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Into the Unknown

Disney fans out there may recognize the title of my column in this edition, which borrows a line from a song sung by Elsa in Frozen 2. Every time I hear my daughter play the song, it makes me think of where we are today…we’re in the unknown. This is my 25th year working in associations and I have not hosted or even attended an in-person event in nearly six months, a record amount of time for those 25 years. And now, after the GIE/OPEI LLC made the wise decision to postpone the GIE+EXPO this year, we will not be gathering in person until January 2021, at the earliest. So, when I say we’re in the unknown, for an association we really are there.

But, venturing into the unknown has its positives. We are not confined by old challenges, and we have the freedom to create new things. Which is precisely what the NALP team did when they created our new “On Tour” series. Part facility tour, part Q&A session, all from the convenience of your laptop or smartphone. I want to thank both Krisjan Berzins and Jeff Rossen for allowing us to learn more about their businesses and giving us a “peek under the hood” as to how they keep those businesses running at an extremely high level.

As for our LANDSCAPES event that coincides with GIE+EXPO, we’re excited to present this in an entirely new, virtual format. At the writing of this article, we are still designing the event and we look forward to revealing all of the details. I feel confident in saying that you are going to be very excited about what we have to offer, because we are following the advice hundreds of you gave us by participating in the survey that we launched immediately after the GIE+EXPO cancellation was announced. The survey focused on what you want from a virtual event, so we can make it the best experience possible for you and your teams. The information you provided has been incredibly helpful in shaping our plans.

In addition to the education and networking we will provide through our virtual LANDSCAPES, we are taking another signature event virtual: our very popular Breakfast with Champions. We will use Zoom rooms to host a series of interactive roundtable sessions with our Champions. Participants will have even greater access to the Champions as we plan to do these virtual events at least three times in the next nine months. Our goal is to provide our members with access to great information and networking, even when we all can’t be together in person.

We firmly believe that in-person events will return. However, we will take advantage of the virtual opportunities we see and work to create new and different events to bring value to our NALP members.

So, join us as we venture into this new unknown…I think you will like what we discover.

Until next time, stay safe and stay healthy.

Britt Wood, CEO
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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Faces of the Industry:

Kinson Desmangles

SOME LANDSCAPE COMPANY OWNERS START THEIR BUSINESS IN order to help pay for their college education, but for Kinson Desmangles, he started his company to help a local student raise funds for college. This is why Desmangles named his business Academic Landscaping, LLC.

The company was started in 2017 with Desmangles and his mentee, Anhuar, mowing neighbors’ properties. Every dollar earned by Anhuar goes to his NC 529 college savings fund. So far, he’s been able to save $2,900.

“When he’s ready hopefully that’ll be enough to buy him some books or make a dent in the total,” Desmangles says.

Anhuar is a currently a sophomore in high school. Desmangles connected with Anhuar through his partner who participates in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. Desmangles says they took some college tours and Anhuar was originally excited about college until he heard the finances required.

“Affordability should not be the reason you can’t go to school,” Desmangles says. “If you have the work ethic, if you have the drive, then nothing should get in your way.”

Aside from helping Anhuar, Desmangles says they’ve also made an effort teaching life skills to the kids who worked for the company last summer.

“When the discussion came around to college previously it was ‘I can’t afford it’ or ‘I’m not smart enough to go to college,’” he says. “By the end of the summer the conversation was ‘This is where I’m going to school. We are determined to have an impact there.”

Desmangles is also a student himself at UNC Charlotte, double majoring in systems engineering and business administration. While he thought he was going to be an engineer, Desmangles says his major has helped him run his landscape business.

“One thing that systems engineering has taught me is if it doesn’t work, change it,” he says. “You need to try something out to figure out if it works for you and what you want to do. There’s no cookie cutter way to run a lawn and landscape business. You really have to decide what you want to do and how you want to do it and how you want to differentiate your lawn care business from others.”

Desmangles says systems engineering is about going through the inputs to give you the outputs you’re looking for. One example of this is when they bought every single available trimmer line and tested them to determine which brands they liked, and which lasted the longest.

“We went from buying trimmer line basically every time we went out to a property to now we’re able to stock up on it and we buy it every six months in bulk,” Desmangles says. “If you add up the time it takes somebody to replace trimmer line, it takes about seven minutes. So, seven minutes per property throughout the year is a huge amount of money. So, if we can make a small improvement, the input, to get the output we’re look for, more efficiency, that’s the systems approach.”

Academic Landscaping is small for its market of Charlotte, North Carolina, but Desmangles says they try to be the go-to landscaper for customers. He says being small allows them to be open to try new things.

“Our biggest differentiating factor is that we are small enough to know our customers,” Desmangles says. “We really do care about the details. Almost all of our new business and continuing business has been word of mouth.”

Desmangles’ favorite part of working in the industry is the impact he’s able to make.

“It’s a very proud moment when you have people visiting and they are commenting on how well this property looks and being able to tell them that ‘I did this’ or ‘Our company did this,’” he says. “That for me is incredible. The actual impact of building something that, hopefully, will last longer than us.”

His two current biggest challenges running his company is having capital and employees. He wishes that the public understood you can have a career in the landscaping field.

“You really could have a middle-class life doing landscapes,” he says. “There’s a lot of opportunity and it really can afford you a lifestyle that I think characterizes the American dream.”

As for what he’d change about the industry, he says he’d like to see more diversity.

“I think there are so many different types of jobs or careers that you could have in landscaping,” Desmangles says. “There could be a lot more diversity.”

In five years, Desmangles jokes he hopes he’ll be able to take a vacation by then. On a more serious note, he wants the company to be in a sustainable place with a variety of revenue types that can handle the ebbs and flows of the market.
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Landscape Companies with Low Experience MODs Do These 5 Things

By Drew Garcia, VP of Rancho Mesa

LANDSCAPE companies with a low Experience Modification Rating (XMOD/EMR) typically exhibit similar best practices when dealing with work-related injuries. Their proactive approach helps close claims faster and return employees to work sooner than their counterparts.

The XMOD/EMR is a unique number assigned to a business that is made up of their historical loss figures and audited payroll information vs. the same information for companies involved in the company’s same industry. Generally, if your business has experienced more claim activity than the industry average, you will have a XMOD/EMR above 1.00. The opposite is true if you have had less claim activity; your XMOD/EMR will be below 1.00. The XMOD/EMR impacts the rates you pay for workers’ compensation by crediting (XMOD/EMR below 1.00) or applying a surcharge (XMOD/EMR above 1.00).

Here are the 5 best practices used by landscape companies who have an XMOD/EMR below 1.00.

1. AN AGGRESSIVE RETURN TO WORK PROGRAM

If you heard our podcast episode with Roscoe Klausing of Klausing Group, you will hear him coin the phrase an “aggressive return to work program” which was a key component to his company, of more than 70 employees, going 3 years without a lost time accident.

Aggressively finding a way to help bring an injured employee back on modified work restrictions has long been proven to provide positive outcomes for everyone involved. Benefits of bringing an employee back on modified duties include:
- Eliminating temporary disability payments from the claim cost.
- Lower the dollar amount of medical treatments.
- Reduce the overall cost of the claim.
- Lower the potential impact the claim would have on your XMOD/EMR.
- Improve injured employee morale.

2. TIMELY REPORTING AND ACCIDENT DETAIL

It is critical to constantly remind your front-line supervisors and employees that they must report all injuries no matter the severity as soon as possible. Studies have shown that work-related injuries reported with the first 5 days have a dramatically lower average claim cost and litigation rates than those reported after 5 days.

Two measurable statistics for you to keep an eye on are:
- The lag time between when an injury is reported to you from an employee.
- The amount of time it takes you to report this information to your insurance carrier.

By conducting a thorough accident investigation at the time of injury and providing a report to your insurance claim professional, you will speed up the claims process and lower costs. Eliminating the time delays caused by the claim professional waiting for details or additional information can be critical in making sure your injured employee is on the fast track to recovery. To assist the landscape industry in completing this necessary step, Rancho Mesa has created a free, fillable, carrier approved accident investigation report for use by the landscape industry at https://www.landscapeprofessionals.org/LP/ToolkitsResources/Business-In-a-Box/HRBiaB/Accident_Forms.aspx.

3. COMMUNICATION

Keeping in constant communication with employees who are injured is vital to a positive outcome. At times, the workers’ compensation process can seem slow. Some injuries will take longer than others. This can lead injured employees to feel frustrated and uncertain. Make sure you address their concerns and checking in on them, frequently.

4. KNOW THE BASIC PRINCIPLES BEHIND THE XMOD/EMR

You do not need to know the XMOD/EMR formula, but you should have an understanding of the basic concepts that leads to XMOD/EMR inflation.

You should know when your claim information will be sent to your rating bureau for next year’s XMOD/EMR calculation and make sure you are familiar with the status of each claim before the information is locked.

If your rating bureau uses a Primary Threshold or Split Point, it is good to understand how this number impacts claim cost and each claim’s impact on the XMOD/EMR.

Know your lowest possible XMOD/EMR, this would be all your payroll with zero claims. The points between your lowest possible XMOD/EMR and your current XMOD/EMR are the controllable points.

Know the policy years that are used to calculate the XMOD/EMR.

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CARRIER AND CLAIMS PROFESSIONAL

The carrier claims professional who handles your injuries can have a huge impact on the outcome of the claim. If you are fortunate enough to have a dedicated claim adjuster assigned to your company, make it a point to call and introduce yourself before the first claim occurs. The adjuster should have a very good understanding of:
- Your attitude and policy regarding return to work programs.
- The level of accident information they will receive from you.
- Who will be your company’s main contact throughout the claim process?

Consider these five best practices when handling your workers’ compensation claims to keep your XMOD/EMR under control and your workers’ compensation costs low.

NALP SAFETY PROGRAM PARTNER: Rancho Mesa
Benchmarking for Improved Profit

By Jeffrey Scott

**AS AN OWNER, IT’S YOUR JOB TO**
become a data scientist and learn how
to manage your landscape business
like any other business: by the correct
numbers and benchmarks. This will
allow you to become a successful
investor in your own business! Start
by getting a handle on these seven
benchmarks:

1. **Five-year trends.** The most
important benchmark is comparing
yourself to yourself. Like any great
athlete that competes primarily against
him or herself, you must keep track of
your past performances. Most firms look
back just one year for comparison, but
a five-year lookback will give you an
actual trend line to see where you are
improving (or faltering) over time. This is
why company valuations are often built
on five-year trends, because it shows
the competitive arc of the business.

2. **Benchmark the big picture.** The ultimate purpose
of your business is to buy things
and hire people in order to serve your
clients, with the aim of producing a
positive cash flow to invest in growth
and take dividends. We can sum this up
in 3 benchmarks: 1) Squeeze maximum
revenue from the trucks/equipment/
things you buy (Sales/Assets). 2)
Operate with efficiency and a smart
pricing strategy to earn the most profit
from those revenues (Profit/Sales). 3)
Ensure maximum effectiveness turning
your profits into a positive cash flow,
aka, cash/profits.

3. **Measure activities and results.** In any business, the right
results are determined by the right
actions. ‘Sales’ is the perfect example:
Activities, e.g.: How many lunch-n-
learns do your salespeople perform?
How many leads or RFP are you re-
ceiving? How many proposals are your
salespeople sending out?
Results e.g.: What is their closing
ratio? What are their margins-as-built?
What are their total sales? What are
their enhancement sales as a percent of
maintenance contracts?
In each area of your business define
the most important activities that lead to
the right results, and track and manage
both.

4. **Triangulate your numbers.** Any
number/percent you take time to
review should be done in context,
by comparing it against the budget and
against the actuals from last year. This
answers two key questions: How are
we doing vs. our goals? and how well
did we do last year at this same point in
time? It is best to put these into chart or
graph form when you share discuss with
your team. This allows non-financially
minded leaders to actively engage
in discussion and make informed
decisions.

5. **Empower the divisions.** Your
growth potential lies in treating
your divisions as profit centers,
but before you grow them you should
optimize their profitability. Look at each
division’s gross and net profit, and
benchmark these internally and vs. best
in class! Treat each division manager as
an intrapreneur and you will optimize
your chances for success.

6. **Motivate crew performance.**
Each division is made of
individuals doing work. Their
performance will vary from crew to crew
and can be tracked as follows: ‘revenue
per man hour’ and ‘revenue per man-
day and man-week.’ You can benchmark
your crews versus one another to
create internal competition, and you
can benchmark vs. best in class to gain
perspective on what’s possible.

7. **Remove the biggest internal
obstacle.** To become a
successful investor, you must
master the soft skills as well as the
numbers. But where to start? Because
all leaders have their blind spots, I
recommend benchmarking your blind
spots against your teams, and identify
where you and each team member must
improve. You can also get outside help,
by working work with an exceptional
coach to understand how you compare
with other top performers in the industry.
As I tell my coaching clients, “When you
continually grow yourself as a leader,
the sky is the limit!”

Every business is different and will
require a unique set of benchmarks
based on its business model and service
mix. Apply these seven outlined here as
a start and figure out what works best
for you! TLP

INTERESTED IN MORE?

Attend the two-part “Benchmarking for Profit Improvement” session at LANDSCAPES 2020: The Virtual Experience on Wednesday, Oct. 21 at 12:15-1:15 p.m. and 1:30-2:30 p.m. Go to www.landscapesconvention.org for more information.
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Pandemic Economy Continues to Drive Mergers and Acquisitions

By Jill Odom

COVID-19 HAS DISRUPTED MANY ASPECTS OF LIFE AND BUSINESS. Mergers and acquisitions are no exception. However, this doesn’t mean landscaping companies have stopped buying or selling. Tom Fochtman, CEO of Ceibass Venture Partners, and Jeff Harkness, partner at Three Point Group, weigh in on the current situation and share what buyers and sellers should be aware of moving forward.

SELLING AND WHO TO SELL TO

Both Fochtman and Harkness agree that we’ll see a lot of landscaping company owners selling their businesses.

“Most owners of small to mid-size businesses do not have an exit strategy,” Fochtman says. “They are too busy working. But this life-changing pandemic, especially for baby-boomer owners is a game changer. This kind of thing wears anybody out and especially business owners.”

Fochtman acknowledges that the landscape industry has been fortunate to be deemed “essential,” but the events of 2020 will give some owners enough incentive to consider lifestyle changes and retirement.

Harkness says there hasn’t been a consistent slowdown with mergers and acquisitions, but rather some pauses and delays. He says the amount of money in the space between strategic buyers and the private equity groups, and the continued desire to grow and add talent has allowed for continued movement with acquisitions despite the general doom and gloom on the news.

As for who these landscape company owners can sell to, it depends on a number of factors including the company’s size, geographical footprint, client portfolio and growth trends.

Fochtman says private equity buyers entering a market want revenue and a footprint.

“The majority of landscape companies in the U.S. do not fit what a private equity buyer is looking for,” he adds. “Most private equity buyers want at least $3 million (that is low) to $5 million in EBITDA before they will consider you as an acquisition candidate. 90 percent of the landscape companies in the U.S. do not meet that criteria.”

For smaller businesses that do not meet this criteria, they can still appeal to strategic buyers who are looking to acquire talent or enter a new market.

Fochtman points out that buyers are looking for companies that have unique value proposition and best-in-class companies to purchase.

“There’s pros and cons with each,” Harkness says. “It’s still people-driven and I think people matter whether it’s strategic or private equity. You get in a room with folks and you start talking about strategy, you start talking about growth plans, you start talking about the day-to-day. Sometimes it’s enough to say, ‘Hey the strategy doesn’t line up’ or ‘I just don’t see myself personality-wise working with that group.’

Whether it’s a good time to sell your landscape company is debatable. Fochtman says due to COVID-19 derailing the economy it is not a great time to do so, but it’s not terrible either.

“If I were a potential seller, the size of my company would dictate my actions,” he says. “If I’m a smaller landscape company, in the $1 million to $5 million range I think I would stay the course. Get a strong 2020 in my books and see what the economy is looking like in 2021 and going forward. Let the dust settle a bit but be working really hard on my growth, processes and procedures and generally building a better company. Get my company ready to sell even if I’m not technically ‘for sale.’ If I intend to sell and my company is $10 million in revenue or higher, I’d have my advisory team assembled and put a plan together to go market. This whole selling process frequently takes 12 months so if you are a larger company and have a desire to sell, I’d be working my plan now.”

Harkness says it’s still a good time to sell just due to the sheer number of buyers and capital available in the space.

“We’ve been in the business in the industry well over 20 years and there was a time when there might have been one to three buyers out there,” Harkness says. “We have 45 to 50 groups in our Rolodex that we know have expressed an interest in our industry. We still think that with the market conditions and the tax environment and the number of buyers available that it’s still a strong time to consider an exit.”
PREPPING A BUSINESS FOR MARKET
Harkness says companies that are considering going to market need to understand valuation, the due diligence required and the different priorities and philosophies of different groups.

“Preparing your company to sell sometimes is a six to 12-month process,” Harkness says. “It can be emotional. Sellers can overcome emotion by getting clarity and facts on the process. Was going to be a lie and what their business is worth.”

Business owners need to ensure their accounting is accurate, that employee files are compliant and there are strong processes and procedures in all aspects of the business. A strong middle-management team, well-maintained assets, and a well-organized facility should be in place. Fochtman says if you are a maintenance contractor, you should have a minimal 90 percent renewal rate and ideally own your marketplace.

Even if you’re not ready to sell the business anytime soon, Fochtman encourages all business owners to have their companies in tip-top shape and “ready to sell”.

“What happens if the phone rings from an interested party and they are willing to pay what you would consider top dollar for you company?” Fochtman says. “Have it ready. It is best to run your business in such a manner that it is ready to sell.”

A GOOD TIME FOR ACQUISITIONS
On the buying side of things, Fochtman and Harkness say now is a great time to acquire.

“If I was an operator today, I would be looking at acquisitions as a growth strategy,” Fochtman says. “Grow my footprint, add talent to my team, maybe add additional offerings and leverage the transaction with very inexpensive money.”

Harkness says the biggest driver for growth through acquisition right now is the access to capital and low interest rates making it an affordable venture for companies.

“There has never been a better time to carry debt,” Fochtman says. “I doubt we are able to rent money again this cheap in my lifetime. This is the perfect time to leverage, invest in your company or companies and take on debt.”

Harkness and Fochtman say banks are underwriting loan candidates a little harder right now, but it is lessening. “The reoccurring revenue model of landscape maintenance is still fundamentally strong,” Fochtman says. “Private equity buyers will for sure be looking and they are now. Landscape and in particular commercial landscape maintenance have never been so viable and essential, which the investment community loves.”

BUYER BEWARE
While it’s a good time to invest and consider acquisitions, it shouldn’t be taken lightly.

Fochtman says some of the questions that a landscape company buyer should consider are things like:

- Will this acquisition expand my geographic footprint?
- Am I getting a great management team?
- Am I buying a great brand that will make my brand only stronger?
- Am I getting a facility that is well located and will make us more efficient?
- Does this company offer a viable service that we don’t currently offer?

Fochtman says the acquisition needs to fit the long-term strategy of the buyer.

“Probably the biggest thing that we’re seeing is there’s additional due diligence being done by lenders and buyers related to the different market segments that green industry companies service,” Harkness says.

An example of additional scrutiny would be determining which companies’ client bases have been negatively affected by COVID-19, such as restaurants. He says buyers should also be mindful that potential companies to acquire have continued sales and if customer payments have slowed.

“Groups that are acquiring still want to see reoccurring revenue,” Harkness says. “So, contracts are always important. I’m seeing a lot more diligence around growth plans. Does the company have an organic growth strategy, before being acquired, over the next one to three years?”

Another aspect of acquisitions that has been affected by the pandemic is the site visits. Harkness says visiting sites was more of an issue in March, April and May but now that good practices have been implemented with social distancing, he says buyers once more have the ability to get in and visit the facilities.

Fochtman says buyers being unwilling to travel has been an issue, but you have to visit a property before buying the company.

“Look at the quality of work that is being provided,” he says. “Look at the facility. Meet with key employees, if that is allowed in due diligence. Buying a landscape company is classic ‘kick the tires’ sort of stuff. Look at the equipment.”

Harkness warns not to get caught up in EBITDA numbers, but be mindful of the broader aspects of the business such as the leadership and company culture.

“We’re seeing a lot more time being spent on the geography, the culture, and the go forward energy,” Harkness says. “Can you grow it organically in this marketplace? Can you do acquisitions in this marketplace? I think all that comes into play and the pandemic has put a premium on those types of analysis points.”

“(This is) uncharted territory for all of us,” Fochtman says. “The landscape industry is considered essential and the fundamentals of a well-managed landscape contracting company are still very solid. Great time to be acquiring an essential business.”

“The reoccurring revenue model of landscape maintenance is still fundamentally strong. Private equity buyers will for sure be looking and they are now. Landscape and in particular commercial landscape maintenance have never been so viable and essential, which the investment community loves.” - Tom Fochtman, CEO of Ceibass Venture Partners
Family Businesses:
Working Better Together

By Jill Odom

ANY LANDSCAPING COMPANIES SAY THEY ARE FAMILY focused or treat their employees like family, but what is it like to work with actual family members? These five companies share their experience of working with relatives and the lessons they’ve learned over the years keeping the business running with their kin.

Stephen Hillenmeyer, CEO of Hillenmeyer Landscape Services based in Lexington, Kentucky, works with his two sons Chase and Seth, which he says has been a pleasure.

“We all like to be around people, no one has a problem being in crowd or speaking their mind” Hillenmeyer says. “I focus more on strategic planning and long-term outlook; Chase also looks at the long term and strategic moves from an operational standpoint. Seth’s strengths are more around development of our sales and growth of the organization.”

Rick Lemcke, founder and president of R.M. Landscape based in Hilton, New York, started his business with his brother Mike. Mike left the business 20 years ago as they did not share the same work philosophy. Rick now works alongside his son, Brett Lemcke (former President of NALP).

“I’m old enough to learn the hard way but young enough to learn the new way,” Rick Lemcke says. “We work together very well. He has us on an accelerated growth program. I was content to just go along with what we had.”

Lemcke says at times he and Brett will have differing opinions and they simply have to hash the matter out, since there is no tiebreaker. He says their personalities are similar as they are both very positive.

At Dowco Enterprises Inc. based in Chesterfield, Missouri, president Maurice Dowell, LIC, has worked with his brother, son, daughter, and former wife.

His daughter, Kelly Dowell, has worked for her father’s company since she was a child, but now works with them in a different capacity. She has her own company Keldo Digital where she helps small businesses in the green industry grow their sales, marketing and recruiting efforts.

Dowell says working with his daughter isn’t any different than working with other people on staff as he sees them as family as well.

At Grasshopper Lawns Inc., based in Larksville, Pennsylvania, Michael Kravitsky IV, LIC, owner/president says his dad, mom, grandfather, sister, younger brother, brother-in-law and his two children have all worked for the company at one time or another. Right now, it is just Kravitsky and his son Michael Kravitsky V who work together in the business.

Kravitsky says his son has become one of the backbones of the company. He says he and his son work together well and he appreciates hearing what his son sees from a younger perspective.

Pete Schepis Jr., director of operations and co-owner of The Greenwood Group, based in Wentzville, Missouri, works along with his father Pete Schepis Sr., stepmother Joan Schepis and stepbrother Nick Sarandos.

“Since we are a combined family, my father and I have similarities and Joan and Nick have similarities,” Schepis says. “I think our differences come more in the way of ‘old’ school vs. ‘new’ school.”

LESSONS LEARNED

Over the years working with Brett, Lemcke says he’s learned it’s more than just physical hard work when it comes to running a landscape business.

Kravitsky says that he has discovered his son is a true MacGyver and can adapt and find a solution to anything. Hillenmeyer says he’s found his sons are both entrepreneurial with a good work ethic.

“Watching them grow and succeed is as good as it gets,” Hillenmeyer says. “They bring so much more to the organization with their ideas and passion to grow and scale our business. They also care about our employees; they want to help them succeed and growth as people.”

Schepis says he’s learned trust is extremely important and being able to speak openly and honestly around your family allows the same comfortability when dealing with others.

“Though it can be challenging at times, there is a sense of security and trust that everyone is working toward the same goals,” Schepis says. “Everyone is invested in the future for different reasons.”
From the top clockwise: Maurice Dowell and daughter Kelly Dowell; Brett Lemcke (middle) and father Rick Lemcke (far right); (From left to right) Nick Sarandos, Joan Schepis, Pete Schepis, Sr., Pete Schepis, Jr.; (From left to right) Seth Hillenmeyer, Stephen Hillenmeyer, and Chase Hillenmeyer; Michael Kravitsky V and father Michael Kravitsky IV
“Here’s what I’ve learned: all family members aren’t going to work,” Dowell says. “You’re going to have to realize that there’s going to come a time or there could come a time where you have to part ways and that can be tough.”

One of the issues that can occur is the awkwardness if a family member is not performing at an acceptable level. Dowell says he had to fire his aunt at one point but since then the company has created better documentation and expectations, so everyone knows what they are responsible for. He says they have weekly coaching sessions to ensure everyone is meeting their deliverables.

**ADVICE FOR OTHERS**

Lemcke says if you’re considering bringing on a family member, they must be able to contribute to the common cause.

“If you’re going to bring family in there has to be a clear expectation and clear responsibilities,” Dowell says. “There needs to be religious follow up on those. There needs to be wins for these people, wins for the customer, wins for the company. Those have to be documented and reinforced and applauded. If you can do that, then you can bring family members. You can grow them. They can make money. We can have fun, you can go to dinner with them, it can be wonderful, but it’s all going to be based upon the way that you set up and the way that you can show them a career path in your company.”

Kravitsky agrees that family members should have defined roles when joining the company and they should be treated like any other employee.

“Some family members aren’t players,” Kravitsky says. “They’re not in the game full time and then it drags everybody else down.”

He also advises that you have controlling interest in your company rather than splitting it 50/50 with a family member. Family members should also have similar values if you want to be successful working together.

“If your sons don’t have the same values, work ethic and passion to succeed as you, then it’s going to be a difficult road to go down,” Hillenmeyer says. “I’m very blessed that the three of us are aligned in our thinking both in the short term and the long run.”

He adds that you should always make sure your family member, specifically your children, actually want to be part of the business.

“I think sometimes people assume they want to be in the family business without asking,” Hillenmeyer says. “I told both of them before they started that it wouldn’t be easy; you will have to work harder than others, you will be watched and scrutinized more than anyone and if you don’t produce and meet the expectations of the job, I will fire you. Then I will put my dad hat on and figure out what I can do to help them find a job that’s works for them.”

**SUCCESSION PLANNING**

Lemcke says one challenge in succession planning is how to get his retirement out of the business without leaving Brett in a bad spot. Because Brett wants to stay in the business careful planning has to be made, since selling the company isn’t an option.

Kravitsky says he is beginning the process of passing the business off to his son while Hillenmeyer has already made the transition with Chase now the current president of the company.

“It’s always hard to have two chiefs, once I felt he was ready to take the helm we didn’t make a big announcement to the company, Chase just began to run the meeting with me in the background,” Hillenmeyer says. “He had already earned the respect of others, so the transition was an easy one. Probably a little harder on me but it’s what I wanted, and I have no regrets. Chase and Seth are equal partners in the business, they work very well together, nothing gives me more pride than to be a part of watching them take this organization to levels I never dreamed of.”

Dowell says he hasn’t had a discussion with his daughter to see if she’d want to eventually take over Dowco as she currently is enjoying running her own business.

Schepis says his parents have slowly started to transition some of the responsibility to Nick and himself, but he says it will never be a complete succession as they’ll always be talking about work around the pool.

“My dad and Joan have built a successful company and are hoping to retire with security and without worry for the future,” Schepis says. “My brother Nick and I are looking to continue to grow and expand on the legacy our parents have built. So that we can take care of our families, the way our parents have taken care of theirs.”

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A Look at NALP’s Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

By Jill Odom

EARLY THIS YEAR, MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF Landscape Professionals recognized there was a need for a greater focus on pursuing diversity in the association and in the industry. To start the conversation, in June, NALP hosted a diversity forum to discuss how we can be proactive about encouraging and supporting more diversity in the industry.

“A lot of the forum was about individuals sharing their stories,” says Britt Wood, CEO of NALP. “I think there were a lot of eyes opened and people shared their experiences, whether it be with NALP or just out in the world.”

The group discussed the need for more diverse leadership within NALP, how to be more inclusive and welcoming to minority members, and how to attract more minority-owned businesses as members.

“I think it’s important that the leadership of the association reflect the makeup of the industry so creating a more diverse Board, committees, and council is important,” Wood says. “Also, it’s good for business. There are many well-documented studies that show that companies that have a diverse team have stronger businesses.”

The Board of Directors also announced the formation of a Diversity and Inclusion Council. The members of the council have not been determined yet, but 10 to 14 individuals will be appointed and they will provide guidance and leadership around association programs and initiatives.

“The goal is for this group to come together and outline the parameters of what they see the council looking like in the future,” Wood says. “The Board feels it is important for the Council to chart their own course and champion projects that they feel will move the industry forward.”

The three overarching goals of the new Diversity and Inclusion Council are recruiting a more diverse membership, increasing engagement with members from underrepresented groups, and building diverse leadership within the association.

Wood says the diversity initiative has been very well received by members.

“Our industry certainly faces workforce challenges and our ability to attract a diverse workforce will help us reduce the employee shortage,” Wood says. “Creating a more inclusive industry represents a great opportunity for us. We are hoping these efforts will help us attract new people and create work environments where they thrive.”

NALP is planning to have more forums in the future so more members can participate in the discussions. While limited to a degree as to how many can participate in a Zoom call, Wood says NALP will continue to leverage technology to engage with members. NALP is also working to provide more resources to members, such as our new sample diversity and inclusion policy for companies to use.

“We’re going to be developing resources to help educate our members on some of the ways they can go about building and retaining a more diverse workforce,” Wood says.

Wood says it is the association’s hope to give members the tools and opportunities to embrace diversity and inclusion and create better businesses. For resources, or to opt-in to news and information about our diversity initiatives, visit www.landscapeprofessionals.org/diversity.

INTERESTED IN MORE?

Check out the “Focus on Diversity and Inclusion: Implementing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives In Your Organization” panel discussion at LANDSCAPES 2020: The Virtual Experience on Tuesday, Oct. 20 at 1:00-2:15 p.m. Go to www.landscapesconvention.org for more information.
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We caught up with AriensCo Senior Product Manager Trae Humphreys to learn more about the benefits of a stand-on commercial mower.

**The market for stand-on commercial mowers continues to grow. What do you think attracts landscapers to stand-on machines?**

**A:** Stand-on mowers, like the Gravely Pro-Stance, offer several benefits to users. Their lower center of gravity makes them better equipped to handle hills and they are easier to maneuver around bushes and retention ponds, helping professional landscape contractors work efficiently.

**Are stand-on commercial mowers as comfortable for the user as a traditional zero-turn?**

**A:** For many users, stand-on mowers are more comfortable than zero-turns. Isolators on the Pro-Stance’s platform reduce vibration and increase comfort. Stand-on mowers are also easier on the operator’s back. When standing, the user’s feet and legs act as shock absorbers, taking strain in place of being in a seated position.

**You mentioned increased efficiency, how do stand-on mowers help commercial landscape professionals accomplish more in less time?**

**A:** In addition to being easy to maneuver in tight spots and around landscaping, the convenience of the Pro-Stance is a big time-saver. Users can quickly hop on and off the machine to remove sticks and debris. They’re quick and easy to get on and off the trailer and provide greater visibility than traditional mid-mount models so users can move freely throughout the yard.

**Gravely has been in the stand-on business for several years, what’s new with the latest generation Pro-Stance?**

**A:** The Pro-Stance was completely redesigned for the 2020 model year. We repositioned the operator close to the machine’s center. This lowers the machine’s center of gravity and improves handling. Pro-Stance controls were updated to be more ergonomic, keeping the user’s arms in a comfortable position for all-day use. The thumb release and vertical pin system makes for quick and easy cutting height adjustments.

The Gravely Pro-Stance is available in deck sizes ranging from 32 to 60 inches and offers Kawasaki EFI engine options. To learn more, visit Gravely.com
NALP Holds Small 2020 Renewal & Remembrance Ceremony

By Jill Odom

“OUR INDUSTRY IS BUILT ON HARD WORK, GRIT AND determination, and we will not let a year go by without making a positive contribution to our beloved Arlington, even in the face of a pandemic,” said NALP President Andrew Ziehler during this year’s small ceremony. “Each year, we use our talents and resources to beautify these sacred grounds, hoping to enhance the comfort of those who are here visiting their fathers, their mothers, their children, their family, and their friends laid here to rest.”

Although the traditional Renewal and Remembrance event was not held this year because Arlington National Cemetery is closed to the public, with special permission and help from the team at ANC, the Renewal and Remembrance Committee planned a small event to honor our industry’s commitment to enhancing the grounds at ANC.

With support from our partners at Caterpillar, Exmark/ Z Turf Equipment, Gravely, John Deere, New Holland, SiteOne, and STIHL, we held a small ceremony in Section 81 (the newest area of the cemetery) and planted a Red Oak tree donated by Country Spring Wholesale Nursery. The tree symbolizes our continued commitment to our work at ANC. Visit the Renewal & Remembrance webpage to view the video. https://www.landscapeprofessionals.org/LP/learn/lp/Events/renewal_remembrance.aspx

Ziehler and ANC Superintendent Ray Alexander addressed the group which included past Renewal & Remembrance chairs; Bruce Allentuck, Phil Fogarty, and Walter Wray; current Vice-Chair, Eric Gilbey; and current Chair, John Eggleston as well as NALP CEO Britt Wood and the horticulture team at Arlington National Cemetery.

In his speech, Ziehler acknowledged how COVID-19 has drastically changed our lives and reflected on his past experiences at Renewal and Remembrance. Over the past 24 years, NALP has served over 50,000 volunteer hours and over 1,000 children have participated in the Children’s Program. 1,375 tons of lime has been applied to the turf and countless landscape, hardscape, irrigation and lightning protection projects have been completed.

“I look forward to next summer when we can come together again to serve our country,” Ziehler said. “We will share the feelings of anticipation, awe, teamwork and accomplishment as we work alongside one another to do such meaningful work. We will wipe the sweat from our brows and share the stories of our experiences and how the day’s work impacted us.”

The 25th Renewal & Remembrance will be held on Monday, July 19, 2021.
LANDSCAPES 2020

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Meet Shayne Newman, NALP’s New President

SHAYNE NEWMAN, LIC, IS THE PRESIDENT OF YARDAPES BASED in New Milford, Connecticut. He will assume the role of President of the NALP Board of Directors in October. While the thought of volunteering within the association was intimidating to him at first, he wanted to be a part of the positive change he saw happening. “I feel that NALP has certainly moved the needle regarding the public’s perception of our industry – something that I am certainly proud to be a part of,” he says.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CHOSEN AS THE PRESIDENT OF NALP?

I feel honored to be chosen as the President of the National Association of Landscape Professionals. Shortly after I decided thirty years ago to make landscaping my career of choice, I promised myself that I would try my hardest to do my part to help improve the lawn & landscape industry for future generations. It is humbling for me to be in a position of leadership within an association that is doing exciting work to help improve the lawn & landscape industry. There have been so many amazing past Presidents of our association, leaders that I have respected, looked up to and learned from. I am both proud and humbled to be able to serve and follow in their shoes.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH AS THE PRESIDENT OF NALP?

During my presidency I hope to accomplish a few things.

First, I would like to encourage members to get involved and volunteer within NALP. There are numerous committees within NALP that are doing great work towards improving specific specialties within our industry. We are always looking for passionate lawn & landscape professionals who would like to be a part of the effort to improve our industry. The association cannot accomplish meaningful change without the work of passionate volunteers. I am a firm believer in karma and have found that any amount of effort that I have put into volunteering and helping others has come back to me in one meaningful way or another. My volunteer involvement within NALP has been no exception. Every minute of my time that I have given to our association has come back to me and enriched my life beyond my wildest dreams. I would like others to take the step forward and enjoy the same positive experience that I have. It may seem intimidating and even a little scary taking the leap, but we all need to step out of our comfort zones in order to continue to improve.

Secondly, I would like to make sure our members really understand all the resources that the National Association of Landscape Professionals have available to help to manage our companies. There’s so much hard work performed by the staff and volunteers and sometimes I feel like some of the resources are underutilized by membership. The resources that NALP has provided my company have directly contributed to us raising our standard of professionalism. Thanks to our involvement with NALP resources, we are more educated, more involved in our community and more aware of issues that will impact our industry. Additionally, there are many ways NALP has saved our company money due to the many partnerships that NALP has established with lawn & landscape industry suppliers. Most importantly, NALP has inspired us to step out of our comfort zone and encouraged us to be the best landscape professionals that we can be. NALP membership has contributed to us feeling full of pride in knowing that we have chosen an amazing industry to be a part of.

Finally, I would like to do whatever I can to encourage NALP members to represent our industry in the best light possible and to be leaders in their communities. If we all represent the lawn & landscape profession in a positive light and become respected business leaders locally, then meaningful change can happen for our wonderful industry.

WHAT’S CHANGED THE MOST IN THE LAWN AND LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY SINCE YOU JOINED THE NALP BOARD UNTIL NOW?

A lot has changed within our industry since I joined the NALP Board. It almost seems like more has changed in the past six months than has changed in the past six years. COVID-19 has certainly changed the way we live our lives and run our businesses. Prior to COVID-19, technology seemed to be gaining momentum and creating exciting efficiencies for our industry. I feel COVID-19 will continue to propel advances in technology as we are forced to adapt and change the way we do things.

One very exciting change I am seeing due to COVID-19 is a generally heightened appreciation for being outdoors. As many of our clients have been more isolated working from home and limited to the amount of travel they can safely conduct, they have become more aware of their outdoor environments. Backyards, landscapes of homes, golf courses and public parks are some of the few places people feel safe. Well-designed and properly maintained outdoor spaces provide a sense of relaxation and escape from the stresses of life. As lawn & landscape professionals, we have always understood and appreciated the benefits of a beautiful landscape. For the first time in my career I feel the public is really starting to understand the simple pleasures of being surrounded by a beautiful landscape. This is an

Continued on page 39

By Jill Odom

Meet NALP’s Three New Board Members

PAM DOOLEY
Dooley is the owner of Plants Creative Landscapes. Her company takes a thoughtful, creative approach to designing, building and maintaining unique, custom-tailored spaces. Dooley has worked in the landscape industry since she was 15, and her collegiate volleyball teammates nicknamed her “Plants.” She worked as a nursery manager and studied horticulture at the University of Georgia before founding Plants Creative in 2005. She has since grown the business from a single truck and a lawn mower to a team of 50 who provide award-winning landscape services in the Atlanta region.

She says she is grateful for the opportunity and humbled by the confidence of the Board in electing her. Dooley says she is excited to work alongside her friends and industry leaders in continuing to advance the professionalism of our industry. “I have a lot to learn about the Board and association, so gaining a greater understanding of these will be my first goal,” Dooley says. “I am passionate about people, culture, and outside-the-box solutions so I hope these 3 things will serve the NALP and our industry well!”

MAURICE DOWELL
Dowell, LIC, founded Dowco Enterprises Inc., in 1981 as a part-time job while working for Sears Roebuck. That part-time position has turned into a thriving landscape maintenance firm where Maurice mentors a diverse cultural and ethnic team of professionals.

In prior iterations of NALP, Dowell has chaired the Awards and Membership committees. He is a Board member of his State Association, MoGia; he has been a Trailblazer since 2007. Maurice loves to travel and bike. Cycling fundraisers have taken him across the country, exploring and finding new friends. He helped start a men’s support group at his church and weekly gives back in a group setting. Maurice is proud of his two young people, both of whom have contributed to the business in their careers.

A personal challenge he hopes to achieve is expanding NALP’s reach through enhanced conversations with state and local associations, pillars of learning, vendors, and consultants. “I am acutely aware that my minority status sets a standard for equality and inclusion throughout NALP,” Dowell says. “One of my goals will be to encourage diversity in our committees, the starting point for growing an organization that resembles its membership. Committee activity carves out higher visibility for these new leaders, and those new to the workforce can see involvement and leadership by “people that look like me.”

IVAN GIRALDO
With more than 30 years in the industry, Ivan Giraldo started his commercial experience at Clean Cut in Austin, Texas, and continued developing in the industry when Clean Cut merged with TruGreen, where he became branch manager with one of the more successful branches of TruGreen nationwide.

15 years ago, Giraldo co-founded Clean Scapes with Rex Gore, which is headquartered in Austin, but has branches in San Antonio and Dallas as well. In 2009, Clean Scapes was named the fastest growing company in central Texas and recently landed themselves at number 33 on the Lawn and Landscapes Top 100 list for 2020.

Giraldo is a past Board Member and director of the NHLA, graduate of the Stanford Latino Entrepreneurship Initiative Education: Scaling, EY Entrepreneur of the Year Recipient in 2017 for Central Texas, Board Member of Round Rock Area Serving Center, and a member of the Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

He says it is an honor just to be considered and invited to be a Board Member. “My goal is to add value to what NALP already is doing for our industry.” Giraldo says. “I hope that with my point of view based on experience accumulated over the years I can help the association accomplish their goals.”

2020/2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The new Board of Directors’ terms begin in late October.

PRESIDENT
■ Shayne Newman, LIC (YardApes of New Milford, Connecticut)

PRESIDENT-ELECT
■ Bob Grover, LIC (Pacific Landscape Management of Hillsboro, Oregon)

SECRETARY/TREASURER
■ Mike Bogan, LIC (LandCare of Frederick, Maryland)

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT
■ Andrew Ziehler, LIC (Ziehler Lawn and Tree Care of Centerville, Ohio)

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE
■ Bruce Allentuck, LIC (Allentuck Landscaping of Clarksburg, Maryland)
■ Pam Dooley (Plants Creative Landscapes of Decatur, Georgia)
■ Maurice Dowell, LIC (Dowco Enterprises Inc. of Chesterfield, Missouri)
■ Lisa Fiore (Landscape Hub of Chicago, Illinois)
■ Paul Fraynd, LIC (Sun Valley Landscaping of Omaha, Nebraska)
■ Ivan Giraldo (Clean Scapes, LP, of Austin, Texas)
■ Phil Key (Ruppert Landscape Laytonsville of Maryland)
■ Roscoe Klausing, LIC (Klausing Enterprises Inc., of Centerville, Ohio)
■ Joe Kujawa, LIC (Kujawa Enterprises, Inc. of Oak Creek, Wisconsin)
■ Frank Mariani, LIC (Mariani Landscape of Lake Bluff, Illinois)
■ William MacMurdo (Bayer Crop Science of Cary, North Carolina)
■ Joe Munie, LIC (Munie Greencare Professionals Inc. of Caseyville, Illinois)
■ Tim Portland, LIC (Yellowstone Landscape of Charlotte, North Carolina)
■ Chris Senske (Senske Services of Kennewick, Washington)
■ Brandon Sheppard (Weed Man of Winchester, Virginia)
IN THE PAST YEAR, SINCE LAUNCHING THE Landscape Management Apprenticeship Program, 52 companies have enrolled and the first apprentices are beginning to graduate from the program. If you are thinking about participating in the Landscape Management Apprenticeship Program but aren’t quite clear on how to staff and manage the program, one aspect to consider is who from your team will take on the important roles of program manager and mentor.

WHAT DOES A PROGRAM MANAGER DO? 
“The program manager handles everything until the individual is approved for the apprenticeship program (i.e. sourcing/recruiting, relationship building, reviewing requirements, working with NALP on any paperwork),” says Angela Barr, administrative manager for Eichenlaub, based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. “Then there’s the baton handoff to the mentor.”

Barr took on the program manager role for her company as it was a natural fit due to her handling many of the recruitment and sourcing activities. For Environmental Management, Inc. (EMI) based in Plain City, Ohio, the employee responsible for training and development is their program manager.

“Many of the same tactics used to find apprenticeship candidates are those used in sourcing full-time team members and interns,” Barr says. The program manager position is suited for someone who is already well-versed in handling administrative paperwork and keeping others on track.

Environmental Enhancements, based in Sterling, Virginia, assigned the role of program manager to their office/HR manager who has been involved in the program from the beginning.

“The program manager is the primary contact with NALP and turns in forms and is a resource for the mentors,” says Joe Lewis, LIC, account manager for EMI. “The mentor is driving the bus and the program manager is making sure they’re driving in the right direction.”

WHAT IS A MENTOR? 
Mentors are responsible for the training that is conducted, which is why companies typically select those who are already in training roles to be their mentors. EMI selected mentors from members of management who were already Landscape Industry Certified technicians or managers.

“We wanted somebody that was in a management position or a position of influence,” Lewis says. “Somebody who has the vision of ‘Look this is new. There may be things that aren’t perfect or ironed out yet, but we need to adapt to make this work.’”

Carmen Kesteven, office manager for Environmental Enhancements, says they look for the most qualified mentor based on their experience, knowledge of the industry and training abilities.

“Our Staff Development Coordinator was the right person to handle mentorship,” Barr says. “She is an industry veteran who is well-versed in all things landscape. Her role at Eichenlaub is to provide, deliver, and manage training opportunities.”

Lewis explains that being a mentor isn’t a full-time job, but rather you check
in on the apprentice and help them learn. “People who look at it as more work, I think they’re looking at it all wrong,” Lewis says. “It’s not more work. The apprenticeship program is just adding to focus to the work we should already be doing.”

“The mentor handles the day-to-day relationship with the apprentice, being vigilant that the necessary tasks are being performed to complete the program,” Barr says. “After the apprenticeship is completed, it’s back to the program manager to wrap up paperwork and discuss next steps with employment and an individualized growth plan.”

TRAITS TO LOOK FOR IN PROGRAM MANAGERS AND MENTORS

Kesteven says a program manager is knowledgeable of the apprenticeship program, consistent in keeping communication between the mentor and apprentice and consistent in tracking information.

“This person is like a talent scout,” Barr says. “(They) need to be personable, knowledgeable about the program/company/outlook of the green industry, strategic, outgoing and open to thinking outside the box.”

Another trait to look for include being a good time manager.

“It’s a year-long to 18-month-long process that you can’t have everything done all at once,” Lewis says. “But you also have to manage your time because you’re managing other people’s time, materials and resources.”

When it comes to what to look for in mentors, Lewis says that mentors need to believe in developing people and believe in the apprenticeship program.

“I think of this person as the coach,” Barr says. “(They should be) nurturing, organized, motivating, knowledgeable in the trade skills and able to give constructive feedback.”

Kesteven adds that mentors need to be patient, consistent and follow through.

TIME COMMITMENT

After getting the program under way, program managers only have to maintain it and check in on the mentors to make sure everything is going smoothly.

“I would say it takes 10 percent of your time, probably less, probably five percent,” Lewis says. “I mean it's really not even an hour a week for a program manager.”

Kesteven says currently their program manager spends 2 to 3 hours per month working on the program, depending on how much the apprentice has completed.

“The biggest items of time consumption are sourcing and building relationships with secondary schools,” Barr says. “These are ongoing and continuing activities with more focus in the fall and late winter/early spring months.”

When it comes to the amount of time mentors can expect to spend on the apprenticeship program, Lewis says it’s the same amount any manager spends training their people. Mentors at EMI meet with their apprentices bi-weekly to discuss where they are, how they’re trending and what upcoming core competencies they plan to cover.

“With consistent weekly training the mentor needs about an hour per week to complete training topics and paperwork for documentation of the hours,” Kesteven says.

Barr says their mentor spends 1/5 to ¼ of her week on the apprenticeship program.

“Don’t look at as a monumental task or that you have to do 2,000 hours in 3 months,” Lewis says. “Look at it as you’re already training your people. Now you’re just documenting how you’re training them in these core competencies.”

REGISTER YOUR COMPANY IN THE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

INTERESTED IN ENROLLING YOUR COMPANY IN THE LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM? GO TO HTTPS://WWW.LANDSCAPEPROFESSIONALS.ORG/APPRENTICESHIP TO LEARN MORE.
Have you thought about how to grow your business? Is there a right way to go about growth? Considering this is one of the most-searched-for business topics on the internet — and entire books are dedicated to it — there’s no simple answer. But we’re diving into the services and strategies used by some successful industry businesses to find out what it took them to grow. Every company’s growth story is a little bit different and what’s right for your business may not be right for another. But it can still help to glean some ideas from other companies that have seen success in growth.
**GROWTH BY ADDITION**

Probably the most expected growth narrative is that companies will grow by adding services and people. That was the case for Casey Hurd, LIC, owner of Worton, Maryland-based Greenscapes Land Care, LLC, who says that over the years, they’ve added services in order to become more of a full-service landscaping company that wouldn’t cause their clients to have to ever look elsewhere. Hurd says that he has grown the company by adding services, employees, and equipment.

“The biggest step that we took to grow the company was to add employees that would help manage the challenges that we face daily,” Hurd says. “As I had the people to support the services, I also added services so that we had to stop subbing out work. We have also invested in new and high-quality equipment to support the work. We have found that avoiding breakdowns and getting higher quality results is worth the higher equipment cost.”

Joshua Malik, owner of Joshua Tree in Stockertown, Pennsylvania, is also a good example of growing a business by adding services. Every addition has been slow and deliberate. Malik says that he knew jumping into a service without thoughtful planning could be problematic. The company got its start in 2005 as an arborist firm but began adding lawn care services in 2013 in response to demand. At the time, Malik says he was only cross selling those offerings to current clients and not marketing them at all. He had a loyal customer base who wanted Joshua Tree to handle more on their properties. In 2017, the company only had 250 lawn care contracts but decided they wanted to ramp up marketing and set Joshua Tree up as a serious lawn care provider in the area. That year, Joshua Tree partnered with marketing agency Landscape Leadership to develop a strategy and has grown the business to 2,500 customers today.

At the start of 2020, that story repeated itself when — after a lot of demand and a lot of contemplation — Malik decided to expand into pest control. Of the 400-plus pest control clients the company has already accrued, 78 percent already used Joshua Tree for other services.

A number of lawn and landscape businesses have expanded into pest control and Malik says he knew he was not only competing against them but against exterminators in the area. That was why he decided to make his division model a bit different.

“A lot of lawn care companies are offering perimeter pest control and focusing on outdoor treatments,” Malik says. “But we wanted to differentiate ourselves so that our clients didn’t feel as though they needed to still hire an exterminator for indoor pest problems. But in order to do that successfully, we needed to bring on the right person.”

Malik hired a pest control specialist who had been working in the pest control industry for more than 15 years to oversee the division. The quarterly pest control services include three exterior visits and one interior visit — a key differentiator.

“It’s a good example of how creating a division thoughtfully, and putting the right people in place, can support its growth. “Brian was here before the first piece of marketing ever went live,” Malik says. ~ Joshua Malik, owner of Joshua Tree in Stockertown, Pennsylvania
Oasis Turf & Tree grows by narrowing their service focus while Greenscapes Land Care grows by being a full-service company.

**GROWTH BY SUBTRACTION**

Although it might seem to buck the trend, sometimes growth also means subtracting services. That was the case for Oasis Turf & Tree, headquartered in Loveland, Ohio. Rob Reindl, LIC, says that he founded the company as a full-service landscape maintenance firm — but ultimately made the decision to narrow their focus to lawn care. He says his reasoning had to do with a fear of being a “jack of all trades, master of none.”

Even so, Reindl says he doesn’t regret starting as a full-service business.

“Had I started as just a lawn care company, I never would have known that we didn’t want to grow into those other things that we had started out doing,” he says. “It’s more valuable to learn from your experiences.”

Reindl says that he’s continued to grow the company by keeping the focus narrowed and perfecting the work that they do. He says their strong focus on training and education has allowed them to charge more.

“I have always believed that if we do a better job than everyone else then we can charge more for our services and ultimately pay our people better,” Reindl says. “I realized that if we honed in on lawn care that we could provide a much better career opportunity for our people by focusing on becoming the best at what we do. It’s a more specialized type of work and it justifies higher earnings.”

Adam Zellner, vice president of sales for the company says that the question has always been, “What can we do to give our customers the best experience and the best service even though we’re solely focused on lawn care?”

The answer has been a laser focus on training so that team members are better at the services they provide. That has included encouragement and support for team members to become Landscape Industry Certified through NALP. Zellner says that there are company pay raises associated with earning this certification and others. Whereas other companies might be nervous about losing employees if they become better-trained — and ultimately more qualified — Oasis has been fostering a positive work culture and paying their people better, so that they ultimately want to stay.

“All of this continues to give our customers a better experience — and that’s what has helped us grow,” Zellner adds. “Despite all of the investment that we make into marketing and advertising, our number one source of leads still comes from referrals and that’s a testament to the fact that we’re continually focused on that customer experience.”

There’s no question it shows in the company’s numbers, as well. Oasis Turf & Tree went from a $2.2 million company in 2012 to the $8.4 million company it is today. And they continued to see growth this year, despite the pandemic.

“I think our growth this season has had a lot to do with the fact that we stayed the course,” Zellner says. “We had plans in place including investments in marketing and we didn’t let up on those plans even when the shutdowns began. I would say that definitely helped us.”

Though the pandemic has certainly left some companies unsure of future growth, Reindl adds that people spending more time at home could ultimately be a good thing for our industry. As more homeowners are staying at their lawns — and their backyards in general — there just may be opportunities to capitalize on growth.

“I’m hopeful that the trend of people spending more time at home will continue to inspire them to invest in their properties,” Reindl says.

**INVESTING IN PEOPLE**

If there’s a common thread in these stories, it’s the idea that investing in people is one of the best growth strategies out there. Whether you add or subtract services, having the right people on board means everything.

Joshua Pool, LIC, chief operations officer of Timberline Landscaping in Colorado Springs, Colorado, says that investing in people means looking at not only your hiring strategy but your retention one, too. If you have great employees — focus on what it will take to keep them.

“We’re also really focused on recruiting young people and getting kids interested in landscaping again,” Pool adds. “If we’re going to solve this industry’s labor challenge, it’s going to come down to inspiring interest from the younger generations.”

In the past, Pool says that Timberline has always relied heavily on the H-2B program. But the uncertainty of that program in recent years has meant looking at other avenues. That has translated to more involvement in NALP’s National Collegiate Landscape Competition (NCLC) and also getting more involved in local high schools.

“I think it’s important for high school students to know that they don’t always have to go to college to have a successful career,” Pool says. “Showing high school kids that landscaping can be a viable career path is really important for our industry as a whole.”

In terms of investing in people, Pool says that a big part of that has been...
the fact that they prefer not to lay their people off during the off-season. In order to be able to keep team members on board year-round, and prevent the risk of ultimately losing them, the company added a Christmas Décor franchise back in 2002 — and recently won Veteran Franchise of the Year for their success. Pool says that the idea is to keep employees busy — and employed.

“We have weird weather in that when it does snow, it’s usually gone quickly, so we try to keep our construction division going, too,” Pool says. “Between that and the Christmas Décor franchise work, we’re able to keep most of our key employees working.”

Oasis Turf & Tree also believes in employing their team in the off-season and typically uses this time to complete some of the training that they might not have time for during the busy season.

“That’s the ideal time we can train on customer service, equipment, agronomics, and support them in working toward new certifications,” Zellner says.

**PARTING WORDS OF WISDOM**

The companies that we spoke to about their growth all echoed a similar sentiment that there’s no “one way” that works for everyone. At the end of the day, whether it’s adding services — or perhaps becoming more specialized — you have to find what works best for your business.

Greenscape’s Hurd says that can admittedly be difficult to do when you’re wrapped up in the business. For that reason, it often really helps to find a mentor or someone who can offer an outsider’s perspective.

“My best advice for a company that wants to grow is to find a mentor, ideally within the landscape industry, who can offer you advice and guidance,” he says. “I’ve had quite a few mentors over the years, both locally and nationally, that have helped me get to where I am today. They’ve opened my eyes to things I couldn’t see because I was too close to it all. Being involved in the NALP has always helped open my eyes to what’s happening on a national level — to see what other companies are doing.”

Hurd also says to surround yourself with professionals from outside of the industry. Ultimately, you need a team of people to support your business who aren’t on the payroll — but whose services are just as important.

“It’s important that young companies start to build good relationships with bankers, insurance agents, attorneys, and accountants,” Hurd says. “Finding the right people will help you move forward. I can honestly say I wouldn’t be where I was today had I not found the right people behind-the-scenes that helped support our growth.”

Pool adds that building relationships with other companies — just outside the scope of the green industry — has also helped Timberline to grow.

“Over the years we’ve built really great partnerships with concrete companies or fencing companies — basically companies that offer services we don’t really want to get into but that are often considered part of a package for a large landscape project,” he explains. “That makes us a turnkey solution.”

Reindl offers a few parting words of wisdom for companies who are working for growth — saying not to lose sight of what made you reach that point in the first place. For strong, organic growth, it’s more likely great customer service.

“Quality results and customer experience are two big things that will separate you from the competition and you can’t let them drop just because you’re growing,” he says. “If you’re willing to invest in that growth — and, more specifically, in your people — then the growth will come. You just have to be ready to support it.”

Pool says that it really does boil down to that customer experience if you want to keep growing your business. At the end of the day, people have to be happy and want to keep hiring you — or referring your work to others.

“There’s no secret sauce,” Pool says. “It really does come down to great customer service in the end. You have to have well-trained people who do really great work — and you can’t let that slip just because you’re growing.”

- Joshua Pool, LIC, chief operations officer of Timberline Landscaping

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Augmenting Fleets with Robotic Mowers

By Jill Odom

When robotic mowers were first presented to the market, many landscapers couldn’t imagine they would be playing a major role in their business, but as years have passed more landscape maintenance and lawn care companies are adopting the autonomous mowers.

Some have added this new tool in the toolbox due to the ongoing labor shortage. Others gave robotic mowers a try so they could stay on the cutting edge of innovation.

Teddy Russell, CEO of Russell Landscape Group, based in Sugar Hill, Georgia, says he first tested out a robotic mower in 2010. He says a company in France invited him to their office where he was able to watch the mowers at work. They then installed one at the front of their office.

“Russell Landscape has always embraced technology and change,” Russell says. “We want to be a leader in the industry and are open to any ideas that help us continue to improve.”

Russell says they have tested Green-zie technology with Exmark and Green Machine mowers and Husqvarna’s Automower.

Jeff Sebert, president and founder of Sebert Landscape, based in Bartlett, Illinois, says his company began testing out robotic mowers around five years ago. His company has also been testing Husqvarna’s Automower brand.

“I think the future is going to be based around robotic mowers for our industry due to all the issues we have with labor,” Sebert says. Sebert says robotic mowers also fit their culture of being green and reducing their carbon emissions.

Todd Vena, maintenance operations director for Mariani Landscape, based in Lake Bluff, Illinois, says they started using robotic mowers in the spring/summer of 2018. This was in response to continuing labor constraints as well as a desire to stay up to date on the latest technology trends in the industry.

Mariani has tested out robotic mowers from STIHL, Husqvarna, ECHO and Ambrosio.

Changing Opinions

Over the past 10 years, Russell says he’s seen improvements with the technology.

“I can now see the light at the end of this long tunnel!” Russell says. “The GPS and more precise data with advanced technology is showing that this will be a viable tool for contractors and consumers to use.”

Vena says starting out they were excited to see how the autonomous mowers would perform.

“Now we have learned a lot but still have much to learn,” Vena says. “Every site presents new and different challenges. Our opinion is still we are excited to see how they change the market.”

Sebert says they are still waiting to see a robotic mower that could be easily utilized from a commercial level on a day to day basis.

“That is the current issue,” he says. “There’s nothing really out there as of yet that will take us into the commercial market and help us maintain these properties.”

Current Business Models

Mariani has installed 50 robotic mowers on customer properties and Vena says the number is climbing.

“We charge for it through our weekly maintenance services,” Vena says. “We try to find sites within our existing client base that are best suited for robotic mowers and then we get the client’s approval.”

Vena says the installation fee is recouped through their maintenance service programs. He says the customer response has been very positive, but with a learning curve.

“Standard maintenance on the machines is every two to three weeks depending on turf growth,” Vena says. “For errors and troubleshooting, that is a daily responsibility depending on the amount of errors.”

Due to the batteries, the robotic mowers are collected and stored inside during the winter.

Sebert says they have installed robotic mowers on smaller residential properties. There is a flat fee for the installation and a monthly maintenance fee. However, the resident can decide to purchase the robotic mower and take care of it on their own.

“Typically, if we’re providing other services to that property we are checking at that point in time, but at least monthly, we’re taking a check,” Sebert says. “Most
of this information is downloaded on to your cell phone so you have an app that you can rely upon to give you information on whether you’re having operational issues on that piece of equipment.”

If customers have a maintenance agreement, then Sebert will pick up the mower at the end of the season and store it for the client.

“From the customer’s perspective, there’s a lot of interested people,” Sebert says. “I think they embrace it. They love the idea. You will see people pulling off to the side of the road and taking pictures or videos of one of the Automowers as they’re working on somebody’s property.”

Russell has been utilizing the Greenzie technology on three commercial accounts and has a Husqvarna robotic mower at his house. They haven’t charged for the robotic mowing as a service yet. With the Greenzie technology, it uses a computer attached to a commercial mower that runs the machine, eliminating the need for guidewires.

“In the commercial market we are still testing this technology,” Russell says. “However, it allows a trained employee to get off the mower and provide leadership to the crew and focus on the detail and gardening services.”

**BENEFITS OF ROBOTIC MOWERS**

Now that crews are freed up from mowing, Sebert says there’s more focus on bed care, taking care of shrubbery and perennials and trimming the edges along the sidewalks.

Vena says robotic mowers have allowed the company to reallocate resources for gardening, horticultural details, and enhancements, as well as have some capacity for new work. Sebert adds that using robotic mowers is also safer since they cannot throw a rock or anything else that would be a potential hazard.

While Russell Landscape Group hasn’t implemented their robotic mowers full scale, Russell says the Greenzie technology has been able to help offset some of the manpower needs.

“Skilled labor is a challenge,” Russell says. “Typically, the person operating a large commercial mower has to be trained with a lot of experience. This will allow the company to utilize these skilled employees in a more productive way.”

**DRAWBACKS OF ROBOTIC MOWERS**

Vena says the main cons for using robotic mowers have been irregular connectivity issues and error notifications that make it difficult to plan and schedule work for the technicians handling troubleshooting on a daily basis.

Sebert says the only drawback right now with robotic mowers is the lack of larger mowers that can be moved property to property.

“Right now, I can’t move that mower to another property and work at the
same speed as a man-powered mower,” Sebert says.

Russell says because the technology is still new, he expects things will be worked out over the next 2 or 3 years. “Safety is a priority at Russell Landscape,” he says. “We have to ensure that our employees, the property and our customers all feel that the equipment would be able to self-operate in a safe manner. This will require investment, time and patience but we believe it will be worth the effort. Additionally, this is a change and we continue to find obstacles such as fences, curbs, slopes, animals, etc.”

**TESTING OUT ROBOTIC MOWERS YOURSELF**
Sebert advises companies interested in utilizing robotic mowers talk to their equipment dealer, as well as the manufacturer.

“Find out all the information that you can by talking with those individuals,” he says. “Test on your own personal property. Bring it out to your office or bring to your home, set it up and work with it for a season just to see what the impact is and gain your knowledge that way as well.”

Russell says companies need to be open to change and not expect it to be perfect.

“Testing this new technology out will offer a new energy and excitement to your team which adds value that can’t be measured,” he says.

Vena agrees that companies should be patient and prepared to allocate the needed time and resources.

“It is not set it and forget it,” he says. “There is a learning curve and you may have to go back and redo things until you learn the capabilities of each mower and site.”

Greenzie technology uses a computer attached to a commercial mower that runs the machine, eliminating the need for guidewires.

**Photo:** Russell Landscape Group

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Conquering Slopes with Remote-Controlled Mowers

While not autonomous, remote-controlled mowers are yet another way landscape companies are augmenting their current labor force with equipment.

The Klausing Group, Inc., based in Lexington, Kentucky, started demoing remote-controlled mowers in 2018. Luke Tedder, LIC, business developer with Klausing Group says they tested the Ventrac and Spider units before settling on the Green Climber unit as the best fit for them.

The model Klausing Group uses has a slope rating of 60 percent. Operators can remotely control the mower up to 500 feet away. He says all three remote-control mower brands they looked at ranged between $30,000 and $40,000, depending on the included features.

Tedder says the company decided to look into remote-controlled mowers as their Louisville branch began to push into maintaining distilleries and other commercial properties with retention basins. These protected waterways have slopes that exceed the slope limitation of a standard walk-behind or riding mower.

“The inefficiency of having six to 10 people string trim those areas with the added risk of slip and fall... it was the best move we could make to both protect our employees and better serve our clients,” Tedder says.

Tedder says he had high expectations for the remote-controlled mowers. “They’ve been exceeded since we purchased it,” he says. “The functionality as a piece of equipment, the areas that it will go, and the efficiencies that it provides is just more than I could have conceived when we started down this path.”

Using the remote-control mowers, Tedder says they are able to finish the jobs in fewer hours, making it more cost effective for customers. Tedder says their customers are elated with introduction of the remote-controlled mowers.

“It was very well received when they saw it onsite,” he says. “Safety coordinators, plant managers have all given us some feedback that it’s both really cool, and they appreciate the added nod towards safety and keeping our guys and the property safe.”

Tedder says they haven’t encountered any issues with the slope mowers yet, but have heard that there are failings if someone exceeds the slope rating or the remote control distance.

As for the training of operating a remote-controlled mower, Tedder says it took about half a day for a long-time employee. “The manufacturer came out with a technician and did some training with him in about three or four hours.” Tedder says. “Since then his level of confidence has only grown. He was a bit apprehensive that first day or two. It’s a very expensive new piece of equipment so he took it really slow and he’s gradually eased into it but his comfort level and ability to operate it at a high level has come pretty quickly.”

For other companies that deal with maintaining slopes, Tedder says they should absolutely consider remote-controlled mowers. He says they are both safer and more efficient.

“We took several years to make the decision we knew that it was the piece of equipment we needed we just wanted to make sure we were investing in the right one, and that took some time, but I would say absolutely demo these pieces of equipment,” Tedder says.

He says it’s incumbent on the contractor to explain clearly to the customer the mechanical limitations of the equipment typically used in the industry and why slope mowers call for a higher priced job.

“It was well received with commercial clients once we sat down and said, ‘Look we’re spending uber manhours on these slopes and it’s still not the safest way to do this.’” Tedder says. “Here’s the better option. We’re willing to invest as long as that relationship goes both ways.”

Remote-controlled mowers allow for safe mowing of dangerous slopes.

Photo: The Klausing Group
Meet Darrell Bley, the Outstanding Educator of the Year

By Jill Odom

Darrell Bley, Curator and Horticulture instructor at the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture, received more than 16 letters of recommendation from former students, colleagues, and industry leaders for the title of Outstanding Educator of the Year for 2020.

In those letters, there were many reoccurring statements, including the fact Bley is the first to arrive on campus and the last to leave, that he is committed to leading extra-curricular activities and that he cares deeply about his students. Bley is characterized as kind, patient, dedicated and the students’ biggest supporter.

“My class, the class of 2020, was truly brought closer together because of Darrell,” one letter of recommendation reads. “He has put in hours well above and beyond his contract to: help us study, help us plan our annual study tours (three in total) and with planning fun activities for the school community like the school musical band and the NCLC competition.”

Bley has been described as “the educator you always wanted, and after dozens of teachers coming and going you never thought would actually exist.” He makes a point to continue to learn for himself. If there is any question a student asks that he does not have the answer to, he will respond “Let me look into it” followed by a well-researched response a few days later.

“Darrell Bley is the true embodiment of what it means to be an instructor,” another letter reads. “He has an unbelievable amount of passion for sharing what he knows and wants to help you to know what he knows. I have the utmost respect for this man, and always will, and I believe that every person at my school, will stand behind that statement.”

While this award is traditionally presented at the National Collegiate Landscape Competition, due to the pandemic Bley’s recognition was delayed. He was recently presented his award in an outside ceremony attended by students and staff. NALP caught up with Bley to learn more about his career.

When were you first attracted to horticulture?
I grew up in a rural area and I grew up with working on a farm for vegetable production. We did greenhouses and annual bedding and cut flowers so I always interested in that aspect of growing plants and so forth. Now I think horticulture just kind of came along for the ride and I started to go outside of working on the farm and looking for summer work.

How did you end up an educator yourself?
When I left school, I had my own company, and I was on the Faculty Advisory Committee for Niagara College where I’d gone to school. And I returned home one evening and my wife had talked to the program coordinator and they needed a teacher for soils. So, she said, “Darrell would love to teach.”
I'm interested in working in elements, certain person to say, "You know what hardworking, and I think it takes a
I think they look at horticulture as BEING INTERESTED IN THE INDUSTRY?
PREVENTING YOUNG PEOPLE FROM WHAT DO YOU THINK IS A BARRIER
just fly by.
have a busy program here and the days never seem to have enough time. We
there's that aspect of time that you I think one of the biggest challenges
AN EDUCATOR?
WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE AS
is for the students to connect the dots from one course to the next because
of what the whole picture is so that's what I really hope the students take
away from the class.
WHAT IS THE NO. 1 LESSON YOU HOPE STUDENTS TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR CLASS?
There's a few. Definitely I always think that students have to push themselves to learn more. I think the classroom is just the gateway that opens the opportunity to learn more on that subject matter. So I really hope the students push themselves. The other thing I always think is really important is for the students to connect the dots in order to understand what the whole picture is so that what I really hope the students take away from the class.
WHAT IS YOUR MENTOR?
My mentor would be one teacher that I had at Niagara College. His name was Peter Mansfield. Peter was a real top-notch teacher. He was tough. He made you learn. When I first started teaching woody plants, I was maybe 25 and I remember trying to think I'm going to emulate how he talks. What I've always tried to do is if I see somebody who I really admire who they are, their traits, maybe their work ethic, it can be a number of things, but I always try to say I like that aspect of that individual. And I try to bring that forward. I think about that quite a bit. I usually make a list of certain attributes I see in other people and I remind myself quite often and I try to bring those aspects forward. It becomes more automatic the longer you do it. I think he influenced my passion and my love for woody plants.
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE NAMED THE OUTSTANDING EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR?
It was a really nice surprise. It really makes me very proud of the students I've taught. It's very satisfying to be recognized for the fact that you've influenced a lot of kids and helped to build their character towards the future and find their passion and field they want to go into. I really think that's satisfying and what I really love to see. I have a very good rapport with a lot of graduates. I keep in touch with a lot of graduates. On a very personal level, that means a lot to me after they graduate and go forward with their career path. I'm really excited with where they end up in a short amount of time. They end up in some great, beautiful places.
“"I really make sure I equalize my opportunities amongst every single student in there. I think it's important to stay current, and one of my mottos, something I have written down on a piece of paper is I want to learn something every day. I stay current.” - Darrell Bley

IN FIVE YEARS WHERE DO YOU SEE HORTICULTURE EDUCATION? WHERE WILL YOU BE?
Personally, I'm going to be at a crossroads. I'm going to be 65 in five years and I'm not sure if retirement is going to sit well with me. I really love what I do every day. I love coming to work and I think I'm going to love it as much in five years. I'm going to stay busy whether retired or not. I'm going to definitely stay on the teaching side of things and I can hopefully visit a lot of the botanical gardens around this world.
In the industry, I see where some of the community colleges are starting to do a lot more online teaching. I think it should be classroom teaching. I really hope where it goes is the more practical-based programs you have, the better.
WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER HORTICULTURE EDUCATORS TRYING TO GET YOUNG PEOPLE INTERESTED IN THE LANDSCAPING FIELD?
It's important to push the boundaries of the students. Don't keep it generic. I think you really need to push them forward and you can take all students whether they're strong, weak or in the middle of the class, you can push them forward. In order to do that, you need to keep it fun in the classroom. I think there's a lot of room for stories. I think as an educator, you need to be extremely professional. That's important to set that higher level of professionalism. It doesn't matter who you are in the class, I take equal time to teach you. I really make sure I equalize my opportunities amongst every single student in there. I think it's important to stay current, and one of my mottos, something I have written down on a piece of paper is I want to learn something every day. I stay current. I do a lot of reading, trying to really push my boundaries of interest well outside of horticulture. TLP

Would you like to nominate someone for the 2021 Educator of the Year? The application is currently on the website - https://www.landscapeprofessionals.org/LP/LP/Careers/Educator_of_the_Year.aspx
Welcome To Our Newest Members

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Congratulations to These Newly Certified Professionals

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<tr>
<th>Full Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Marc William Baker</td>
<td>Exterior Technician</td>
<td>Hardscape, Irrigation, Ornamental, Softscape, Turf</td>
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<td>Michael Anthony Durkin</td>
<td>Lawn Care Manager</td>
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<td>Tera Howerton</td>
<td>Lawn Care Manager</td>
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<td>James Belt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tyler Jacob Marguth</td>
<td>Lawn Care Manager</td>
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opportunity for our industry to rise to the occasion and show our communities and clients how much we can contribute to their everyday quality of life.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FOR THE NALP TODAY AND WHY? HOW DOES THE BOARD PLAN TO TACKLE THOSE CHALLENGES?

I believe that labor is going to continue to be our biggest challenge, which seems crazy when so many Americans are currently unemployed due to the pandemic. The reality of our industry is that it’s very labor intensive and there are not enough people interested in performing such labor. We aren’t alone in the struggle to entice a reliable workforce. Most other trades in the construction and service industries are experiencing a similar shortage of labor. Part of this problem comes back to the perception of our industry. The NALP Foundation and the Industry Growth Initiative have done an amazing job at improving awareness of our collective history. Creating the NALP Archives allows us to better understand the present when we have concrete knowledge about our past.

With these principles in mind, focusing on building our collective history is essential. Creating the NALP Archives is a group effort, and we continually need your help and participation. If you’d like to donate materials (print and/or digital) please email archives@landscapeprofessionals.org.

As we continue to build the NALP Archives, we become more aware of the amazing accomplishments NALP has achieved over the years. From launching Student Career Days in 1977 to partnering with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) for a Clean Air Study in 1989, NALP has a broad range of accomplishments that need to be recognized and celebrated.

The NALP Digital Archives will be accessible to members and the general public soon - stay tuned for more information. In the meantime, visit the NALP Timeline to see a chronological view of NALP’s accomplishments over the years, https://tinyurl.com/y8p5kqve

“We are not makers of history; we are made by history.” — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
2020 Election Update – NALP Creates Voting Resources

ON TUESDAY, NOV. 3, AMERICANS ACROSS THE NATION will head to their polling places to cast their vote in a historic election that will have profound impacts on the direction of our nation. Our nation seems more divided than ever and as we near election day NALP wants to stress the importance of this election and provide you information to assist and encourage you to vote.

As the national association for the landscape industry we believe this election is extremely important for the entire nation but also specifically for the landscape industry. Votes casted in November will elect officials for two-, four- or six-year terms in which the elected officials will craft policies, laws and regulations that will impact the landscape industry at the federal and state level. We want all NALP members and landscape professionals to let their voices be heard through their ability to vote.

These may seem cliché but they are true:

- Elections matter
- Your vote can make a difference
- Elections have consequences
- Every vote counts
- You can’t complain if you didn’t vote

Now is the time to start focusing in on the 2020 elections, get informed, be prepared and be ready to participate in the democratic process.

WHAT’S AT STAKE

Once every four years we experience a proverbial “perfect storm” of a presidential election combined with the possibility of major changes in the partisan balance of power in the U.S. Senate, U.S. House of Representatives and many state governor mansions and state legislative chambers. The outcome of the election results could drastically change the majority and minority status of America’s two political parties. AND 2020 looks to be no different.

- Presidential Race – President Trump (R) vs. Former Vice President Biden (D)

Senate – In the Senate, 35 senators are up for re-election. Of those 35, 23 are Republicans and 12 are Democrats. The Republicans hold a 53 to 47 majority that could be in jeopardy with several of those Republican senators in races deemed a “toss-up.”

House – All 435 seats are up for grabs in the biennial election for the U.S. House of Representatives. The Democrats hold a 223 to 188 advantage over the Republicans with about 24 seats deemed as “toss up”. At this stage in the race it appears the Democrats will retain the House, but a strong showing by President Trump could put the House back in play.

Governors – 11 states will be voting for their governor

State Legislatures – 43 states will have elections for their state legislative offices. Of those states, 22 state legislative battleground chambers have been identified in
17 states. Heading into the 2020 elections, Democrats control 11 battleground chambers and Republicans control nine.

Going into the election President Trump’s approval rating has been dropping for various reasons including, but not limited to, his handling of COVID-19, his handling of civil unrest, a sagging economy and high unemployment rate. BUT historically incumbents have a very strong track record of being reelected and President Trump has maintained a solid base of support.

While President Trump’s approval rating has dropped, Congress’s approval rating is even lower, mired in partisan gridlock. Republicans control the Senate while Democrats control the House, so there is blame to go around.

As of writing this article, Democrats are in a strong position to capture both the Presidency and Senate while retaining the House and we could be getting ready for a Democratic “Blue Wave” but there is still a lot of time prior to November. We are due for the traditional “October Surprise,” which historically has had significant impacts on the election. Additionally, the state of the economy and a possible vaccine for COVID-19 could dramatically alter the playing field.

HELPING YOU VOTE!
Now that you understand what’s at stake, it’s important you know how to vote. Voting is your constitutional right and opportunity to play an integral role in our democracy. To assist in these efforts NALP has created an election 2020 information section of the NALP website located at www.landscapeprofessionals.org/election2020. The election 2020 website serves to provides specific voter information for all 50 states. This information includes:
- Where/how you can register
- What you need to register
- Deadline to register
- Absentee rules
- How to find polling place/absentee ballot

Additionally, due to COVID-19, voting by mail will be at historic levels this year and in-person election day procedures are subject to changes prior to the election. NALP will be continuously monitoring any developments and updating with the most current information.

Your ability to vote and your participation in the 2020 elections is NALP’s top priority. To be informed and educated NALP recommends that all NALP members independently research candidates for your specific elected offices by visiting their specific campaign websites.

NALP ADVOCACY PRIORITIES
Advocate Relentlessly is one of NALP’s five strategic pillars. NALP is the voice of the landscape industry before elected officials at the federal, state and local level, and what happens in November will certainly impact NALP’s advocacy priorities. NALP will be providing additional resources to help members understand industry objectives while also providing information on where to find elected officials positions on issues. NALP’s tier 1 “priority” issues in 2020 have been:
- H-2B cap relief
- Pesticide/fertilizer restrictions
- Landscape services deemed “essential”
- Water quality and use
- Pesticide applicator certification and training

NALP has previously provided and will continue to provide information on elected officials that have supported NALP Tier 1 “priority” issues.

The 2020 election is likely a transformative election for our future. We want to ensure that you have all the necessary information to ensure your ability to vote, and we encourage you to do so. Nov. 3 is just around the corner…

For any questions or concerns involving voting or the 2020 election please contact Andrew Bray, andrew@landscapeprofessionals.org. TLP
Christy Webber, Christy Webber Landscapes

Christy Webber, owner of Christy Webber Landscapes, based in Chicago, Illinois, says she's a country girl and her love for the outdoors drew her to the landscaping industry. “I grew up in the country, but I wanted to live in city because I’m gay and wanted to be around people like me so that just seemed like a natural fit,” she says.

She incorporated her business in 1994. She says she had no training whatsoever when starting out, but she ended up taking some horticultural courses at the College of DuPage. Now she employs over 400 employees.

“I grew up in the country, but I wanted to live in city because I’m gay and wanted to be around people like me so that just seemed like a natural fit,” she says.

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“What is your proudest moment in business?”
My proudest moment was when I got the United Center. United Center was one of the hottest joints in town because it was where the Bulls played and at that time, they were on championship number five or something like that. Brickman had it and they were a big company. I had one pickup truck and one dump truck. I'm very still proud to have that since 1997.

“What is your biggest business challenge today?”
For me right now, just because I'm almost 60, I'm tired. The biggest challenge is just to stay in it. I want to come to work every day, but I just want to do what I want to do. I do love putting the teams together and making it all click. I'm a production person.

“What motivates you on Monday mornings?”
I work on Saturdays and some of Sundays, so I don't have to come to work on Monday. So, my Monday might be Wednesday. For me right now, I want to close out somehow a winner and I want the business to continue on. I don't know how exactly that's going to happen right now.

“What business worry keeps you up most at night?”
Never in one million trillion years would I ever thought I'd be the size of the company I am now. I've learned the more you got, the more you worry and the more you worry about losing it.

“What is a great landscape life hack you’d be willing to share?”
Pay attention to your numbers and don't take no for an answer, meaning that if your CFO doesn't have a spreadsheet for you, you need to ask for it. Don't think that you can just step away and let others run your business because it's just not the same. At my size, I need everybody for sure, but they also need me as their leader, as the person whose name is on the door. You got to watch your business and you have to understand business a little bit. You have to have common sense and look at your numbers and see whether you're on track.

“Who is your business mentor?”
My CFO has always been whispering in my ear. My biggest growth spurt came when he came on board. I sputtered and stopped out at $5 million. He came on board and borrowed money. I never did that before.

“What does it mean to you to be a landscape professional?”
That's changed for me. It used to always be winning jobs and uniforms. Now, it's really just do a good job. Let's do a professional job, not some sloppy install.

“In five years, where do you see your business going?”
I hope retired! I really think that some of the people who work for me could run this thing, not into the ground, but even run it better. I need to figure it out. TLP
With the help of NOW Solutions, you can get the essential lawn care products you need and save. This program runs August 1 – September 30, 2020, so don’t wait.

To learn more, contact your distributor representative or visit es.bayer.us/now-solutions.
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