
[www.milwaukeetool.com](http://www.milwaukeetool.com)

**SUPPLIER IN THE NEWS**

**Exmark Honors Program salutes military and first responders**

In recognition of their hard work, dedication and service, Exmark, Beatrice, Nebraska, has launched an Honors Program in which current and former military members and first responders will be entitled to a discount of up to \$1,500 on a new Exmark mower.

Exmark General Manager Daryn Walters says the Honors Program is a way to say thank you for the commitment these people and their families make to the service of others.

"We salute these heroes and recognize the tremendous debt of gratitude we owe them for their service and the time

commitment it requires," Walters says. "With the Honors Program, Exmark is making it easier for them to spend less time maintaining their lawns and more time doing the things they love."

The Exmark Honors Program is open to all current and former military, law enforcement, fire, rescue and EMT personnel. The discount offer applies to all new Exmark Radius, Lazer Z and Navigator zero-turn riders; Staris and Vantage stand-on riders; and Turf Tracer walk-behind mower models. Discounts range from \$300 to \$1,500 off the suggested retail price or national promotion price, depending on model.

A complete breakdown of equipment discounts and customer eligibility requirements for the Exmark Honors Program is available at [exmark.com/honors](http://exmark.com/honors). The program runs through Oct. 31, 2020.



Photo: Exmark



**4 Backpack vacuum.** Makita USA, La Mirada, California, offers its XCV17PG 18V X2 LXT Dry Backpack Vacuum Kit that provides a longer run time and a larger debris capacity to tackle big jobs. It includes a 36-volt brushless motor and a higher-capacity container that allows up to 1.6 gallons of dust and debris collection. The easy-to-manuever, compact unit weighs only 15 pounds with an empty dust bag and the two included 18V 5.0Ah batteries.

Features include an efficient two-stage HEPA filter that captures 99.97% of particulates 0.3 microns and larger and extends the life of the main filter. Three power levels allow the user to match the power to the task, allowing up to 139 minutes of continuous run time on the normal setting.

The vacuum is also available without the batteries under item number XCV17Z.

 **Makita USA**  
[www.makitatools.com](http://www.makitatools.com)



**5 Spray jets.** Maxijet, Dundee, Florida, has announced its winged one-piece jet is available in four spray patterns and three gallonages, suitable for landscape applications.

The wings are made of pro-grade, durable, UV-inhibiting resins and offer an ergonomic solution for convenient installation without tools. The new quick threads make installation and removal faster and easier, and the flat fan spray helps minimize wind deflection.

The jet is available as a 2 x 20-degree center strip for long, narrow spaces; a 90-degree quarter-circle for corners; a 180-degree half-circle for use next to structures and walkways; and a 340-degree full-circle for open spaces. Each pattern can be optimized by selecting the ideal gallonage and orifice size. At 20 psi, the blue jet delivers 10.5 gph, the green jet delivers 16 gph and the red jet delivers 20 gph.

 **Maxijet**  
[www.maxijet.com](http://www.maxijet.com)



**6 Tool-less saddle tee.** Dawn Industries, Arvada, Colorado, is offering KwikTap, a tool-less saddle tee for polyethylene pipe irrigation systems. KwikTap tool-less saddle tees offer less flow restriction than insert fittings and provide quicker installation than with work screw clamps. The product does not include snaps or straps, and no tools are needed for installation.

KwikTap is available with 1/2- and 3/4-inch FPT outlets and with a swing elbow, swing adapter or 17-mm drip fittings installed. These fittings can be removed giving the end user the ultimate flexibility when installing the product. KwikTap is available for multiple pipe sizes and can be removed and re-used. The products are made in the USA.

 **Dawn Industries**  
[www.dawnindustries.com](http://www.dawnindustries.com)

**SUPPLIER IN THE NEWS**

**SiteOne Landscape Supply acquires The Garden Dept.**

Roswell, Georgia-based SiteOne Landscape Supply Inc. has announced it has acquired The Garden Dept. Inc., a supplier that serves the greater Long Island, New York, market. The Garden Dept. was founded in 1976 and today has three locations in Coram, Dix Hills and Speonk, New York, focused on the distribution of nursery and landscape supplies to landscape professionals.

“The Garden Dept. is an excellent fit with SiteOne as they significantly strengthen our market-leading nursery and landscape supply position in the Long Island market,” says Doug Black, chairman and CEO of SiteOne Landscape Supply.

“This addition aligns with our mission to be the best full-line distributor to landscape professionals, providing the highest quality products and services designed to help our customers be more successful.”



“The Garden Dept. has an outstanding culture built around customer service. They have a talented team that shares SiteOne’s passion for providing quality products, exceptional service and superior value to our customers,” adds Black. “This is our third acquisition in 2020 as we continue to expand the number of markets in the United States and Canada where we provide a full range of product lines to our customers.”

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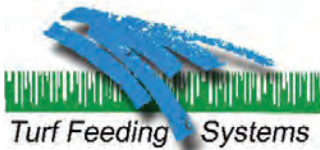
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Husqvarna - www.husqvarna.com ..... 2, 3

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## 5 FUN FACTS ABOUT TULIPS

**1 There are thousands of varieties of tulips.** There are more than 3,000 varieties of tulips worldwide.

**2 Tulips have an expensive history.** During the 1600s in the Netherlands, tulips were highly valuable and are considered by some historians to be the cause of the economic crash of 1637.

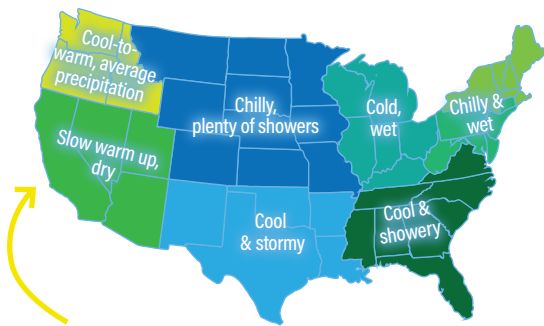
**3 The flowers are edible.** Tulips are actually a part of the lily family, which also includes onions, garlic and asparagus. The petals are edible and have been used as an onion substitute and to make wine.

**4 There is a near-black variety.** Although there are no true black flowers that occur in nature, many hybrids and cultivars have been created to get close. Queen of the Night tulips have deep purple petals that almost look black.



**5 Tulips originated in Asia.** Many people think that tulips are native to Holland, but they actually originated in central Asia. They were first brought to Turkey and sent to Holland around 1560.

(Source: Better Homes and Gardens)



## What's in store for spring?

While we will officially greet the spring season on March 19, *The Farmer's Almanac* predicts there will be a slow start to spring with winter lingering across the Midwest, Great Lakes, Northeast and New England. Occasional wet snow and unseasonably chilly conditions will hang on in some of these areas until April.

Much of the rest of the country will experience frequent and widespread precipitation. During the first week of April across the Plains states and parts of the Southwest, there may be a threat of strong-to-severe weather, with some storms capable of spawning tornado activity. Temperatures will run somewhat cool for most regions, even into June.

Drier weather will prevail in the West. A very cool and stormy spring is on tap for the South Central states.



## CALIFORNIA COMPANY CREATES TRIBUTE TO KOBE BRYANT

An ordinary patch of grass at a Bay Area park in California was transformed Jan. 29 into a tribute to Los Angeles Lakers legend Kobe Bryant, who, along with eight others, was killed in a helicopter crash Jan. 26.

According to an article by NBC Bay Area News, owners of New Ground Technology, Kelli Pearson and her husband Pete Davis, spent an hour creating the tribute to the 41-year-old sports figure.

Situated next to a baseball diamond at a park in Pleasanton, the massive 115-by-92-foot image shows the smiling basketball superstar in his No. 24 Lakers jersey.

Pearson and Davis specialize in large format printing on turf. The “Turf-Printer” technology they use blows air to bend the grass in a designed direction that, when light hits it, unveils an image, which can only be seen from above.

“You look at the light and the dark stripes on a baseball field, it’s basically rollers on the mower either tilting the turf away from the viewer or toward the viewer,” Davis explains in the article. “So you can see the light reflecting off of the one direction and shadowing on the other. This machine uses that same pressure roller technique, but it does it in 3-inch squares using just air.”

Pearson and Davis expected Bryant’s image to last for about two days before the grass naturally straightened out. Davis says they wanted to do this to create something in honor of Kobe’s life and legacy.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Grass plants are **75%-80% water**, by weight.

(Source: *The Lawn Institute*)





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**Quick Release**

# Never Pop a Capstone Again



**CCT Selectable**



**Brightness Control**

## Hardscape Lighting

A hardscape light with quick-release mounting, selectable 2700-3000K CCT and brightness control dial makes WAC the only hardscape light to use for permanent installations. Our patent-pending invention is a factory-sealed water tight fixture with diffused LEDs, providing color-correct illumination of any stone material. Available in bronze, graphite and sand finishes, the WAC hardscape light addresses all concerns that may arise after installation under a capstone.