

# ➤ The Landscape PROFESSIONAL

The official magazine of  
the National Association of  
Landscape Professionals  
January/February 2021

For Lawn Care, Landscape Maintenance, Design-Build, Tree Care, Nursery, and Irrigation Professionals

# INDUSTRY OUTLOOK



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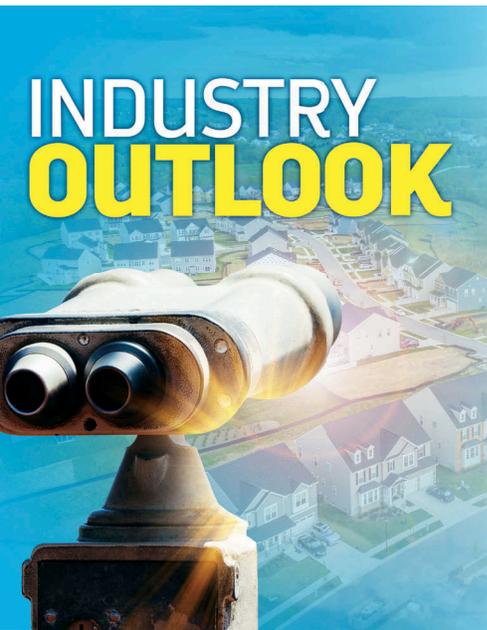
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# The Landscape PROFESSIONAL



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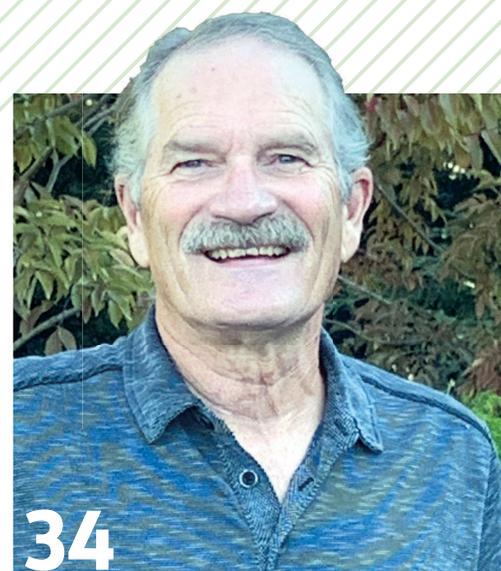
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2018



2019



2020



2021

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# Good-Bye 2020, Hello 2021

## I'M SURE I'M NOT ALONE IN WISHING 2020 A FOND

farewell. While 2020 taught us a lot and showed the resilience of this industry and how we have truly earned our essential status, I for one, will not miss it. Instead, I am choosing to look forward to 2021 and the opportunities and challenges it presents for NALP and our industry.

Let's start with the opportunities. For our first opportunity, I must tip my cap to 2020. The year of COVID-19 taught us that we have to be good at online learning. It will never replace in-person learning; however, we did learn that there truly are some distinct advantages to online learning, including that it can be more convenient and more cost-effective to learn online. With that in mind, I am pleased to announce that NALP will be rolling out a new Online Education Platform in 2021.

Initially, the content in our Online Education Platform will be focused on education for both landscape and lawn care certifications. This content will help individuals prepare to get their certification, as well as help them maintain their certifications throughout their career. NALP is working with state agencies to ensure that our lawn care content meets the standards that they have put in place for continuing education units

(CEUs), as certification in this area is not administered by NALP. In addition to our Online Education Platform, we will also continue to offer some of our more successful online programs including our virtual site tour series "On Tour," as well as our Zoom with Champions series.

Another opportunity I am looking forward to in 2021 is the opportunity to gather again for an in-person event. Now COVID-19 has taught us that nothing is a sure thing, but as I write this column, two vaccines with over a 90 percent effectiveness rate have been announced. I would love to see all of you wonderful volunteers in July at Renewal and Remembrance, but that may be a bit too ambitious. On the other hand, as it will be NALP's last year in Louisville, I am optimistic that the vaccines will allow us to gather in October. After that, we start to look ahead to hosting our new NALP Annual Meeting in Orlando in September 2022 and then in Dallas in September of 2023.

So, what are our challenges in 2021? We know for the first part of the year we will continue to deal with COVID-19 and to that end, NALP will continue to work hard to ensure our industry stays on the Federal Department of Homeland Security list of essential industries. We will also continue to work to maintain the essential status of the landscape industry in all 50 states.

And, we will be dealing with a new administration in Washington. Specifically, for our industry, this means we will be dealing with new heads of EPA, DHS and DOL. We will have to work hard to highlight the importance

of the landscape industry in benefiting the environment, the economy and the communities throughout our nation while advocating for policies that promote and enhance the industry rather than those that could inhibit and restrain your ability to operate. We will also continue to face challenges to the use of materials (pesticides & herbicides), as well as getting the people we need to operate our businesses (H-2B), to ensure you can run your businesses as effectively as possible. Unfortunately, we see these challenges appearing at the federal, state and local levels of government in 2021.

These challenges present an opportunity for you. What is that opportunity? Get educated and get involved. Get educated by subscribing to our newsletter "The Advocate." This weekly newsletter will keep you apprised of everything occurring that is impacting you at the federal, state and local levels. It takes you less than a minute to sign up and I assure you it will be more than worth your while. Finally, get involved. The most powerful voice with Congress, state government and even your county and city boards is yours. NALP can help you do this, but at the end of the day, those lawmakers want to hear from you.

So, here's to 2021, a year to get back together, get better educated and get more involved.

**Britt Wood, CEO**

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2021**

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# Faces of the Industry: **Kristy Mathews**

By Jill Odom

## **KRISTY MATHEWS, OWNER OF K&B LAWN AND LANDSCAPING**

based in Jacksonville, Florida, has only been working in the landscape industry for less than a year. She started her business in April 2020. Thanks to contactless payments and their work being done outside, Mathews says the pandemic has not caused any issues for the business.

"Everybody's wanting to do their lawn now," she says. "Since more people are working from home, they want to look out the window to a more beautiful and well-kept lawn."

Mathews currently runs the business with just her husband, but she says she's bidding on a neighborhood contract and is planning to expand the business with more crews.

She says when she realized she could make a career out of landscaping the feeling was euphoric. Previously, Mathews served in the Army for nine years.

"I would have stayed in the military," she says. "But there were too many times I had to choose between my family and my career, I really wanted to be here for my family. Three deployments take its toll on a family and I made the best decision I knew to make at the time."

Mathews also struggles with PTSD,

but she says working outside in nature helps her tremendously.

"I initially went into construction, but I just like nature," she says. "I like cutting the grass and the peace it brings when I'm on the lawn mower or when I'm digging in the dirt. I legitimately love what I do."

Mathews says she wishes people would study more on how nature can help with mental stability.

"Once you organize things, and they look good, it makes you feel better," she says. "Your yard is the first thing you see when you come home. And the last thing you see before you leave. Whether you are conscious of it or not it has an effect on you. We run a very tight schedule and we try to make sure that we show up to cut our clients' lawns on the same day at the same time. So, for some of them it's like a fresh haircut or hairstyle."

Mathews says her military background has helped her be more disciplined, organized and to never give up when it comes to running her business. She uses pricing charts on her website to give the customers an idea of how much certain services cost and to qualify her leads.

"We give free estimates but it's not free for us," Mathews says. "It costs us gas and time to go out there so we give them a starting price then they know if they can afford it or not."

So far, she hasn't had any mentors yet, but she says she's trying to get her feet wet more.

"I initially went into construction, but I just like nature. I like cutting the grass and the peace it brings when I'm on the lawn mower or when I'm digging in the dirt. **I legitimately love what I do.**" - Kristy Mathews

"I like to go to the table with knowledge," she says. "People seem to want to help you more when you know a little bit more and you're really into what you're doing."

She says her favorite part about working in the industry is the scenery and being able to ride around and see different things all day. Mathews says she doesn't see anything as challenges but as learning opportunities.

"For me, it's a matter of figuring out a way to do it," she says. "But if I were to say a challenge I deal with, it would be working at night and doing this during the day."

At night, Mathews has a job with the railroad. She rests on Sundays and Mondays currently.

"I think it is hard work but in the end it's worth it and it has a great turnaround," she says. "I feel like if all I had to start with was a push mower, I could start from the push mower and make my way up fairly quickly with hard work and determination."

As for where she sees herself in five years, Mathews jokes she'll definitely be a millionaire.

"I'm not really chasing the money because I love what I do," she says. "I have so many ideas for the future because there's not really anything for women in this industry and I really want to push to have things specifically for women. Clothing is a big one for me because I know that if I'm comfortable and I look and feel good I will have a better day. I feel that at times I'm losing my femininity and I think having more feminine wear would help with that."

Aside from having more gendered work clothes options, Mathews would also like to change the mindset that women can't do landscaping. In one instance, she was doing a consultation with a woman who asked if she knew how to cut grass because she's never heard of a woman cutting grass.

"That's how people think because of the traditional dynamic of the family," she says. "Men have done it for so long, and there are so few women in the industry."

Mathews plans to do a survey of the surrounding area to try to answer the question of why so few women do enter into this career path. **TLP**



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# 2021 Forecast for Commercial Markets

By Jill Odom

**\*NOTE THIS ARTICLE  
WAS WRITTEN  
DEC. 4, 2020**

**COVID-19 CAUSED MAJOR DISRUPTIONS IN THE COMMERCIAL** markets with some benefiting and others struggling due to its effects on how companies do business. For lawn care and landscape companies that service commercial clients, paying attention to trends in commercial business sectors now takes on new importance. We talked to some experts on their forecasts for 2021 and what they expect to see happen in the various markets this year.

“At one end of the spectrum, the lodging sector isn’t doing very well at the moment because the pandemic has depressed travel,” says Karen Dynan, a professor of the practice of economics at Harvard University. “At the other end, we are hearing stories that the warehouses supporting e-commerce are thriving. Within retail, it really depends on the business. Grocery stores are very busy because so many people are eating at home, but there are other

types of retail where customers are still staying away because of fear of the virus.”

## HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY STATUS

Hospitality-related industries including restaurants and hotels have been some of the hardest-hit commercial markets during the pandemic.

In Yelp’s most recent Economic Impact Report, 32,109 restaurants have experienced closures with 19,590 of

those closures being permanent.

Meanwhile, 57,180 hotels are estimated to foreclose or close due to low current/projected demand without another COVID stimulus bill from Congress, according to the American Hotel & Lodging Association’s research.

“I think the 2021 outlook for the hospitality business really depends on vaccine progress,” Dynan says. “I’m not worried about consumer demand for hospitality services over the long run because people love eating out and traveling. But I don’t think that demand in these areas is going to really pick up until people feel safe going out, and that won’t happen until we have an effective vaccine with widespread take-up. I’m not a public health expert,



but it's looking more and more like that won't happen until well into 2021."

"I think the hospitality sector will recover fully, once the impact of the pandemic passed," says Tracy Lentz, managing partner at Lentz Thompson Retirement Advisors. "But there may be permanent changes as to how some do business. That's not always a bad thing, and fortunately, businesses are good at adapting and providing what its customers want and need."

### COMMERCIAL OFFICE SPACES

Office spaces are another area that has been greatly impacted by the pandemic as it continues on. More companies are pushing back their return to the office dates from January 2021 to June 2021 currently.

According to a report by the National Association of Realtors, assuming that jobs in the information, financial activities, and professional and business services increase by 100,000 monthly, payroll employment in office-using industries will only fully recover by March 2022.

The West and Northwest regions have experienced the largest loss of office occupancy in 2020 Q2, while office vacancy rates rose in all regions, with the highest rates in the South and Midwest.

Dynan says it's likely the pandemic will have a lasting impact on how businesses operate and there will probably be more remote workers moving forward and hybrid work models will be adopted as some important business activities are still best done in person.

"The trend toward remote office and administrative work was already building momentum, and now the COVID-19 shutdowns have moved it many years ahead," Lentz says. "Overall, this is probably a good thing for many employees and industries. Less commute time, more family time, control of schedule... From what we are seeing, the overall productivity in most organizations seems to be very good, and from what I can tell, this may change the scope and dynamics of remote and office work from here forward."

Similar to how COVID-19 has spurred on more frequent adoption of remote work, it has also caused businesses to pull the trigger on reorganizing, moving or downsizing plans they were considering prior to the pandemic.

"Figuring out the new business

model will take some time, but it will probably involve some downsizing and that downsizing is likely to begin next year (2021)," Dynan says.

### EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED

Because forecasts are not set in stone many different things could happen to shift what's going on in certain markets. Dynan and Lentz offer advice on how landscape companies can prepare for the future.

"With the health and economic outlook still quite uncertain, I think they need to stay flexible and be ready to adapt to changing conditions," Dynan says. "They also should be focused on ways to keep their employees and customers feel safe."

Lentz encourages companies to have cash reserves available to help navigate unforeseen challenges. He also suggests hiring and rewarding good employees are they are always your most valuable asset.

"Be willing to change and adapt your service model to what the market and your customer base needs or desires," he says. "As hard as it is to do, especially when you are a small business owner, businesses need to

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- Tracy Lentz, managing partner at Lentz Thompson Retirement Advisors

be forward thinking, and try to adapt ahead of the economic curve. If I had one small piece of advice, I would advise businesses to start embracing the world of providing their services online or virtually. For example, I would say that having the ability for online billing services would be an area I would focus on if I was a landscape contractor. I know with my own commercial and residential properties I would like to see that service with the contractors we use." TLP

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# Increase Customer Retention with the Fast Visual Results of Blindside Herbicide from FMC

Founded in 1973, Waynes serves residential customers in Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The company offers year-round lawn care.

Zac Fleming, lawn supervisor for the Huntsville branch of Waynes, says there are many reasons their customers choose them including having educated technicians and using the best chemicals available.

"We don't shy from chemicals," Fleming says. "We use the best chemicals that are allowed for us to use. We follow all the EPA and state guidelines on rates so we get the most out of our chemicals by buying the best chemicals that we think are out there."

The company has to deal with prolific weeds like yellow nutsedge, purple nutsedge, and Virginia buttonweed because pre-emergent chemicals are unable to control their root systems.

Around eight or nine years ago, Fleming says they tested out Blindside, a postemergence herbicide, that can be applied to warm-season turfgrasses

along with Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue turfgrass.

"It allows the guys not to backpack over the yard multiple times," Fleming says. "You're able to hit a lot of weeds at the same time with [Blindside]."

Blindside contains sulfentrazone and metsulfuron-methyl, allowing Waynes to cover a broader spectrum of weeds. Sulfentrazone brings quick results, and metsulfuron-methyl expands the spectrum of weeds even further. Fleming says they use Blindside in combination with Celsius.

"When we go out and spray, our former products were a little bit slower, so we didn't get those fast, visual results," Fleming says. "But here with sulfentrazone we're talking about just in a few days or so, we start getting that yellowing and that browning so it gives a customer a visual to say, 'Hey yeah they did spray something and it's working pretty quick.'"

Fleming says this quick visualization has helped improve their customer retention, which is a key factor in growing a successful lawn care company.

"In this business, people want to see results and what you're doing," Fleming says. "Most the time, that's hard to achieve with Mother Nature, but that sulfentrazone does allow us to give them a faster visual result instead of a 14 to 21-day type deal with the other products."

Waynes uses a low-volume spreader sprayer combo to spread Blindside on customer properties. This helps improve his labor cost and improves the efficiency of his technicians.

"I think it's a great product," Fleming says. "We like it because it gives us quick results, it controls multiple weeds and it has a low consequence on the Bermuda grass."

For Turf Masters Lawn Care, based in Roswell, Georgia, they service around 45,000 residential properties. Matt Lieter, VP of operations for Turf Masters, says their customers choose them because they are the best at what they do and provide customer service.

The weeds they deal with include chickweed, doveweed, crabgrass and sedges. They have been using Blindside for three seasons now. Lieter says they heard about the herbicide from vendors and others in the industry. They had been having trouble controlling summer weeds and sedges with the products they were using.

"We looked at the formulation and figured we could get a better result than what we had been using at that time," Lieter says. "It is nice to see results on the more difficult weeds like Virginia buttonweed. Seeing sedges and kyllinga show signs of decline and/or suppression is a beautiful thing."

Lieter says they have improved their retention rate by two to three percent every season they have used Blindside.

For more information about Blindside, contact your local FMC distributor or local FMC Market Specialist.

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Waynes uses Blindside because it provides fast visual results and treats a number of broadleaf weeds.

Photo: Waynes



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**TREATS:** Over 70 broadleaf weeds and sedges like dollarweed, doveweed and buttonweed

# Solved: Big Liability Exposure for Lawn and Ornamental Care Companies

By Drew Garcia, VP of Rancho Mesa

## THE APPLICATION OF HERBICIDES AND

pesticides creates significant liability exposures for lawn and ornamental care companies. For this reason, specific insurance coverage is needed to protect their business in the event a third party is harmed either through bodily injury or property damage.

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# Most Company Owners Have Had a Business Mentor. Do You?

By Jill Odom

## IF YOU ASK ANYONE WHO USES THE NALP'S TRAILBLAZER

Mentoring Program why other members should consider using it, they'll often say it's a no brainer. The program allows member companies to learn from volunteer industry professionals who share their knowledge about how to run successful lawn care and landscape companies. Participants often meet at the Trailblazer's company, learn about their operations and receive candid advice to help with business challenges.

## GET ADVICE FROM SUCCESSFUL COMPANY OWNERS

Deborah Wade, co-owner of Wade's Lawn Service, based in Goodlettsville, Tennessee, says years ago they were trying to turn the corner with their company and reached out to a larger company in Tennessee to see if they could learn from them.

"I felt that we needed to get connected with someone who had paved

this road before so that we could learn some of the do's and the don'ts," Wade says.

She says she also wanted to see how other companies functioned so they could implement systems that would help them grow their business. The company declined because they were concerned about Wade's Lawn Service eventually growing to be their competition.

She began contacting different companies in Georgia and the only one that got back to her was High-Grove Partners, LLC, based in Austell, Georgia. CEO Jim McCutcheon, LIC, got her connected with NALP and they began taking advantage of the different programs and events. One of those programs included the Trailblazers.

Both McCutcheon and Maurice Dowell, LIC, president of Dowco Enterprises helped Wade's company as Trailblazers. Wade says she's stayed in touch with her Trailblazers and they have always made themselves accessible if she has a question.

She says their site visit to HighGrove Partners was amazing and she liked how efficient the company is getting its crews out in the morning.

"One of the things that he (McCutcheon) told us was how to basically set up our customer base, in terms of instead of doing bi-weekly mowings, take those mowings to weekly mowings," Wade says. "It would just be better for you all around because you won't have to have as many customers, but the customers that you have, you could do just as well."

Wade says when they implemented that change, they were anxious and ex-



pected to lose half their customer base.

"When we went to weekly mowings, we gained more customers," Wade says. "We didn't lose anybody."

Wade says their visit to Dowco was very impressive as well. She says they were allowed to sit in on staff meetings where the company discussed their vision and forecast for the business. They also visited several of Dowco's jobsites to see how the crews worked together on the properties.

"They gave us access to look at those different forms and those different systems that they have in place, and then not only that, but they even gave us a copy of some of those things that we could take back with us," Wade says. "So we've been able to take those things and use them in our company and implement different policies and procedures and different things like that because they've already done the work and they were so gracious to share it with us so that was a major blessing."

#### **BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING**

McCutcheon says based on the feedback from the mentees he's worked with over the years, participating in the program was a leapfrog event for them.

"They say, 'I could have spent many more years trying to figure this out, but by the time I left I had years of experience,'" McCutcheon says. "That's why it's a no brainer."

Wade encourages other companies to consider using the program if they

haven't tried it yet.

"It is one of the most important things that you can do for your business," Wade says. "It is one of the most important things that you can do even for your own professional development. We know that Scripture tells us that iron sharpens iron. So, it's good to be around other people who have done it, who are doing it, who are successful, and who can show you things."

Wade points out that Trailblazers can show you the ropes and some of the mistakes you don't have to make on your own.

"You don't have to fall in the same ditches," Wade says. "You can avoid those things when people who have done it before you can just tell you, 'Here this is the way I did it and this is what worked for me.'"

Tom Heaviland, LIC, one of the Trailblazers and president of Heaviland Landscape Management based in Vista, California, encourages members to not be shy and to take advantage of the free program.

"I always take something that somebody is doing, I don't care how big or small, there's always something that they're doing that's unique," Heaviland says. "I always gain something tangible. It's always rewarding to participate."

#### **BIG CHANGES CAN RESULT FROM THE TRAILBLAZER PROGRAM**

As for how large your company can grow after using the Trailblazer program, Heaviland says he need only point to his mentee Joe Chiellini's

company ASI Landscape Management, which he says is now as large or larger than Heaviland Landscape Management. McCutcheon says company growth can vary. One mentee he was able to help shift from doing residential and commercial work to solely commercial jobs.

"In other cases, it's people where they're probably doing the exact same thing before, but they figured out how to price better and actually make money," McCutcheon says. "It's not necessarily a top-line issue. It certainly can be, teaching you how to sell better, but in most cases where it really helps is the bottom line."

The Trailblazer program isn't just for smaller companies either. Heaviland says Dowell has also utilized the program and visited his company.

"I said, 'Well let's just make this a two-way street,'" Heaviland says. "We can look at each other's organizations and best practices, so I don't think you need to be the small company that's looking to improve and develop. There are guys like us, the Maurice Dowells of the world, that just want to get out and meet other people."

McCutcheon agrees that even larger companies can find value in the program and it is a good way to learn from each other.

#### **WHAT TO EXPECT**

Trailblazer site visits are typically just a day with the visiting company often coming in the night before to get acquainted with the Trailblazer

Lawnmasters, Inc. owners Jason and Amy Wynne, paid a visit to Trailblazer Jim McCutcheon's company HighGrove Partners and spent a day learning about their operations.

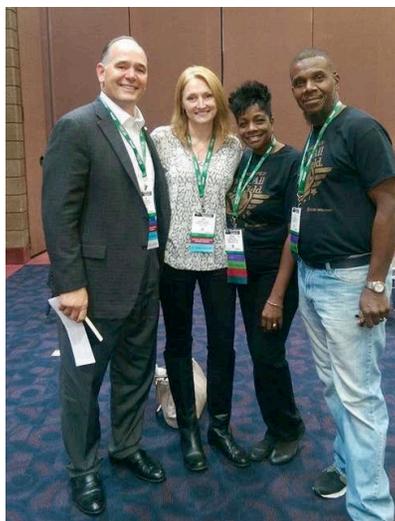
Photo: HighGrove Partners





(Above) HighGrove Partners and Lawnmasters, Inc. discuss operations. (Right) Jim McCutcheon and his wife Erin with Deborah and Ira Wade of Wade's Lawn Service.

Photos: HighGrove Partners



before spending the following day at their headquarters. Heaviland says he prefers to visit his mentee's headquarters but the program can work both ways with mentees visiting the Trailblazer's company as well.

"I want to meet their people," Heaviland says. "I want to see their operation firsthand. I want to be there in the morning when the crews get out. I want to meet their leadership team. I think it's more beneficial for me just to see firsthand."

McCutcheon says early on he would visit the mentee's operations, but he says he's found having folks visit HighGrove has had greater value over the last five or 10 years.

"Not only do I spend time with them, but they spend time with our head of sales, head of customer service, head of operations, so it's a much more well-rounded experience," he says.

Both McCutcheon and Heaviland say they request a fair amount of infor-

mation from the mentee to properly prepare. McCutcheon has a phone call with the mentee to find out what they are hoping to gain from the visit. He requests information such as three years of financials, an organization chart, an explanation of the company and their challenges so his team can be up to speed when the mentee arrives.

"I give them a laundry list of things that I'd like to see like financial statements and a sales and marketing plan, vehicles and equipment lineup, their people and their accounts," Heaviland says. "I like to get as much information as I can and then I spend a fair amount of time poring over it. I'll give the financials to my CFO and have her take a look and see if she sees anything. I really want to be prepared."

McCutcheon says he will provide the mentee with all the pieces of information they requested, and he encourages them to contact HighGrove if they have any other questions in the future. After the site visit, he says it's dependent upon the mentee to stay in touch.

For those thinking the Trailblazer program is similar to a peer group, Heaviland explains Trailblazers is more intimate and allows for one-on-one focus on certain areas your business may be struggling with.

"The Trailblazer side of it really allows a longer duration of focus on that particular company than one peer group meeting," McCutcheon says. "It's a way for them to let their guard down a little bit and understand what it means to share and be willing to be open because if you can't do those things in the Trailblazer environment you're not going to do well in a peer group."

#### MAKING THE MOST OUT OF THE PROGRAM

To make the most out of the program, make sure you understand what kind of company you want to be. While any Trailblazer may be able to help you to a degree, it's best to match with one that has the same company makeup you are trying to become.

"Really do your due diligence and look for that right mentor with the right scope that you're looking for," Heaviland says. "Don't be afraid to say maybe it's not a good fit on both ends, whether you're a mentor or mentee."

Wade advises when you do your site visit to listen and ask plenty of questions.

"You'll be amazed at what you come back with," Wade says. "Everybody I think needs to do a Trailblazer visit. Even the ones who are really developed in their company could still do a Trailblazer visit with someone else because you can always learn something. You never get to the place where you've just arrived, and you know everything. So, you can always learn, and you can always grow and you can always develop."

#### BECOMING A TRAILBLAZER

Heaviland has been a Trailblazer for at least 15 years now. He was mentored by Trailblazer Wayne Richards, former president and COO of Cagwin & Dorward, based in Novato, California.

"Wayne and I are still very close friends to this day," Heaviland says. "He was terrific. He was very forthcoming with information and always available. He's a great guy and very well-regarded and respected."

Heaviland says he felt like there were no secrets with Richards. He says his Trailblazer was generous with his time and sharing information.

"I've always tried to do that with the companies that I mentor," he says. "Whatever you need, whatever I have that I can share, it's yours. No need to recreate the wheel if you need job descriptions or a chart of accounts."

He says the program has been fun, rewarding and the biggest benefit is making lifelong friendships.

"I've been in the green industry almost 36 years and you never walk alone," Heaviland says. "There's always people along the way that have guided, mentored and helped me. I just have that pay it forward attitude."

McCutcheon says serving as a Trailblazer is wonderful and he learns a lot himself when working with mentees.

"While my business might be 10 times, 20 times or 30 times their size, and I can tell them a lot about the operations and sales, there's always things that as the mentor that you that you gain from this, not to mention the friendships," McCutcheon says.

"This probably some of the greatest investments of your time that you'll ever make," McCutcheon adds. "It will certainly pay off financially. I think everybody gains from this kind of relationship. It's really just a matter of having the courage to share." **TLP**

**Interested in being matched with a Trailblazer or becoming a Trailblazer? Go to [landscapeprofessionals.org/trailblazers](https://www.landscapemag.com/landscape-professionals.org/trailblazers) for more information.**

# Developing Your Team Through An Apprenticeship Program

By Jill Odom

## NALP'S APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM OFFERS JOB SEEKERS A PATH

to a new career through a paid apprenticeship with a landscape company that includes on-the-job training. The program, first introduced in February 2019, is now beginning to turn out and registered companies are beginning to have individuals complete their apprenticeship.

New Garden Landscaping & Nursery Inc, based in Greensboro, North Carolina, says they registered in the program to offer growth options for their employees. They offer the program to any employee who has been with the company for at least six months.

When they first introduced the program, New Garden says there was a lot of interest from employees, mixed with apprehension.

Belknap Landscape, based in Gilford, New Hampshire, had been searching for apprenticeship programs locally.

"Ultimately, having a successful program meant building it essentially from the ground up," says Mike Normandin, Belknap's apprenticeship mentor. "Once we learned of the NALP program and researched it, it was clear that it provided the platform and schedule that worked."

Belknap offers the apprenticeship to employees who express an interest in continuing to work in the field.

"I think most people were excited to hear it was being considered," Normandin says. "For the first round, we only offered to send one individual through, enabling us to get a feel for the program and decide who may benefit from future offerings."

## BENEFITS OF APPRENTICESHIP

Normandin says for the employee who is going through the program, it has brought a new level of conceptual understanding, critical thinking, problem-solving and overall direction on the jobsite.

"If they are frustrated with the experience level of employees or prospects, they owe it to themselves to try the program," Normandin says. "I'm 50 years old, I started landscaping when I was 10 because my father specialized in building housing developments. Most kids and young adults are not exposed to this type

of work. Where can they go to learn horticulture, to construct landscapes, irrigate or proper maintenance of landscaped areas? Our answer is NALP!"

He says the program allows for learning on both ends and he often engages with other employees during teaching moments with the apprentice.

"As a trainer for Belknap Landscape Company, I don't always have the time to go into detail regarding tasks," Normandin says. "However, with the apprenticeship program online learning modules, I find that the apprentice now has background knowledge in many areas, which leads to direct understanding of more complicated tasks. In other words, he knows before I even have to teach him."

"It allows employees to add skills from across the industry, making them more valuable to their employer," New Garden says. "It offers the company an opportunity to promote mentors, educators and raise awareness in their workforce that they want and need young enthusiastic employees to rise up."

Barbara White, flower program manager for New Garden and an apprentice in the program, says it trained her well and let her know what areas of the industry she is not interested in.

"The apprenticeship has given me the aptitude and skill to move seamlessly between departments and assist wherever needed," White says. "In that regard, I consider myself a success."

White says anyone in the program becomes an asset to the company they work for.

"They will know where to research information quickly and efficiently and will have a multitude of experts in various fields they can lean on as well," she says.

## ADVICE FOR OTHERS

New Garden says companies should



expect to struggle in the beginning.

"While the content is all laid out for you, it's up to each company to tailor it to their own specifications," New Garden says. "Take it slow, listen to what your apprentice discovers as they maneuver through the program's requirements. Assigning proper mentors is key."

Normandin says picking the right apprenticeship candidates is important as well.

"Make them own a part of the commitment and keep tabs on their classroom progress," he says. "Give them praise and encouragement during the process as milestones are met."

While they are still in the early stages of using the program, Normandin says they can see the positive effects of the program already.

"I can only imagine we will continue with it and I would like to see it (or a portion of it) as a required element of promotions, raises, etc.," he says. **TLP**

**Want to participate in the NALP Apprenticeship Program? Go to [landscapeapprenticeship.org](http://landscapeapprenticeship.org) for more information.**

# The Business Case for Certification

By Jill Odom

## IF YOU ARE SEEKING WAYS TO STAND OUT AS A HIGHLY-SKILLED

lawn and landscape company, consider investing in your team members' Landscape Industry Certified (LIC) credentials. NALP offers certification for six categories: business manager, exterior technician, interior technician, horticulture technician, lawn care manager and lawn care technician.

Shayne Newman, LIC, president of YardScapes Landscape Professionals, based in New Milton, Connecticut, says their entire team takes pride in their industry and strives to be the best landscape professionals they can be.

"Having our staff earn Landscape Industry Certification credentials is a way for us to stand out and prove that we are working hard to be the most highly trained and professional team as possible," Newman says.

Jeff True, VP of operations for Hursthouse, based in Bolingbrook, Illinois, says certification gives their team members a sense of achievement outside of the company's in-house training and it shows they take their craft seriously to become the best at what they do.

## BENEFITS OF A CERTIFIED STAFF

Joel Hafner, LIC, president of Fine Earth Landscape, Inc., based in

Poolesville, Maryland, says he pursues having a Landscape Industry Certified staff so he can become a Landscape Industry Accredited Company. Currently, he is seven employees away from reaching this designation.

Thanks to having a significant number of certified staff, Newman's company has earned the Landscape Industry Accredited Company title.

"Earning this designation is a mark of excellence at the company level, which has created a great sense of pride within our entire team," Newman says. "Being a Landscape Industry Accredited Company clearly sets our company apart from our competition."

Hafner says some of the main benefits of having a certified staff is being recognized as one of the industry leaders. He says their employees are better trained thanks to the certification. He says they also use their certification for marketing with customers, as there

are certain clients who prefer that they have certified staff.

Joe Lewis, LIC, account manager for Environmental Management Inc. (EMI), based in Plain City, Ohio, says certification helps add validity to this field as a skilled profession. EMI is also a Landscape Industry Accredited Company.

"If you're attracting talented people that are looking for a career, it shows that this industry, this profession, can be a career," Lewis says.

He says offering certification can attract highly-qualified people and retain them by providing them an opportunity to progress in their careers.

"We believe the best way to provide or to satisfy our clients' needs is through developing our people," Lewis says. "We believe clients are always the most important, they keep the lights on. But who's keeping the clients happy? It has to be a well-trained staff."

All four companies promote the fact their staff is Landscape Industry Certified as it helps with credibility.

"Our clients value their relationship with us because they can trust that our entire team is trained properly and that we take pride in always working hard

Offering certification can attract highly-qualified people and retain them by providing them an opportunity to progress in their careers.

Photo: Environmental Management Inc.



to become more educated landscape professionals,” Newman says. “Having certified employees on staff reassures our clients that they have made a wise decision to put their landscape in our care.”

### INCENTIVIZING CERTIFICATION

As for who should consider getting certified, True says it is optional for their staff but they encourage anyone who wants to put the time in.

“We encourage our crew leaders the most but keep it open to anyone who wants to take it on,” True says.

At Hursthouse, those who finish their certification receive additional pay. The company pays for all the associated fees and the training manual. True says they keep a copy of the training manual available at the office for anyone if they want to determine if they would like to become certified.

For YardScapes Landscape Professionals, Newman says they encourage anyone who has been on the team for longer than a year to work toward becoming certified.

“We require all managers and senior crew leaders to participate in the Landscape Industry Certification program,” Newman says. “In my opinion, it’s important that we all lead by example, having managers and crew leaders that have hold a designation of Landscape Industry Certified sets the bar for the rest of our team.”

The company splits the initial investment for the exam with the employee who commits to becoming certified.

“We feel that they should have something vested in the process, which helps encourage them to put the cor-

rect effort into preparation,” Newman says. “If they pass the exam, then we reimburse them the 50 percent that they invested.”

Those on the maintenance and construction crews for YardScapes are given raises when they pass the Common Core exam and an additional raise when they pass each of the separate specialty exams. Becoming certified also makes crew members eligible for promotion to a management position in the company.

For Fine Earth, certification is an option but Hafner expects all his foremen to be certified. Those who do get certified receive a dollar increase to their wages.

“If they get certified today, we’ll give them \$1 tomorrow,” Hafner says. “I think that’s important on an hourly basis and I think it sets them apart from their peers. I won’t move anybody into management that is not certified. So, if they want to move up through the ranks of our company, they have to get their certifications.”

He says he doesn’t approach employees about getting certified until they have two years of experience. Fine Earth pays for the certification fees, but the employee must finish the course, pass or fail. Otherwise, if they do not finish their certification test, they have to pay the company back.

Hafner says some of the work is on the employees if they’re truly interested in getting their certifications and you need to hold them accountable. Fine Earth provides 15-20 hours of in-house training as well.

At EMI, they require their mid-level managers to be Landscape Industry Certified. Lewis says those who get certified are paid a \$500 bonus upfront and they are also added to the company’s wall of fame. Lewis says certification is a force multiplier.

“Nobody takes the test, passes it, and then they just put their head down and go to work,” he says. “They’re excited to tell one they got \$500 in their pocket, but two their name is on the wall, and they’re talking about it. Now they feel like an expert.”

As for who takes the exam, Lewis says they often have people volunteer or ask for more information about certification, and managers can recommend people as well. EMI pays for the test and the study materials so they conduct an interview to determine

“I think there’s much more to owning a landscape company than just having a pickup truck and shovel. There’s much more education than what the industry gets credit for. **That’s why we need certification because we need to be recognized as the industry leaders.**” -

Joel Hafner, LIC, president of Fine Earth Landscape, Inc.

if the employee is meeting standards or exceeding them and if they’re knowledgeable about the necessary proficiencies.

If they can tell the employee has a high propensity to pass, they will be provided the study materials for the test.

“If it’s a no, it’s a not yet,” Lewis says. “We share here’s what it will take to get there and here’s the time frame. It’s still a win-win because even if they’re not ready yet, you’re still showing that engagement of when they will be ready and what will it take.”

Hafner encourages owners to consider becoming certified as well.

“I think there’s much more to owning a landscape company than just having a pickup truck and shovel,” Hafner says. “There’s much more education than what the industry gets credit for. That’s why we need certification because we need to be recognized as the industry leaders.”

### INVEST IN YOUR EMPLOYEES

A common fear that can prevent companies from pursuing certification is the possibility of your newly certified employees leaving. Businesses that use the program say they’ve never had this concern.

“I would tell them that they are crazy,” Newman says. “The Landscape Industry Certified program is an excellent tool to help educate and train your team. Untrained and/or undereducated staff can lead to inefficient and inferior quality work which will cost more in the end. Underqualified employees can also lead to concerns of safety which may put fellow team members at risk, which is an extremely important point to consider.”

True says they believe in supporting their team members to be the best they can be.

“This will allow them to best serve our clients, grow themselves and they have an appreciation of our investment



**Superior Results.**

**Local Pride.**



Employees at EMI who get certified have their name added to the company's wall of fame.

Photo: Environmental Management Inc.

into our families that they don't want to leave," True says. "We have extremely high retention for the last 30 years in business. Take care of the people that take care of you."

For those concerned about investing time and money in their employees only for them to leave, Lewis asks why would someone leave a company that's investing in their future and creating an atmosphere where they can share their expertise and be an active influencer within the culture of a company.

"Instead of thinking, why would you spend this money and they leave, think about what if you spend this money and they stay," Lewis says. "Don't have a defeatist mentality. Talent costs money, plain and simple in any industry. Ours is not excluded from that. If you invest in your people, they will stay."

EMI says they have close to a 90 percent retention rate and their certified employees don't leave unless they are starting their own company.

Hafner also pays to put his employees through college so he says he has no fear in investing in his employees. He says it's important to do what's best for your business today.

"I only focus on today," Hafner says. "I don't worry about tomorrow. If employees are leaving companies, I think there's probably some other

cultural issue that's involved for the reason for leaving. It's not going to be because of whether you certified them or not and they got a better opportunity somewhere else. I would think if your employees are leaving you, it's because there's some culture that you don't provide for them that they're finding elsewhere."

Hafner says 90 percent of the employees who have left Fine Earth end up coming back.

"I don't think any penny that I've spent on certification is lost revenue," Hafner says. "I think I've benefited from first the employees getting the certification, second, their peers saying that they wanted to get that and third we have these qualified people on staff that promote and educate the other employees in our business. I think all of that stuff is important. I don't think any of that is a bad investment."

#### COMPANY GROWTH

All four companies say they have experienced growth since participating in the certification program. Newman says his company has been using it for over 15 years and he credits the program for helping them become the most highly trained landscape professionals in their market.

"We have had a terrific growth

period in terms of volume, hiring and experience and expertise of our crew members," True says. "Certification has certainly played a role in that"

"We've been growing close to double digits each year," Lewis says. "It's hard to grow when you don't have the leadership in place to handle it. Typically, you have a lot of people coming in who are entry-level. It's great to bring in that hungry talent, but if you don't have enough leaders and managers, then it can unravel rapidly. So, with having this certification, it helps stabilize that growth. It enables us to grow by putting those certified people in positions of leadership."

Hafner says when he got involved with certification they had 24-25 employees and now Fine Earth has 90 employees. He believes that if every NALP member company gets involved with certification it can really make a difference in the industry.

"I'd like to see a concerted effort to get critical mass in certification," Hafner says. "I think it's so important. I really do believe that we should share the benefit from the education level that we put in to give our clients the best end product. I think the guy with the pickup truck and the shovel is bad for our industry and I think certification sets us apart from that." **TLP**

▼  
For more information on certification go to [landscapeprofessionals.org/certification](http://landscapeprofessionals.org/certification).

# How to Assess the Impact of a Workplace Injury vs Profitability

By Drew Garcia, VP of Rancho Mesa

## LAWN AND LANDSCAPE

business owners actively look for opportunities to improve business operations. When it comes to evaluating the safety program, a challenge most companies have faced is quantifying the true impact of a workplace injury or illness.

OSHA released their “Safety Pays” application to bridge direct and indirect workplace injury cost vs the company’s profit margin.

Direct cost values the dollar amount incurred to pay for the medical treatment, temporary or permanent disability and expense of an injury.

Indirect cost includes:

- Any wages paid to injured workers for absences not covered by workers’ compensation;
- The wage costs related to time lost through work stoppage associated with the worker injury;
- The overtime costs necessitated by the injury;
- Administrative time spent by supervisors, safety personnel, and clerical workers after an injury;
- Training costs for a replacement worker;
- Lost productivity related to work rescheduling, new employee learning curves, and accommo-

ation of injured employees; and

- Clean-up, repair, and replacement costs of damaged material, machinery, and property.

With this tool, OSHA has been able to allocate a value for indirect cost by assigning a multiplier to either the value of the direct cost or specific type of injury.

Based on the information entered into the application, businesses can see the amount of additional sales they will need to generate in order to off-set the expense.

OSHA also indicates that there are other indirect costs that are not included in the calculation, some examples would be.

- The costs of OSHA fines and any associated legal action;
- Third-party liability and legal costs;
- Worker pain and suffering; and
- Loss of good will from bad publicity.

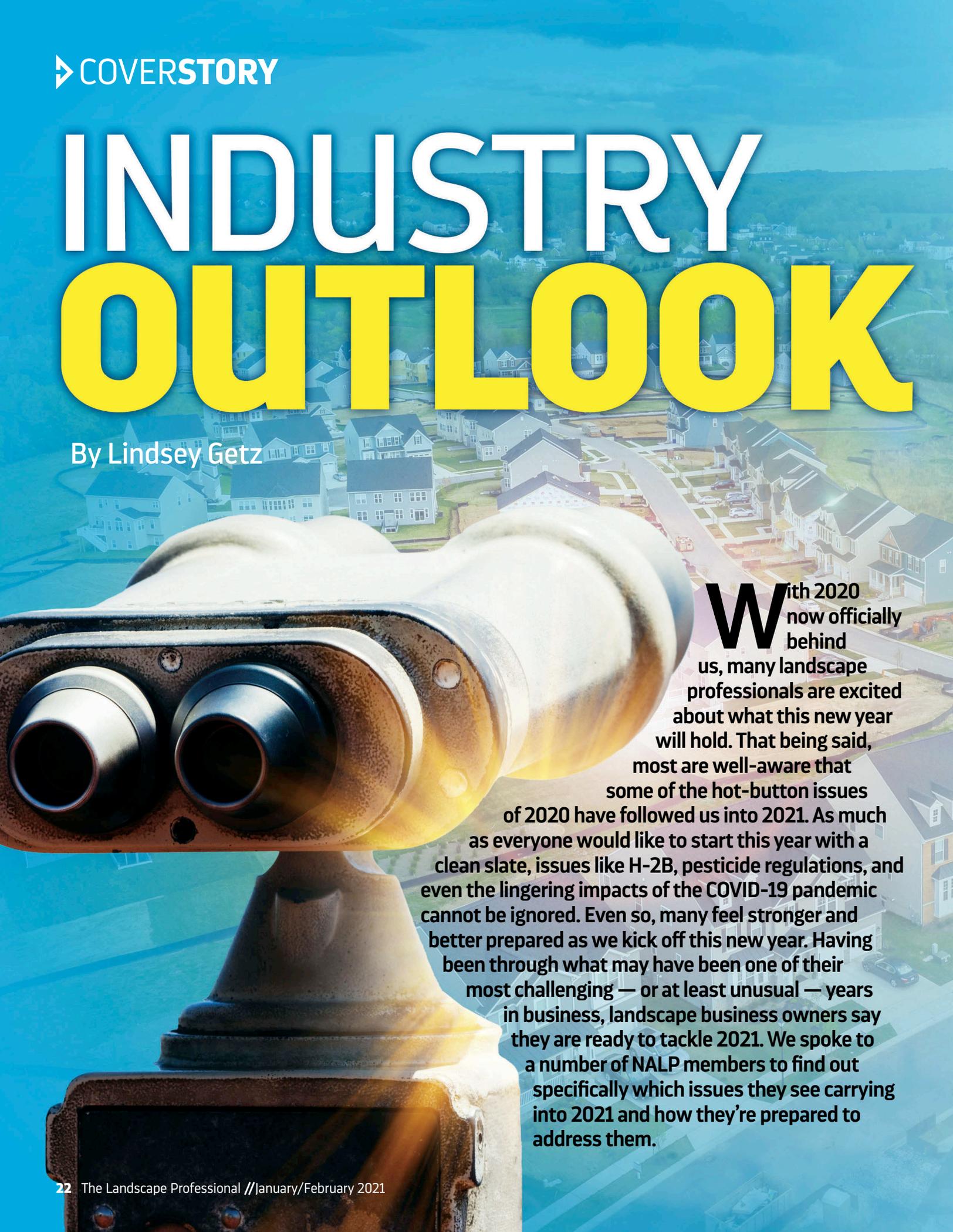
Through NALP’s Safe Company Program, lawn and landscape companies have access to weekly safety training topics, a customizable Safe Company Program, a Safety Benchmarking Report and more. These tools can be used to help improve your companies’ safety practices and lower your total cost of risk. **TLP**

NALP SAFETY PROGRAM PARTNER:

# RANCHO MESA

# INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

By Lindsey Getz



**W**ith 2020 now officially behind us, many landscape professionals are excited about what this new year will hold. That being said, most are well-aware that some of the hot-button issues of 2020 have followed us into 2021. As much as everyone would like to start this year with a clean slate, issues like H-2B, pesticide regulations, and even the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be ignored. Even so, many feel stronger and better prepared as we kick off this new year. Having been through what may have been one of their most challenging — or at least unusual — years in business, landscape business owners say they are ready to tackle 2021. We spoke to a number of NALP members to find out specifically which issues they see carrying into 2021 and how they're prepared to address them.

## ▶ COVID-19

Like us, we're sure you're likely tired of talking about the pandemic. But there's no denying it has been an unprecedented, historical event that impacted many businesses. Fortunately for our industry, with landscape businesses being deemed essential early on, many were able to keep working through the worst of it. Even so, cutbacks in commercial spending meant those servicing certain markets — particularly hospitality and retail — took a hit.

Bob Grover, LIC, president of Pacific Landscape Management in Portland, Oregon, says that the impact of COVID-19 remains an unknown for this year.

"There is great hope that a vaccine will put COVID-19 behind us, but I believe it will take time, and the economic impact to-date will have a long-lasting impact on the general business climate in the United States and the world," he admits.

But through difficult times come invaluable lessons and many say they've come out stronger on the other side. Doug McDuff, president and co-owner of Landscape America in Wrentham, Massachusetts, is among them.

"The pandemic — and our strict adherence to guidelines such as wearing masks and social distancing — has created difficulties in communication lines between management and crew members, but I am proud of the way our team reacted and continued to build on our strong culture," he says. "We have used videos and newsletters to communicate our open-book management updates and provide other messaging. We were also able to conduct our stretch and flex outdoor sessions each morning while still socially distancing, until our governor enforced new guidelines reducing outdoor gatherings to 25 people. We also utilized our employee Facebook group to engage with the entire team."

McDuff says that the need to alter typical communication practices has led managers to checking in even more often with the team and ensuring everyone is staying engaged.

"I feel our organization is actually stronger both in culture and in talent than we were in February, before the pandemic," he says.

Jennifer Lemcke, LIC, chief executive officer of Weed Man Lawn Care, headquartered in Oshawa, Ontario, says

that the pandemic has presented an opportunity for businesses to incorporate technology that perhaps they'd dragged their feet on in the past. She says that going forward, this could create lasting change.

"We launched 'buy online' opportunities last year and some customers liked the no-human-interaction approach to buying lawn care," she says. "So, looking to the future businesses might think about how that could change their business model."

The same is true of hiring, Lemcke says. Will interviews need to take place on Zoom? What will onboarding look like if we continue to be faced with the challenges of the pandemic in 2021? The good news, Lemcke says, is that business owners are better prepared than they were in 2020.

"For many of us, the pandemic has been the push to fully integrate technology the way we've talked about for a long time," she adds. "That's one positive to have come from all of this."

## ▶ THE H-2B PROGRAM

In addition to dealing with the pandemic, many landscape business owners also had to face the difficult reality that their H-2B workers were not coming through this past year. For Shayne Newman, LIC, founder and president of YardScapes Landscape Professionals, in New Milford, Connecticut, this was a challenge. He says many of the workers had been coming to work for YardScapes Landscape Professionals for more than 10 years — and losing them was difficult for everyone.

"I'm so supportive of this program and will continue to fight for it," Newman says. "These are people who choose to come here and want to work — and they're messaging me and asking if they'll be able to come next year. It's so difficult when it is fully out of our control."

Newman only sees continued challenges for the program ahead as he admits it is difficult to argue it's a necessity when so many Americans are unemployed right now.

"It does seem crazy that with our unemployment rate we still struggle with labor so much, but the fact is that intensive labor is not something most

people are interested in," Newman says. "As a result, we continue to look at ways that we might be able to attract new people. Right now, we're looking closely at the hospitality and restaurant industries, which are suffering from the pandemic. How do we entice those people that this is an industry for them? For people to really thrive in our industry, they do need to love to be outside and that's not for everyone. But for the right person, it can be a great opportunity."

On the other end of the country, Grover is equally as worried about H-2B.

"It's going to be another tough year for it as it has been lost in the immigration controversy in Washington," he says. "I believe there will be H-2B visas this year, but significantly less than we need. Some in Congress believe there shouldn't be an H-2B program during the pandemic because of the high unemployment. However, our experience was that it was harder to hire seasonal workers this past year than in previous years even with the higher unemployment. Those who are unemployed are not seeking work in the landscape industry."

Joseph Barnes, marketing director for Yellowstone Landscape, headquartered in Bunnell, Florida, but with locations across the country, says that H-2B impacts many of the company's branches.

"At Yellowstone, we've been passionate advocates for reform in the H-2B program for the better part of the last decade," Barnes says. "It's been extremely frustrating to watch the program be turned into a political football over the past five years, as it's been pulled into the larger debate about the need for comprehensive immigration reform. Personally, I've met with dozens of Congressmen and Congresswomen who understand the great need for a dependable and well-vetted guest worker program, but refuse to publicly support reforming the H-2B program, for fear of what some of their constituents may say about them. As we look ahead to a new Congress in 2021, we look forward to the opportunity to educate newly appointed members on the deep need for reform in the H-2B program, while cautiously optimistic that we'll be able to bring meaningful legislation to the floor that makes the program a more reliable source to meet our industry's seasonal labor challenges."

## ► ECO-FRIENDLY PRACTICES

As we move forward in 2021, many landscape business owners see eco-friendly practices as a hot-topic industry issue. Claire Goldman, principal and head of design and business development for R&R Landscaping in Auburn, Alabama, says that being a good steward of the environment is a responsibility of landscape professionals and it's important to continue to look at ways that can be achieved.

"We are actively making changes where we can," she says. "We have an overarching theme of sustainability for 2021 that includes initiatives for tree plantings, pollinator gardens, water usage, and being more proactive about reducing our waste. Environmental changes often feel so overwhelming it's easy to feel like you aren't really making a difference with small, incremental steps. However, when you compound each of those small steps together, you make a big change."

Eco-friendly practices have been on the radar for Terra Phelps, "the handler" at Utopian Landscapes, LLC, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for a long time.

"This is essential to so many facets of our industry," she says. "It will help us grow by gaining deeper roots and branching out. All of the other industries are already on it — lightbulbs, paper products, flooring, cosmetics, and the list goes on."

Eco-friendly landscaping is important to today's major market of consumers, Phelps adds. After all, she says this is the generation "raised on recycling and organic food." As a result, their values need to start flourishing in our industry as it has in others.

Weed Man's Lemcke says that the company has always been focused on integrated pest management (IPM). Now, they are in the midst of testing robotic mowers.

"We are currently testing in three markets — Atlanta, Madison, and Columbus — and we're keeping a close watch on the future of lawn cutting," she says.

Robotics have also been of interest to Yellowstone Landscape.

"We have been watching closely as several firms have jumped into the race to develop a commercial-grade, autonomous mowing solution," Barnes says. "We're currently in varied levels of testing and discussions with many of these firms and see great promise in the work that some of them are doing. For now, we're still keeping our expectations closely grounded, but can see the possibility of some of this technology moving out of testing and into regular production within the next 12 to 24 months, for certain segments of client properties we serve. Our hope is that as more of the technology transitions off the testing fields and into real-world use, it will only improve more quickly and become more robust and feature rich."

Of course, the interest in eco-friend-

ly practices can vary from market to market. Grover says that in the West, which is already known to be more environmentally aware, this movement only continues to increase.

"Some in the landscape industry are afraid of this movement but I believe the industry needs to be a part of the solution as opposed to afraid of change," he says. "I am a strong advocate of water conservation, reduced pesticide and fertilizer use, reduced emissions, and many other environmental initiatives. However, I do not believe that we need increased regulation and I challenge our industry to make the improvements from the inside as opposed to ignore the change and allow regulation to negatively impact us. We can fix ourselves from the inside to achieve the objective of lowering the impact to the environment."

## ► PESTICIDE REGULATIONS

Pesticide regulations were amongst our industry's hottest topics in the past few years. But labor shortages and the pandemic have made it a less talked about issue. However, it certainly has not gone away.

"It seems as though some of the emphasis on pesticide regulations have taken a backseat during the COVID-19 pandemic and election this year," McDuff says. "I anticipate this will pick up after Q2 of 2021, once the vaccine

This year Landscape America conducted their stretch and flex outdoor sessions each morning while still socially distancing, until their governor enforced new guidelines reducing outdoor gatherings to 25 people.

Photo: Landscape America



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## Attack Success

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“Changes will start to happen as we become accountable for the values that we set in motion in 2020,”

- Terra Phelps, Utopian Landscapes

has been distributed and local governments refocus.”

McDuff says that in addition to pesticide regulation, on the legislative front, he also sees salt usage and snow contract indemnification clauses to be an issue. There is currently a pending bill in Massachusetts.

Weed Man’s Lemcke says that this is an issue where more lawn and landscape industry voices need to be heard.

“I think we need to do a better job of being proactive in our segment of the industry,” she says. “We are currently working and having a lot of conversations with TruGreen, Spring-Green, Lawn Doctor, and some other large lawn care organizations. I do think being part of the franchise system we can help with the narrative and identify the people who are being good stewards, which is not just good for our brand but for our industry.”

## ▷ SUPPLIER OUTLOOK

From the supplier side, manufacturers are cautiously optimistic for what this year will hold. Per Kvarby, global director, product management – wheeled category – at Husqvarna Group, says that from a market perspective, the fact that the landscaping industry held strong through the worst of the pandemic gives them optimism for 2021.

“We fully expect business to continue forward as it did in 2020,” he says. “Of course, the measures that the new government implement – what they rule federally – will have an impact on the supplier side. Safety is the main concern – at Husqvarna, the safety of everyone is of extreme importance. With that in mind, reduced production capabilities are something that definitely worries us. There’s always the concern about being able to supply

enough product while also meeting the social distancing requirements at production facilities. This goes for equipment manufactured in the United States but for imports, as well. There are restrictions globally, too.”

Kvarby calls these “uncharted grounds” and says that we must all proceed with caution.

“I think the fact that landscaping is considered essential work is a huge positive that we have going for us,” he says. “But the fact that the work is there does not mean there are no complications. Up until this point, labor has been the industry’s biggest challenge. Now it’s possible that equipment could pose new challenges, as well. I think it’s important that landscape business owners pay close attention to what’s going on and make decisions accordingly.”

“There is no denying 2020 was an extraordinary year and we all have to be prepared for more uncertainty in the year to come,” says Bjoern Fischer, president of STIHL. “However, while there are many things we don’t know, at STIHL we do know that we will continue to stay the course and remain focused on quality production, logistics and service to ensure that we support STIHL Dealers, and their customers, to the best of our ability.”

STIHL says they plan to strengthen their supply chain and expand and modernize several of their branch operations.

“We are delivering new technologies to the market – launching a new line of high-tech professional STIHL battery products, in addition to expanding our gas and battery product range for both professionals and homeowners,” Fischer says. “Our goal is to ensure that essential services, like arborists, landscapers and first responders will be able to continue their critical work in our communities and keep this country running.”

## ▷ DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Utopian’s Phelps says that diversity and inclusion were hot-topic issues in 2020 and remains something their company is committed to keeping on their radar.

“Changes will start to happen as we

become accountable for the values that we set in motion in 2020,” she says.

Phelps says there is also a need for more industry acceptance and support for the LGBTQ community as well.

## ▷ 2021: WE GOT THIS

Although there are industry concerns that we wish wouldn’t have followed us into 2021, overall, the consensus is that landscape business owners have a better grasp on what it will take to have a good year.

McDuff says that his best advice for 2021 would be to communicate consistently (even if not in-person), budget conservatively, and hire from other industries that have laid off as a result of the pandemic.

“Also, stay engaged with state and national associations for updates, legislative help and opportunities to network remotely,” he says. “Stay close to your customers, survey them, ask for feedback, and be a resource for those who are feeling the pains from the pandemic and economy.”

Goldman says that R&R Landscaping remains cautiously optimistic.

“Our focus for this year will be to chip away at the indirect hours and continue to streamline inefficiencies,” she says. “Our intention is to be laser-focused on our ideal client and ideal team members, celebrate the wins when they come, and learn from the losses.”

YardScapes’ Newman says that there’s no denying 2021 will come with its own struggles – or perhaps continuations of struggles that started last year. But he, too, is positive in his outlook.

“I feel optimistic about our industry,” he says. “So many of our clients have gained an even greater appreciation for outdoor spaces – and the work that we do – and we’ve been just as busy with sales. I’m appreciative and grateful for that, and I think it will continue. People are spending more time outdoors than ever. As far as what the year holds, I like to think that we’ve been through the worst but at the very least, we’ve learned a lot and we’re ready to tackle 2021. We have to keep moving forward and learn as we go.” TLP

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The Women in Landscape Network champions female representation and advancement in the landscape and lawn care industry. The network connects and empowers members through many channels, including various networking events, and provides the opportunity to engage with professionals across the US and Canada. Be part of the conversation—join the Facebook group.

 [www.facebook.com/groups/womeninlandscape](http://www.facebook.com/groups/womeninlandscape)

## Young Professionals Network

Acknowledging the unique interests of the young professional community (under 40) within NALP, the Young Professionals Network provides a platform to connect, share experiences, and exchange ideas with peers nationwide. Join the Facebook group and subscribe to the “Growing in the Green Industry” podcast!

 [www.facebook.com/groups/NALPYP](http://www.facebook.com/groups/NALPYP)

## Latino Landscape Network

The Latino Landscape Network (formerly NHLA), connects Latino landscape professionals across the nation with training, resources, and networking opportunities. We advocate for the nearly 500,000 Latino landscape professionals with elected officials at the State, local, and Federal Levels. Engage with the community and join the Facebook group.

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# 117th Congress & the Landscape Industry



By Andrew Bray  
VP, Government Relations

This article was written on Dec. 11 prior to final results from key races in the U.S. House and Senate. Please contact Andrew Bray for updates.

## THE 117TH CONGRESS WILL BE SWORN IN ON JAN. 3,

2021. The Democrats will retain a majority in the House of Representatives but not until Jan. 5 (or possibly several days later) will we know which party will control the majority in the Senate depending on the outcome of the special run-off elections in Georgia. Below we detail dynamics we anticipate in both chambers during the 117th.

### U.S. SENATE

The proverbial blue wave never materialized in the Senate. Heading into the elections Democrats were only defending a handful of competitive races while Republicans were defending nearly 10 competitive seats. Democrats only needed to net three seats and win the White House, which looked likely by polling data, but in the end, several states reelected their embattled Republican Senators. Key pick-ups for Democrats include Arizona and Colorado where Mark Kelly and John Hickenlooper won their states respectively, but Democrats were unable to flip Sen. Ernst (R-IA), Sen. Collins (R-ME) and Sen. Tillis (R-NC). This has led to a 50 – 48 Republican majority, with two special elections pending in

Georgia. Democrats need to win both races to get to a 50 – 50 tie which would make Vice-President Elect Harris the deciding vote in favor of the Democrats as the Vice President per the Constitution presides over the Senate and is the tie-breaking vote.

By the time this article has published the balance of power in the Senate should be resolved, but I do want to state that having two special election Senate races, happening in the same state, that state being very close in the Presidential race with the balance of power of the U.S. Senate hanging on the results is quite unprecedented, to put it mildly.

If the Republicans win the majority, the Senate will likely serve as a firewall to extreme legislation (ahem...Udall/Neguse Anti-Pes-

ticide Bill) that will come out of the Democratic-controlled House, which is good for the landscape industry. But, the Senate could also serve as obstructionists to any of President Biden's key initiatives and we could remain in a political quagmire for the next two years, which isn't as positive for the landscape industry. Hopefully, if the Republicans retain the majority President-Elect Biden will be able to work with several of his old colleagues and friends to find some common ground on COVID-19 relief and infrastructure.

If the Democrats win the two special runoffs and reach a tie the Democrats will control the White House and both Chambers of Congress. Heading into the election there were talks that if this happened the filibuster would be abolished, the Electoral College will go, an additional 4 – 5 Democratic nominated Justices would be added to the Supreme Court and Puerto Rick and Washington D.C. would become states adding four likely Democrat Senators

to increase their hold on the majority. At this point, we don't believe these extreme scenarios to play out. It takes just one Democratic Senator to side with the Republicans and the Vice President's vote no longer matters because 51-49 provides no tie to break. Sen. Manchin (WV-D) has already signaled he would not vote with his party on extreme proposals. In this scenario, you could see moderate and centrist Senators coalesce around key Biden initiatives on COVID-19, immigration, health care and climate change.

Regardless of who wins the Georgia run-off, there will be challenges and opportunities with the U.S. Senate during the 117th Congress. There are no changes expected in the leadership of either of the Republican or Democrat parties with Senators McConnell (KY-R) and Thune (SD-R) remaining numbers one and two for the Republicans and Senators Schumer (NY-D) and Durbin (IL-D) the same for the Democrats.

#### U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Similar to the Senate elections, the Democrat blue wave never materialized in the House and the Democrats actually lost most of their competitive races. The Democrats now hold a 222 – 207 majority (6 races pending all expected to go Republican). 218 votes are needed to pass legislation in the House and the Speaker is likely only going to have 4 to 5 votes to spare. Going into the elections Democrats held a 36 seat majority which gave Speaker Pelosi the ability to pass anything without bipartisan support and in many cases could allow moderate Democrats to vote against the party line vote and still pass the legislation.

A small majority like this is

likely a good thing for getting things done in the next Congress.

If the Democrats and Speaker want to pass legislation they will need to find a compromise with moderate Republicans because moderate legislation that could actually pass the Senate will likely not receive support from the far left wing of the Democratic party (which is more than 4 – 5 votes). A centrist bipartisan group of legislators known as the Problem Solvers Caucus is already emerging as a powerful force in the next Congress. In December, the Problem Solvers worked with centrist Senators to put forth a bipartisan COVID-19 relief package that was eventually endorsed by Democratic leadership in the House and the Senate.

While optimistic that moderate legislation that would help the landscape industry will emerge during the 117th Congress we will still see our fair share of harmful legislation be introduced and possibly even pass the House but later die in the Senate.

Leadership in the House is not expected to change while Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Hoyer are expected to remain one and two for the Democrats and Minority Leader McCarthy and Rep. Scalise will be the same for the Republicans. It is likely that Speaker Pelosi will be challenged for the top spot but early reports indicate that she will cut a deal with Republicans within the Problem Solvers Caucus to mitigate defections from the far left wing of the party. It is also important to note that it is likely that Speaker Pelosi (the first female Speaker in our nation's history) will resign as leader of the party after this final two-year term to make way for younger members to step up into leadership. It's also very likely the Republicans regain control of the House in 2022; a seemingly predictable

tradition that the House flips away from the sitting President's party during mid-term elections during their first term.

#### SO WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN FOR THE LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY?

As stated earlier there will be opportunities and challenges with this Congress. From an H-2B perspective, we were making significant strides prior to COVID-19 derailing all efforts to reform guest worker programs due to economic conditions. There remains a solid and growing group of H-2B champions in the House and the Senate and we will need to push them early in this Congress to act. There is also a possibility that immigration reform finally moves forward. If that happens we are well-positioned to get something on cap relief in exchange for some integrity measures to prevent bad actors from using the program and/or harming foreign and domestic workers.

From a lawn care perspective, I think we will have some serious education to conduct concerning how our industry uses products and the benefits we provide. Considering climate change will likely move there should be a tremendous opportunity to highlight how properly maintained greenspaces help combat climate change through carbon dioxide sequestration, water purification and cooling the planet.

There will certainly be other issues that impact the industry including more COVID-19 relief, infrastructure, health care and taxes and NALP will continue to be hyper-vigilant and engaged on behalf of the industry.

What we do need from you is your engagement. Please stand prepared to participate in grassroots alerts and a 2021 virtual legislative day, details to be released soon. **TLP**



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# How to Take Advantage of New Plant Material

By Jill Odom

Bailey's Gardens & Landscaping recently started using the geranium Rozanne in their projects. Although it first debuted in 2000 it has recently seen increased adoption in Europe.

Photo: Courtesy of Proven Winners

## PLANT BREEDERS ARE

constantly introducing new plant cultivars with a variety of desirable traits such as disease resistance, low water requirements, growth habits and color. A new year marks a new batch of plant material for you to check out. Here's how some companies go about implementing new plant material in their landscape designs.

## WHEN TO USE NEW PLANT MATERIAL

For Daria Paxton, owner and founder of Gaia Gardens, based in Montclair, New Jersey, the new features of the plant are the driving factor of whether she will use it in her designs right away.

"Sometimes it's a more southern plant like a 'hardy' gardenia that we haven't been able to grow here, or extended bloom time, like encore azaleas," Paxton says. "Often I try out new varieties for

particular colors. But the two most common reasons for me to try a new variety of plant are disease resistance and growth habit. All aesthetics aside, I need the plants to be healthy and suitable for the space in which they are planted."

She says if the new traits are disease resistance, dwarf size, or fragrance related, she will work with them right away. Cold resistance and new colors she will wait and see how stable the new variety is. Paxton says she usually has a good experience with new plant material, but she strives to be aware of the weakness of the plants and find micro-climates for them, or she will err on the side of caution and wait.

"How long I wait depends on the feedback I get from the industry and my own knowledge of a species," Paxton says. "In general, I want to see a plant make it through whatever limit it is pushing, i.e. drought or cold tolerance, for at least two years."

At Bailey's Gardens & Landscaping, based in Charles Town, West Virginia, founder Arthur Ebeling Jr. says they are always vigilant for new and interesting plants.

"Often, it is compelled by the project requirements where we may design for certain needs that may include the use of unique plant material or specimens," Ebeling says. "That said, we are passionate about horticulture and embrace an avante-garde approach, always eager to innovate, originating unique spaces and designs."

He says for them, new plant material might be something they simply haven't incorporated in previous work. For instance, the geranium Rozanne debuted in 2000, but they've only started using this plant over the past few years in their commercial and residential projects.

"My research led me to discover this hardy geranium's many merits, including its free-flowering and lengthy bloom period, offering a wide-spreading display from late spring to mid-fall," Ebeling says. "I also discovered that it had been enjoying increased adoption in various parts of Europe. I try to keep my eye on happenings abroad. There may be an exciting new plant enjoying newfound popularity in the U.K., for instance."

Ebeling says generally they've had positive experiences with new plant material, but there is always some risk when using unfamiliar plants.

"This can be mitigated by performing proper research and exercising discre-

tion when selecting plants for projects," he says. "It is critical to understand the needs of the site as well as the needs of the customer and their appetite for maintenance and care."

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Part of the due diligence when selecting new plant material is to do your research. Paxton says she always looks at the reviews on new plant material. She also seeks advice from growers and nursery professionals who are working with new material before it goes to market.

"It is important to understand the behavior of the plant and its benefits to both validate its use in a project as well as communicate it to the customer," Ebeling says. "Assessing reviews, awards and accolades certainly engenders trust in new plant applications."

Ebeling says unique characteristics such as longer bloom times, faster growth rates or the visual interest the plant offers are some of the reasons he would consider using new plant material. Paxton says she looks for new plants with better disease resistance and resilience to the fluctuating weather conditions, as well as particular growth habits for urban-suburban yards.

## COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS

Once you have decided to install new plant material, Paxton and Ebeling both advise discussing with your client that you are trying out a new variety.

"It imparts to the customer that we do regard innovation and that we are giving them something special," Ebeling says. "Some customers are apathetic to horticulture, others more enthusiastic and there are even some that are quite erudite. Again, it is important to emphasize – know the customer and their needs. This will help inform plant selection."

Paxton says she has some clients who do a lot of research online and request the new varieties upfront, while others want more interesting uncommon plants, so these customers are more likely to get the new varieties.

"I am very picky about finding the right plants to suit different locations, uses and aesthetics," Paxton says. "Since the process is a puzzle to me, I get excited about finding the right pieces and sometimes those are new. I enjoy sharing with clients how plants are developed and why and why each choice makes sense." **TLP**



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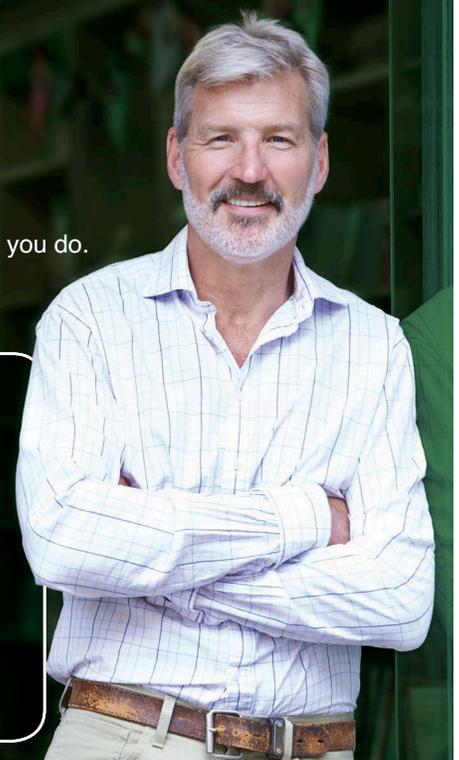
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Company	City	State
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A Sharper Image Landscaping	Commerce City	CO
Adame Landscape, Inc.	Murrieta	CA
AIMM Systems	Sun Valley	CA
Alpha Lawn and Landscape, LLC	Sparks	NV
Austin Lawn Services	Del Valle	TX
Bailey's Gardens & Landscaping, Inc.	Charles Town	WV
Beacon Pest Control	Hoquiam	WA
BJJC Cabezon, LLC	Albuquerque	NM
Buffalo Center for Arts & Technology	Buffalo	NY
California Landscape Services, Inc.	Manteca	CA
Canyon Landscaping, LLC	Richmond	VA
Castro Family Landscaping, LLC	Austin	TX
City of Aurora Parks	Aurora	CO
Coldwater Landscapes, LLC	Muscle Shoals	AL
Concord Tree & Landscape	Acton	MA
Cornerstone Landscape Care, Inc.	Santa Ana	CA
Creative Landscapes, LTD	Fairview Heights	IL
Dominion Quality Landscaping	Midlothian	VA
Ecologic Lawn & Landscape	Pearl River	NY
Electric Sheep Robotics, Inc.	Pleasanton	CA
Enviro Views, Inc.	Richmond	CA
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GBC Grounds Care	East Hampton	NY
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Green Pastures, LLC	Conway	SC
Greenscapes, LLC	Yona	GU
Heritage Landscape Supply Group, Inc.	McKinney	TX
Holmes Landscape Co.	Oceanside	CA
Hortia, LLC	Oklahoma City	OK
J&D Landscapes, LLC	Burton	OH
Jackaroo Landscape	White Oak	TX
Jay-Crew	Muncie	IN
JC Lawn and Gardens	New Orleans	LA

Company	City	State
Jerry Kempenski Landscapes	Spring	TX
Joe's Jr. Services, LLC	CHICAGO	IL
John David, LLC	Cromwell	CT
LawnBoy Lawn Services	Leesburg	VA
Lifescape Custom Landscaping, Inc.	Morgan Hill	CA
Lytx	San Diego	CA
Mangold Horticulture	Excelsior	MN
McMillan Landscaping Services, LLC	Louisville	KY
Millhaven Landscapes	Lindon	UT
Northern Exposures Landscaping, LLC	Houghton Lake	MI
Oasis Urban Gardening, LLC	Vienna	VA
Podium	Lehi	UT
Positec USA, Inc.	Charlotte	NC
Property Worx, LLC	Delaware	OH
RC Mowers	Suamico	WI
RGS Landscape, Inc.	Dallas	GA
Rockwell Earthworks, LLC	Ada	MI
Rogers Landscape	Rocklin	CA
Roof Meadow Services, Inc.	Philadelphia	PA
Select Property Services	Plymouth	WI
SiteRecon	St. Johns	FL
SlatTrax	Hamel	MN
Solution Driven Landscaping, Inc.	Marlborough	MA
Southern Pride Landscaping	Opelika	AL
The Live Doctor	Basking Ridge	NJ
The People's Landscaper	Union Beach	NJ
The Tree Man, LLC	Fairfax	CA
TK Landscapes	Skaneateles	NY
United Returning Citizens	Youngstown	OH
Vision Concepts, LLC	Fergus Falls	MN
W A Management, Inc.	West Chicago	IL
Waterfront Restoration	Long Lake	MN
Westco Grounds Maintenance, LLC	Houston	TX
Western Piedmont Community College Horticulture Technology	Morganton	NC
White Gator Lawn Care	Slidell	LA
Willow Lake Lawn & Landscaping, LLC	Charles Town	WV
Dragonfly Garden Services	Burnaby	Canada

# Congrats to These Newly Certified Professionals

Full Name	Program Name	Program Specialty
Brady Forman	Lawn Care Manager	Lawn Care
Franco Ivan Aguilera	Lawn Care Manager	Lawn Care
Garrett Webb	Exterior Technician	Ornamental
Heather Hamby	Interior Technician	Interior
Jalal Saiful	Lawn Care Manager	Lawn Care
Jeffrey W. Kelly	Manager - Exterior	Exterior
Kevin Martin Dylong	Exterior Technician	Softscape
Matthew Zuccari	Horticulture Technician	Horticulture
Sara Stover	Manager - Exterior	Exterior, Lawn Care

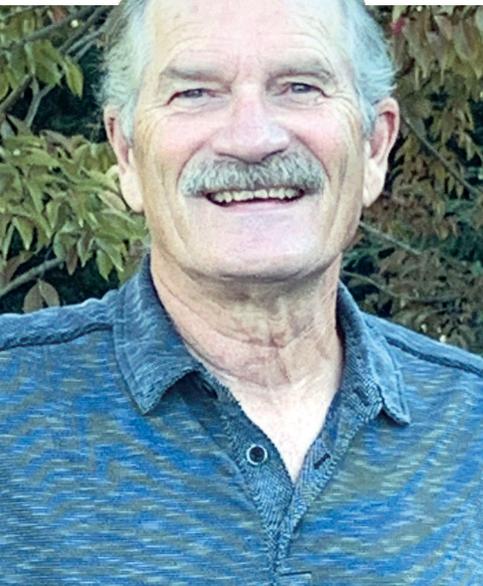
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# Tom Brumfield, Siteworks Landscape

By Jill Odom

**TOM BRUMFIELD, PRESIDENT** and founder of Siteworks Landscape, based in Richmond, California, first got into the landscape industry when a high school friend offered him a job as a groundskeeper at a local retirement community.

"While working there, I found out another alumni from my high school was pursuing a degree from The Ohio State University in ornamental horticulture," Brumfield says. "It sounded interesting, so I visited the head of the department and decided to enroll. I had grown up working with my father in the garden most weekends, so it was an easy choice."

## WHAT IS YOUR PROUDEST MOMENT IN BUSINESS?

It would have to be witnessing the development of our labor force. Employees that were hired fifteen years ago with limited experience are now managing multi-million dollar projects at the homes of top executives from the largest tech companies and venture capital firms. Some are managing crews of 20-30 individuals building intricately constructed gardens designed by internationally acclaimed landscape architects.

## WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST BUSINESS CHALLENGE TODAY?

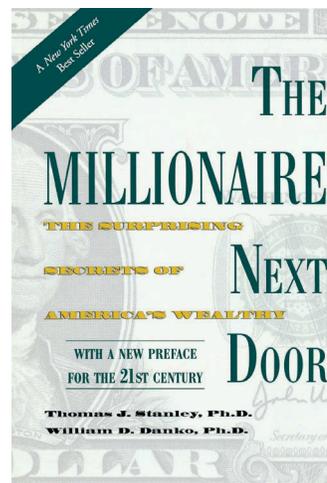
Finding employees with strong work ethics. Back in the day, young people would work in laborer jobs while they decided

what careers to pursue. As a result, there was a strong pool of labor readily available. Some decided they liked the industry and made a career of it. Today, young people seem to be interested in working in an app-based economy.

The landscape industry has become heavily dependent on the Hispanic community due to their work ethic and strong family values. Unfortunately, Washington has treated immigration as a political football for many years and the results, or the lack thereof, have created unnecessary challenges for our industry. Our base wage has almost doubled in the last three years due to a lack of available talent. Those increased costs are manageable while the economy is strong, but will provide a headwind during the next downturn.

## WHAT BUSINESS WORRY KEEPS YOU UP MOST AT NIGHT?

For the longest time, it was sales. Our business model was based on old school values of unmatched service and product quality, which when done properly, creates challenges with or profitability. Our industry has an unfortunately low barrier to entry. Individuals with little industry education and marginal experience regularly entering the market, have a negative impact on established businesses. It impedes a company's ability to not only provide a high level of service but also challenges their ability to offer benefits to valued employees that commiserate with companies in other industries. This is why we chose to work for households in the top one-tenth of one percent where what is considered fair is still rooted in the price, but how the customer's define value is aligned with ours.



## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE BUSINESS BOOK?

**This is an indirect business book, but offers insights into how a business owner should live one's life. It's called 'The Millionaire Next Door'. The book describes how a successful small business owner has the ability to accumulate wealth by living within a modest budget. It compares that approach with owners who let the temptation of a rise in affluence distract them. I give the book to anyone who is starting a business.**

## WHAT MOTIVATES YOU ON MONDAY MORNINGS?

Coffee. I'm a less than half glass empty person. My goal was to get through Mondays. This is why I teamed up with Larry Steele my business partner. His glass is overflowing. I tried operating as a sole proprietor while still in college and for several years after. Trying to wear the many different hats required for a startup can be insurmountable. Teaming up with someone who has skills that you lack allows for 3x growth.

## IN FIVE YEARS, WHERE DO YOU SEE YOUR BUSINESS GOING?

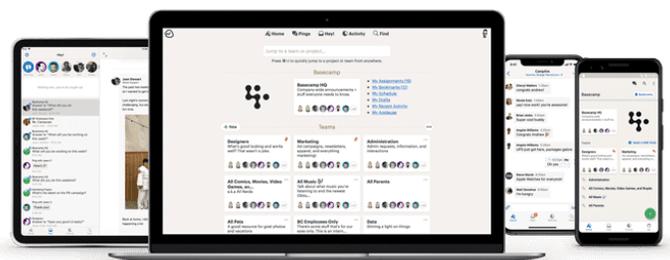
We are a well-established company with over \$20 million in annual sales. Growth will depend on our ability to find and train employees. We don't advertise for new business and have multiple solicitations per week from non-internet lead sources. Our focus is and has always been on how to improve the inner workings of the company to increase profits before seeking growth through increased sales.

## WHAT IS A GREAT LANDSCAPE LIFE HACK YOU'D BE WILLING TO SHARE?

Our company uses an app called Basecamp to communicate inter-company messaging. With the bombardment of emails and texts from the outside, it helps to have a closed system for communication.

## IN FIVE YEARS, WHERE WILL YOU BE AS A BUSINESS OWNER?

Retired. I have chosen two long term highly qualified individuals to replace me. I'm excited with the idea of Siteworks Landscape being around for generations. **TLP**



# THANK YOU.

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It takes strength and perseverance to own a small business. It takes dedication, hard work, and sacrifice. Many of you continue to operate to provide essential services to our communities. As the backbone of America, you play a vital role in the recovery of our economy. Together, we'll come out stronger than ever. We see you, we need you and we thank you.

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# AN INNOVATIVE LINE OF TURF MANAGEMENT PRODUCTS



## ADDING TO THE EXMARK LEGACY.

New to the Exmark family of products, the Z Turf Equipment brand has significantly expanded its product line, with a number of new models based on legacy Exmark designs. First, well-known for its rich history in the lawn care industry, are the Z-Spray spreader-sprayers. The complete line-up includes: the Z-Spray LTS, Z-Spray Junior, Z-Spray Mid and Z-Spray Max stand-on models. Next, the Z-Aerate line will expand in 2021 from one model to three including stand-on aerators in 40-, 30- and 24-inch widths. Other new 2021 Z Turf Equipment includes the versatile 20-inch Z-Seed slicer seeder, which performs three jobs with each pass: verticutting, dethatching and overseeding. Z Turf Equipment has also added more than 700 North American dealers, making it easier than ever for customers to get the parts and service support they need to keep their machines running at peak productivity.