

PLANET

advantage

WINTER 2006

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Why did I switch to John Deere? Two words—**GreenFleet**.

Tom Emerson, Professional Landscaper



3320 COMPACT UTILITY TRACTOR



757 Z-TRACK MOWER



HPX GATOR UTILITY VEHICLE



332 SKID-STEER LOADER



BH65 POWER BLOWER

It's a lot to ask to change brands. But GreenFleet was an opportunity I couldn't afford to miss. Literally. I've seen firsthand what John Deere can do in the field—more productivity, which means more money in my pocket. Plus, by purchasing just a few pieces of John Deere equipment, I qualify for a huge GreenFleet discount. GreenFleet gave me the chance to try a trailer full of John Deere, very affordably. And that's what convinced me to take my whole fleet green.

So give your John Deere dealer a call. You'll see making the switch is way easier than you think. I know I did.



JOHN DEERE

PLANET *advantage*



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Cover photo: Courtesy of Outside Unlimited, Inc., Hampstead, MD

OUR MISSION

The Professional Landcare Network cultivates and safeguards opportunities for our members — the dedicated professionals and companies who create and enhance the world's landscapes.

OUR VISION

To be the respected leader and voice of the green industry.

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Winter 2006



Jennifer Buck
Student Career Days Committee Chair

Plan to attend the INDUSTRY'S LARGEST RECRUITING EVENT

I'm often asked why I attend Student Career Days (SCD). In recent months, my response has been, "I'm the chair of the event, silly, I have to go." As to why I've been attending SCD for so many years, though, my response is very different. SCD is the reason I'm writing this article, the reason I'm in the green industry, and much of the reason why I have so many contacts and friends in the industry. SCD helps me accomplish my professional goal of finding qualified employees and interns, and it allows me to build my personal relationships with industry colleagues.

Interacting with companies that are attending SCD for the first time always puts the event in fresh perspective for me. First-time attendees say that they often have heard about the event and how great it is but, for one reason or another, have never taken the steps to get there. Watching the expressions on their faces, I can just imagine what is running through their heads. "Ohhhh, this is why I hear so much about SCD." The surprised and anxious expressions are often followed by comments such as:

- "I had no idea this event was so big."
- "I can't believe how many energetic and bright students are here. They have updated and professional resumes, and they want to interview for positions at my company."
- "The students are so excited to be here. It just rubs off on me."
- "I can't believe I've been missing out on this for so many years."

That last line is one of my favorites. That's when I know the event has really touched them, and they are already planning to attend next year. And for good reason. From its simple beginnings in 1977, SCD has grown to become the green industry's largest recruiting event and student competition. It includes a career fair, educational sessions, networking opportunities, and competitive events that are directly related to the skills necessary for a career in the green industry. SCD attracts hundreds of students enrolled in horticulture and related programs from colleges and universities across the country.

Join us next March at Michigan State University and reach out to the industry's future. We expect between 800 and 900 students to participate. Sign up now! If you're a first-time attendee, please make a special effort to say hello. I want you to share your first impressions and excitement with me.

The Professional Landcare Network's 31st annual Student Career Days (SCD) will be held March 29–April 1, 2007, at Michigan State University, in Lansing, Michigan. For more information about Student Career Days, contact PLANET at (800) 395-2522 or visit the SCD Web site at StudentCareerDays.org.

DIFFERENTIATE YOURSELF

from your competitors

PLANET certification is an excellent way to separate yourself from the competition. Certified employees on your staff indicates that your company has achieved the highest standards of professionalism.

But the value of certification goes well beyond its marketing appeal. PLANET's certification program is designed to help raise industry standards, encourage self-improvement, and help employers award those individuals who have demonstrated a high level of competence in the profession. The program also offers first-class, test-specific training materials that can double as an important resource for ongoing in-house training.

PLANET offers several certification designations, including the Certified Landscape Technician (CLT), Certified Landscape Professional (CLP), Certified Ornamental Landscape Professional (COLP), Certified Turfgrass Professional (CTP), and Certified Turfgrass Professional-Cool Season Lawns (CTP-CSL). Participating in any of these programs will add value to your employees, your company, and the industry.

Join the thousands of people who are already internationally certified by PLANET and set yourself apart. As an added bonus, PLANET members receive a discount on training materials and testing that is well worth the cost of membership. For more information, visit landcarenetwork.org.



Matt Triplett, CLP, CLT, CLIA
International Certification
Council Chair

PLANET advantage is sent complimentary to PLANET members and other green industry professionals nationwide. If you are a green industry service provider that specializes in lawn care, design/build/installation, landscape management, or interior plantscaping and are not a PLANET member, call today to take advantage of a special offer to receive a FREE copy of *Crystal Ball Report: Developing Your Human Capital — A Focus on Training* and your choice of one of four specialty-group publications at the members-only price. Call Gail Rogers in the Membership Department at (800) 395-2522 today for this one-time special offer.



What is your industry's BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

McRAE ANDERSON, CLP, ASLA
Interior Plantscaping Specialty Group Director



We need to ensure our companies' viability

We've made some great strides over the years, but, as an industry, we still have a ways to go to get the prices we need to ensure our member companies' viability. Most of us in this business enjoy our work. We're creative, we like to work

with people, and we look forward to creating beautiful, functional green interiors. Unfortunately, we're not nearly as fortunate or skilled when it comes to running the business side of our companies.

The profit margin for interior plantscapers should be in the 20 percent range. Instead, our industry is reporting an average net in the single digits. This is not acceptable, but it's understandable, considering the rising costs of plant material, fuel, and insurance, as well as the perception among still too many clients that the services we provide are a luxury and not a necessity.

This is our challenge — to become more astute with our pricing and marketing so that we can grow, offer more services to our clients, and offer more opportunities to our employees. To rise to the challenge, industry members will have to devote more time to the financial side of their operations. We'll also have to continue on our quest to increase awareness about the benefits of plants, which we actually initiated with Plants at Work more than six years ago.

The initiative has had a positive impact among our clients, 95 percent of whom are in the commercial sector. Retail operations, shopping centers, and corporate campuses are changing their perception of plants in the workplace. After all, plants that increase productivity by more than 10 percent can no longer be viewed as a luxury; they are a necessity. Furthermore, many of our Class A clients already appreciate the value of image. We have to continually demonstrate, with our designs, containers, and installations, that interior plants are image enhancers. Similarly, we have to stay current with design trends, to make sure that the services and products we provide are compatible with landscape architects' expectations.

The task at hand is not as daunting as it may appear. We've come a long way over the past few years, but we still have to continue to sharpen our pencils and our clients' perceptions of our service offering.

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BILL HORN, CLP, CLT
Landscape Management Specialty Group Member



We're in a labor crisis

If there's a silver lining in the recent H2-B cloud, the failure of so many landscape management companies to get their workers last year brought our labor crisis into full view. We don't simply depend on guest workers to get the job done. We depend on them for keeping our companies and our industry viable.

Without them, our current customers suffer, and growth comes to a screeching halt.

This is a case of demand far outstripping supply — labor supply — and if we don't fix it, our industry will miss an opportunity of a lifetime.

I believe the industry can approach the crisis from several vantage points. First and foremost, we need a guest-worker program that will ensure an adequate supply of field workers. The current H2-B program has a proven track record for supplying legal workers. We need an expanded version of that program, or something like it, to meet our labor needs. What we don't need is a mishmash of regulations that will make us quasi enforcers of new, improved immigration legislation.

With that said, I don't believe we can pin our industry's future entirely on H2-B, in large part because the crisis extends beyond the field. Our industry also needs middle and upper-management people. Owners and managers need to be proactive and place labor issues on their yearly strategic-planning agendas. Filling our labor requirements, including recruiting, training, and retaining employees, has to be part of any business plan and any long-range strategy.

We must start recruiting earlier, when students are in their high school years, and follow through with a sustained recruiting effort at two- and four-year schools. Describing career paths and growth opportunities within our industry becomes an important part of our message to students and to other prospective employees both inside and outside our industry.

Recruiting, though, is only half the story. Training and retention are important in their own rights, and they complement one another. By placing more emphasis on training employees for mid- and upper-level management positions, we are also scoping out career paths for them, defining new challenges, and keeping them interested in working for us and our industry.

All service industries seem to be in a tug of war over a very limited labor supply. All we can do is keep the pressure on our legislators, put our best foot forward with young recruits, and keep up a sustained recruiting effort all year long.

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JEFF KORHAN, CLP, ASLA
Design/Build/Installation Specialty Group Member



Consistent quality standards build profits

Achieving consistent profitability in the green industry's design/build sector is becoming a challenge. Today, the marketplace contains a greater range of companies. In some respects, buyers are becoming more discriminating. More companies offer more services, and this presents more choices for the consumer.

These choices naturally lead to value comparisons. Unfortunately, most design/build projects are customized to a specific site and customer's needs, making comparisons difficult. Customers logically give visual evaluations of quality the greatest weight. This hurts the profitability of professional companies that incorporate the necessary infrastructure to ensure the long-term integrity of their projects.

All things being equal, companies offering excellent quality at a fair price will prosper. However, all things are not usually equal for one important reason. On a typical design/build project, much of the investment that goes into ensuring quality is underground — the client never sees it. For this reason, they don't want to pay for it. Such infrastructure can include the base to patios and walls, wiring, drainage measures, and piping for various systems. In addition, don't forget good soil preparation, properly sized root balls, and the removal and disposal of buried debris.

What's the solution? First, we must get together as an industry and develop quality standards. We should do this before they're developed for us by others who don't have our knowledge and experience. Then, we need to educate the marketplace to look for adherence to these standards.

How should this process work? Should PLANET combine efforts with other professional organizations such as the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)? How high should these standards be? Unfortunately, we live in a society in which buyers are conditioned to accept short-term solutions, which compromise quality. Should we accept that reality or strive for creating projects that are sustainable over the long haul? Higher quality doesn't have to mean higher prices, but in a labor-intensive industry such as ours, it should be foreseeable.

For example, the Certified Landscape Technician (CLT) test includes a design/build component. CLTs are more likely to deliver high-quality services and to be more highly compensated than their peers, as well they should. Greater market awareness of the value of such training and certification will make it easier for "good profits" to prevail. This should increase the demand for our services at consistently higher levels. Having more quality projects that customers continue to benefit from will only expand that market for all of us. And better yet, the marketplace will help us to ensure the future prosperity of our businesses.

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FRED HASKETT, CTP, CA
Lawn Care Specialty Group Director



What is happening to Canada can happen to the U.S., too

In the lawn care industry, we fight an ongoing battle to be able to use products that keep our customers' landscapes healthy and green. Thanks to the pre-emption laws, local municipalities are prevented from overriding state and federal regulations and legislating against the use of these products. In Canada, however, an incredibly organized and committed group of activists has overturned that country's pre-emption law. The result? Local municipalities throughout Canada are prohibiting lawn care operators from using chemicals that keep weeds, insects, and diseases in check. The irony, of course, is that these same pesticides and herbicides are readily available to homeowners and other users, such as golf courses.

If you think we're immune to these challenges from so-called "environmentalists" in this country, think again. There are individuals and groups of individuals — all very organized — who simply don't understand and don't care to understand how and why we use lawn care products. They are simply looking for an excuse or a way to give local government the authority to overturn federal statutes that allow professional applicators to use insecticides, pesticides, and other products.

In Canada, more than 120 municipalities now have individualized sets of bylaws governing the use of lawn care products, and more than a dozen have banned their use by professional lawn care operators. Weed Man has been a leader in the fight to protect the right of its franchisees and other professional operators to use safe and effective lawn care products. But in the words of Weed Man's Chief Operating Officer Jennifer Lemcke, "Our industry in Canada is in a defensive mode. Our industry has formed an IPM (Integrated Pest Management) Council, we worked with individual lawn care operators to put together a Plant Health Care program, and we have developed a strong educational campaign at the local and national level. But we are fighting an uphill battle against a well-organized opponent."

Her advice to lawn care operators in this country is to be proactive — to become organized, to educate, and to network — before activists become entrenched. "We thought we had a pre-emption law in our country," she adds. "A 2001 ruling in one Quebec municipality changed our landscape dramatically."

Lemcke's advice is well taken. PLANET and the industry at large continually work and lobby at the national level on behalf of lawn care operators. But their effort doesn't absolve us, as individual operators, from taking responsibility for our own future. We have to be hyper-vigilant at the local level to protect our industry, our livelihood, and our lawns and landscapes. We must continue to network with local governments, educate the public and our customers, and train our people.

What is happening in Canada can happen here.

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Diversification is key—no matter what business you're in. Landscape contractors living in colder climates need only look out their front windows during the winter to discover a new outlet that could bring them big profits. Industry experts will tell you that a key to success in the snow removal business is learning

to use different tools that fit the specific environments you are servicing. That's why professional snow and ice management companies have turned in recent years to compact equipment. By interchanging attachments, they can tailor one machine to perform a variety of snow and ice removal tasks.

THERE IS NO OFF-SEASON.





Skid-Steer Loaders

Featuring the ability to turn within their own length, skid-steer loaders' maneuverability and agility make them popular for removing snow in the tightest quarters, such as crowded parking lots. Unlike a pickup truck with a snow blade, a skid-steer loader is not only able to push snow, but lift, pile or load it for transport.

"In many applications the dumping ability and large number of attachment options enable the operator to remove snow more efficiently," says Rob Otterson, Bobcat Company market segmentation manager.

Attachments most commonly used with skid-steer loaders are the snow blade, snow V-blade, angle broom, snowblower, scraper, Whisker push broom, snow pusher and buckets. The Bobcat® snow blade attachment comes in five blade widths ranging from 4 to 8 feet, and is best used when pushing more than a foot of snow off a path. For further versatility, many snow removal companies opt for a snow V-blade. It can be configured five different ways—as a straight blade, V-cut blade, scoop blade and 30-degree left- or right-angle blade.

For snow removal jobs that require removing hard-packed snow and ice, Otterson suggests using a scraper attachment. It has a self-sharpening cutting edge that easily slides under stubborn snow and ice on pavement or concrete to produce a smooth surface.

The snowblower attachment proves ideal for blowing more than 6 inches of snow away from an area, into a pile or dump truck. And for lighter snowfalls, attach either an angle broom or Whisker push broom. The angle broom can be used for sweeping less than a foot of snow, and the Whisker push broom should be used for less than 6 inches of snow. Snow buckets also help plow snow, but they're best used for piling snow and loading it into a truck. The snow bucket, which ranges in width from 54 to 100 inches, has a round back to aid in dumping.

An enclosed cab with heat, selectable joystick controls and suspension seat are just a few of the features on Bobcat skid-steer loaders that help make operators more productive and their jobs easier. An optional two-speed transmission also increases efficiency by shortening travel time and increasing plowing performance.



All-Wheel Steer Loaders

The advantage of the all-wheel steer loader is that landscape contractors get two machines in one. Operators can quickly change from all-wheel steer mode to skid-steer mode with the flip of a switch inside the Bobcat A300 all-wheel steer loader.

The steerable axles of the all-wheel steer loader increase comfort when riding or turning on hard surfaces and enable the operator to direct tractive effort, minimizing sliding when pushing snow. The all-wheel steer mode also greatly reduces rubber marks left by the tires when turning on concrete.

When it comes to pushing snow, experts know that speed improves blade performance. By using the standard two-speed feature on the A300, Otterson says operators can choose the 12-mph high-speed setting to build momentum. The momentum and snow work together—resulting in the snow rolling with the blade rather than the blade just pushing it.



Mini Track Loaders

In addition to skid-steer and all-wheel steer loaders, a mini track loader provides an easy-to-operate, economically priced machine that can be used for snow removal. By adding attachments to the Bobcat MT52 and MT55, you now have machines to access spaces—such as sidewalks and walkways—that are too small for larger equipment.



Toolcat 5600 Utility Work Machine

The benefit of purchasing a Toolcat utility work machine is that it combines the best features of a utility loader, pickup truck and attachment carrier into one machine. It also features a hydrostatic drive system that provides high axle torque, simple shifting and excellent speed control.

The machine's four-wheel drive and weight distribution provide the traction and pushing power needed for fast and efficient snow removal. Because it has all-wheel steering and a tighter turning radius than most ATVs, the utility work machine is often used for plowing snow in tight areas, such as crowded parking lots and in-between buildings.

In addition to the attachments mentioned previously, a spreader attachment can be mounted in the Toolcat utility work machine's cargo box to spread salt and sand on sidewalks and pathways. The machine's 60.5-inch width allows it to fit between most sidewalks and pathways, making it ideal for municipal snow removal applications.



2300 Utility Vehicle

The new Bobcat 2300 utility vehicle can move snow, sweep and move materials with its one-of-a-kind RapidLink™ attachment system. Operators can control attachments with an easy-to-operate joystick—all from the comfort of the operator area. An enclosed cab is available for added protection from winter weather.



VersaHANDLER Telescopic Tool Carrier

If you plan to take on larger snow removal jobs—such as mall parking areas—Otterson says a telescopic tool carrier can provide the extra speed and lift you need.

The VersaHandler® telescopic tool carrier can travel as fast as 18.4 mph and is available with lift heights of 18 or 23 feet depending on the model. The travel speed enables the machine to more effectively push and pile a large volume of snow. And the increased lift height enables operators to pile snow higher than a one-yard loader and more easily load dump trucks.

Another advantage of telescopic tool carriers is their ground clearance, which enables them to easily travel across snow-covered areas. And the two-speed hydrostatic transmission features a creep function which provides dynamic braking and controlled movement while inching up and down slopes. Attachments most commonly used with telescopic tool carriers for snow removal are the angle broom and light material buckets.

One Tough Animal™



Bobcat®



MOVING

COMPANY PROFILE:

**LANDSCAPE CONCEPTS
MANAGEMENT, INC.**

Grayslake, Illinois

FOUNDER & PRESIDENT:

Mike Kerton

FOUNDED: 1981

EMPLOYEES: 300

HIGHLIGHT:

This year, Landscape Concepts Management received the Presidential award from the Greater North Michigan Avenue Association for the best urban landscape on the Chicago Magnificent Mile. This award had not been granted since 2001.



It's a familiar story. An aspiring landscape contractor starts his own company after gaining a few years of experience working in the industry. He gets a couple of accounts, takes on a partner, and is off to the races. This story, though, has a slightly different twist. Landscape Concepts Management, Inc., located in Grayslake, Illinois, is not your ordinary company. Mike Kerton's company is one of the largest full-service landscape management companies in the Midwest, with branches in Illinois, Michigan, and Indiana, and a satellite location in Minnesota. Kerton, founder and owner, has accomplished this, in large part, by providing a single point-of-contact service.

While most full-service companies provide a one-stop service for clients, Landscape Concepts Management provides this service without using subcontractors. Additionally, the company's full-service offering for a particular job comes under that account manager's umbrella.

Visionary approach

In business for 25 years, Landscape Concepts Management has seven divisions — tree care, plant health care, water features, seasonal color, construction-design, snow removal, and landscape management. Its market is comprised of office buildings and corporate campuses, retail establishments (including shopping centers), apartments, homeowner associations (HOAs), and municipalities.

"Our company started to seriously expand seven years ago," says Kerton. "Despite a trend at the time to focus on providing niche services, I thought that one-stop shopping was still an attractive option for our clients. I wanted to find a way to make it even more attractive by providing unimpeachable timely and consistent service."



AWAY

from niche services

To do this, Kerton restructured his company to accommodate a matrix management strategy. Manufacturers tried this approach in the 1970s and 1980s, but the strategy was never truly given a chance in the service sector.

Aggressive growth strategy

As Kerton explains, “The matrix management system allows direct interdepartmental communication and decision making, expediting services to the client under the supervision of a single point of contact.” The approach, he adds, allows his company to apply its resources in a timely manner and gives account managers the ability to efficiently manage a large spectrum of services. Throughout, company divisions operate semi-independently. They provide ongoing support for full-service accounts and stay on call for special projects.

The business approach works. Since it initiated an aggressive growth strategy, the company has experienced a 25 percent annual bump in sales. The expansion is all home grown, too. Kerton says that he doesn’t want to buy other companies and then attempt to overlay his company’s culture on them. For that reason and others, he has no intention of transforming Landscape Concepts Management into a national company. He wants to own a strong regional company that operates branches within similar geographies

and climates, with his team members at the controls.

“This is our second year in Indianapolis and fourth year in Detroit,” Kerton relates. “In both markets, we started with our landscape management division and then brought in different services per a client’s request. Again, we are full service and have in-house experts in all areas of an exterior landscape.”

Companies cannot provide this level of service without having the people to make it happen. Kerton realized early on that his growth strategy not only depended on having a flexible management structure in place, but that it also hinged on having specialists in every field. Today, the company employs Certified Landscape Professionals, Certified Landscape Technicians, Certified Arborists, Certified Snow Professionals, and Certified Irrigation Contractors. Eighty percent of its managers hold college degrees, 98 percent of managers and supervisors have attended courses in green industry-related subjects, and everyone attends seasonal, in-house training. The owner has invested in people and it has paid off.

American dream

Landscape Concepts Management’s owner may very well be a prototype of the American dream. Only 45 years old, he oversees a company that manages the landscape for more than 227 Burger King locations, 150 apartment communities, 100 HOAs, 150 com-



mercial properties, and 100 shopping centers. In addition to providing more traditional management, lawn and tree care, and design/build services, Landscape Concepts Management also works with municipalities and forest preserve districts to restore prairies and native grounds.

The single point-of-contact approach, combined with the matrix management formula and a continuous reinvestment of revenue, has fueled this growth. In fact, the owner's vision and talent helped earn him a finalist position this year for the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year award.

The company is big but not so big that Kerton is an absentee owner. To the contrary, he says he is a hands-on type of guy who enjoys getting in the field and working with his team members. He stays in touch, too, by holding weekly sales and operations meetings.

An organizational chart shows crew members and a foreman for each crew.

Foremen wear white shirts and are fluent in English. Next come the 10 account managers, with their property load determined by an overall dollar volume, and supervisors who oversee specific geographical territories. The company also employs five branch managers, two vice presidents, seven division heads, and an executive committee.

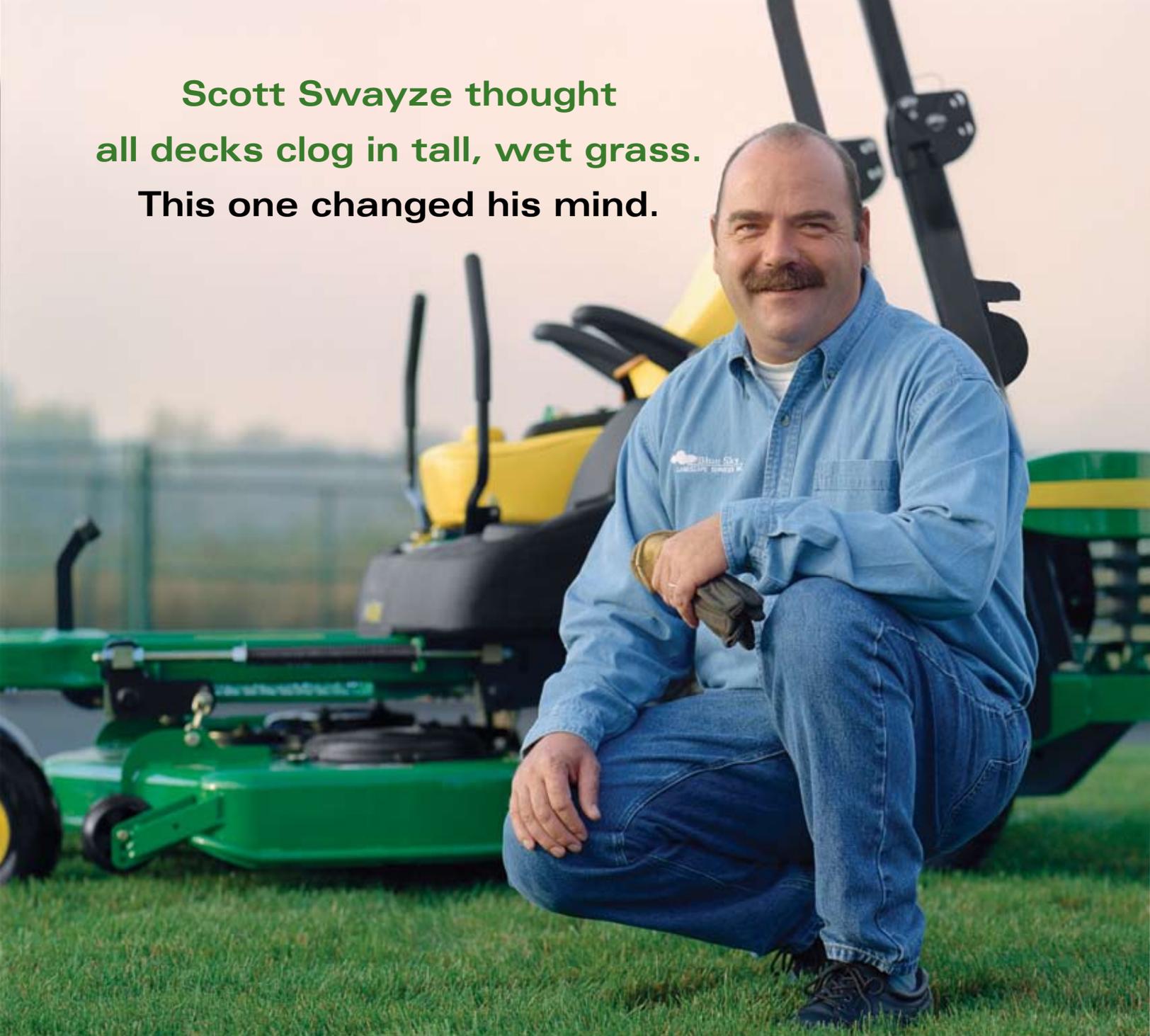
"It's interesting," says Kerton. "As big as we've become in recent years, our company operates with a culture that's more like a million-dollar company than a multimillion-dollar one. We truly work hard to have a corporate culture with a personal touch. I'm convinced, too, that much of our success hinges on our single point-of-contact approach. What company wouldn't want to conduct business with a one-stop shop and one person? Making this service timely and consistent only strengthens our competitive advantage." 

- **Landscape Concepts Management has in-house experts in all areas of exterior maintenance.**

- **Seven divisions offer tree care, plant health care, water features, seasonal color, construction-design, snow removal, and landscape management.**

- **The single point-of-contact approach, matrix management formula, and continuous reinvestment of revenue have fueled company growth.**

**Scott Swayze thought
all decks clog in tall, wet grass.
This one changed his mind.**



The New John Deere 7-Iron II™ Deck.

“Here in Washington, we have to cut in wet conditions all the time,” says Scott. “So we can’t afford to clog. And with the new 7-Iron II deck, we didn’t have to slow down, not even once.” With a higher blade tip speed, the 7-Iron II makes short work of even the tallest grasses.

Scott Swayze, Blue Sky Landscape Services, Inc., Puyallup, Washington



See more of what Scott Swayze has to say at www.mowpro.com



JOHN DEERE

INDUSTRY VETERANS **PLANET**

I imagine inviting a business consultant in for a day, and the only cost to you is his or her direct expenses. In this bargain, you also get the ear of an industry veteran who has made significant, long-term contributions to the green industry. This veteran has experienced what you're experiencing and can offer timely suggestions that will help you grow and prosper. Sound interesting?



**Richard Poynter,
president of Poynter Landscape
and Construction**

**“We felt that we were
doing many of the
right things, but now
we’re doing them
better thanks to the
Trailblazer program
and thanks to Steve.”**

— RICHARD POYNTER

The opportunity to invite a Trailblazer — the industry veteran — to your facility is just one perk of your PLANET membership. Trailblazers include 60 of the most respected names in lawn care, landscape design/build/installation, landscape management, and interior plantscaping. These experts have been nominated by their peers to be Trailblazers,

and they commit to setting aside one day per year to provide on-site mentoring to other PLANET members.

How it works

This in-depth, member-to-member networking and mentoring program allows company owners to gain insight and advice on developing and growing their businesses. Any PLANET member can apply for the Trailblazers' personal assistance. If selected in a random drawing, your company will have a Trailblazer's undivided attention for an entire day. The popular program has won accolades from mentors and protégés alike.

Rod Bailey, CCLP, a former PLANET president and landscape contractor, operates a consulting business out of his office in Duvall, Washington. Bailey was a charter member of the Trailblazer program and, over the years, has visited several member sites. “I can speak for all Trailblazers when I say that it's important to give back to the industry,” says Bailey. “When we advise another industry member, we're doing two things: As a Trailblazer, we often help company owners break out of a particularly frustrating business pattern and make them more aware of their true potential. And, by helping out, we also work toward building a better industry.”

Recently, this Trailblazer visited Roscoe Klausing, CLP, owner of the Klausing Group, Inc., in Lexington, Kentucky. “We've been hanging around the \$1 million mark for a few years,” Klausing relates. “One of our stumbling blocks is people, and Rod helped create an organizational chart

TRAILBLAZERS



Rod Bailey, CCLP, former PLANET president and landscape contractor

for the future and a budget that supports it. After talking with Rod, I have a better idea of what our company should look like and how to get it there.”

He continues, “To get someone as knowledgeable as Rod to come in for a day, for the cost of a plane fare, lodging, and food is unbelievable. Furthermore, what could be more valuable than having an industry professional look inside your company and give an honest assessment of your organization? You get a good assessment of your business from someone with business experience. All you have to do is be honest about where your company is and where you want it to go.”

Bill Leuenberger, lawn care manager for Chalet Landscape Co. in Wilmette, Illinois, recently invited a Trailblazer applicant to his

“I can speak for all Trailblazers when I say that it’s important to give back to the industry.”

– ROD BAILEY, CCLP

facility. “I took Darin Bowers, the owner of Pro-Mow Lawn Care in Charleston, Illinois, to see several of our jobs,” says Leuenberger. “I showed him our facility, and we talked about the things I look for in a customer relationship. We spent the day together talking about business, what works, and what doesn’t work so well.”

Adds Bowers, who is in his eighth year of business, “I’ve always believed in the value of surrounding myself with successful people. When my application for a Trailblazer was selected, Bill volunteered to come to my place. But I thought it would be more beneficial for me to see his operation. He showed me the operational side of his landscape management and lawn care operation, and I returned back home with several new ideas. It was time very well spent.”

Michael Madarash, owner of KokoBo Plantscapes in Hempstead, New York, traveled to St. Paul, Minnesota, four years ago to learn from McCaren Designs Trailblazers

Cindy Peterson, CCLP, and McRae Anderson, CLP, ASLA. Recalls Anderson, “Mike came to our facility armed with a number of questions about his business. We worked with him on budgeting and pricing, and talked quite a bit about marketing. Since then, we’ve stayed in touch. I think we are like litmus paper for him. From time to time, he floats an idea or two by us just to get our reaction.”

Says Madarash, who now has been in



Trailblazer protégé Darin Bowers believes in the value of surrounding himself with successful people.

“One of the great things about Trailblazers is that it becomes a point of contact for young people getting into our industry.”

— McRAE ANDERSON, CLP, ASLA



McCaren Designs, Inc., President McRae Anderson, CLP, ASLA, and Vice President Cindy Peterson, CCLP, are Trailblazers.

business more than five years, “My company would not be where it is today without the help and ideas that I got from Cindy and McRae. Of the many ideas they shared with me, two stand out above the rest. I discovered that I wasn’t charging nearly enough for my work, and they encouraged me to develop systems to help standardize my operation. They’ve also become very good friends and I still look to them for advice.”

“One of the great things about Trailblazers is that it becomes a point of contact for young people getting into our industry,” Anderson emphasizes. “We work to fast track them into networking, which is one of the special benefits of being a PLANET member.”

Two-way street

In addition to being a Trailblazer, Steve Pattie, CLP, owner of the Pattie Group, Inc., in Novelty, Ohio, also coaches several company owners. “Lending a hand is always a two-way street,” he emphasizes. “Every company does something that is unique, and I always walk away from a mentoring opportunity more knowledgeable about the industry.”

A Trailblazer for two years, Pattie missed an opportunity to mentor last year because of a motorcycle accident. This

summer he traveled to Wildwood, Missouri, to visit Richard Poynter, president of Poynter Landscape and Construction. “Among other things, Richard was interested in how our sales process works,” notes Pattie. “I walked through our entire selling program, and then we talked about unloading some of his managers’ responsibilities. Delegating is always a challenge for owners.”

“I thought it was truly great to have someone of Steve’s caliber look at our operation,” says Poynter. “The Trailblazer program is valuable in a different way from other PLANET initiatives. The seminars, symposiums, and the Green Industry Conference are all valuable, but with this program, I get to set the agenda and discuss challenges that relate directly to our operation.”

“Steve brought several great ideas with him. We talked about how to set up an organizational chart, handle problem employees, answer the phone, set up training systems, and grade sales leads. I tape-recorded most of our discussion and even brought in our top management staff for a Q & A lunch with Steve.”

Poynter adds, “We’ve been in business since 1992 and currently are in the second year of a three-year plan to double our size. We felt that we were doing many of the right things, but now we’re doing them better thanks to the Trailblazer program and thanks to Steve.” 

For more information about the Trailblazer program or joining PLANET, visit landcarenetwork.org.

NEWLY NAMED PLANET TRAILBLAZERS

DESIGN/BUILD/INSTALLATION

EDWARD BAYER

Land Escapes, Inc.
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

LAWN CARE

JON CUNDIFF

Weed Man/Kansas City
Lee’s Summit, Missouri

HAROLD ENGER

Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.
Plainfield, Illinois

TERRY KURTH

Weed Man/Madison
Middleton, Wisconsin

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

CHRIS KUJAWA, CCLP

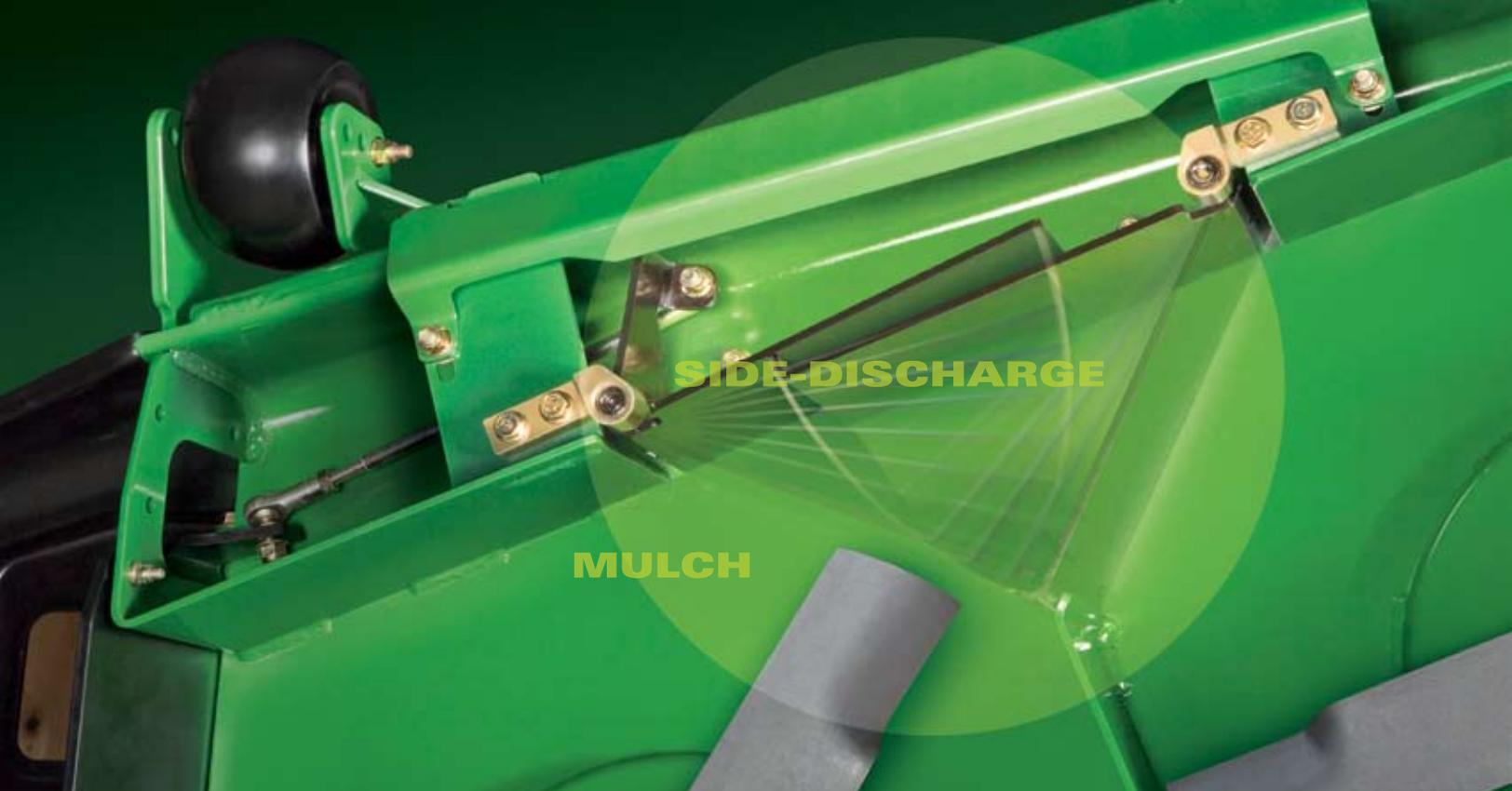
Kujawa Enterprises, Inc.
Oak Creek, Wisconsin

WILLIAM LEIDECKER, CLP

Five Seasons Landscape Management, Inc.
Reynoldsburg, Ohio

MICHAEL PEZZA, CLP

Ground Pros, Inc.
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mower that can do that.”**



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Mike Dykstra, Dykstra Landscape Services Inc., Grand Haven, Michigan



JOHN DEERE

7 IRON II™

See more of what Mike Dykstra has to say at www.mowpro.com

NEW COURSE **REVEALS** INDUSTRY'S PRACTICAL SIDE

Typical college business courses cover finance and accounting systems, liability management/insurance, developing a corporate image/brand, marketing, and creating a business niche. Until now, those topics have been atypical for a program preparing students for the green industry. This fall, the landscape design and contracting program at Colorado State University (CSU) in Fort Collins, Colorado, will be teaching these and similar topics in a new "Professional Practices for the Green Industry" course.

The 16-week class, held from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. every Tuesday evening, is team-taught by 20 to 25 industry veterans. It will teach students the essential elements of running a landscape contracting business.

Brain child

The new class is the brain child of CSU Assistant Professor Zach Johnson, CLT. A landscape architect who remains active in the industry, Johnson pitched his idea to the school and the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC) a year ago. By early this year, he had won approval from CSU to proceed with the course and, with ALCC's help, had rounded up more than enough volunteers to teach it.

"I graduated from CSU with a degree in landscape design and contracting," says Johnson. "At the time, I remember wanting to learn additional aspects of what it takes to be successful and, like most students, I had to wait until my first job to actually gain that exposure. This



American Civil Constructors' Todd Williams (standing) and Rich Wilbert, CLP, (seated) from Robert Howard Associates, were speakers for the first "Professional Practices for the Green Industry" class.

course will give juniors and seniors a taste of what it takes to operate and manage a company in the green industry — from people who are involved in the industry. I'm looking forward to the course and the students' response to it."

He's not the only one excited about the business focus of this course for the green industry. "We need the next generation of green industry owner and managers, and we want to attract more young people to the profession," relates Kristen Fefes, executive director of ALCC. "When Zach approached us with the idea, we were very excited. Getting industry volunteers to help teach the course proved to be an easy assignment for us, and we contributed \$2,500 to help fund a teaching assistant for the course and to defray other expenses."

She continues, "Operating a landscape contracting business is not easy. What does subrogation mean? What is an H2-B program? How does one brand a green industry business? These are questions that instructors will answer in class to help familiarize students with most everything it takes to operate a business in the green industry."

Both Johnson and Fefes emphasize that the course will benefit instructors, too. Industry teachers, for example, will get an opportunity to talk with students and indirectly promote their services and company. The course will also give the industry an opportunity to strut its stuff and talk about a broad array of services it offers and the various markets it serves.

Classroom talk

Todd Williams, vice president and regional director for American Civil Constructors' Littleton, Colorado, office and Mike Ransom, partner and vice president of operations with Robert Howard Associates, Inc., in Boulder, Colorado, are two of the 25 volunteer instructors. Williams is scheduled to help introduce the course during the first week, and he will teach the class, "Contracts and Negotiations," during the eighth week in October. Ransom will team-teach selling design and construction services with another volunteer in the twelfth week.

"When Zach came to us with a suggestion for the course, he hit a sweet spot with us," says Williams, last year's ALCC president. "One of our state association's major goals is to increase the professionalism of our industry and attract more students who want to make the industry their career choice. One of the best ways to do this is to teach professionalism in a practical class and make students more aware of specific companies and opportunities.



"In the first class, we set the stage for the course, in part by introducing students to a broad view of what our industry has to offer. Students want to be landscape architects and golf course superintendents because that's where they think the money and glory are. We will show them that they can get the same rewards, if not better ones, working in other areas."

Ransom is a CSU alum who graduated from its landscape design and contracting program in 1991. "CSU already has a strong four-year landscape program, one that I credit for getting me started in my career," he relates. "The school has close ties to the industry and works closely with companies placing internships. This course will make a solid program that much better and practical for students."

His evening lecture is a good example of how the new course combines practical application and theory. He and his team-teaching partner will share their thoughts on how to sell designs and how designs can sell other landscape contracting services.

Green grass, blue sky

"Professional Practices for the Green Industry" is currently in the trial or experimental phase. Students who take the course this fall will receive a pass/fail grade; its elevation to a full-time slot in the curriculum will depend on its reception in the classroom. Johnson has high expectations.

"The class filled up quickly this spring, and students seem enthusiastic about the subject matter," he relates. "The faculty and volunteer teachers would like to see the course become a regular part of our curriculum. In fact, ideally, I would like to offer an industry-taught course each semester and eventually make it available online."

As Johnson points out, this is not all about blue sky. Students who graduate from horticulture and landscape management programs around the country already know how to design, grow, and maintain colorful landscapes. By giving them practical knowledge about the business side of the green industry, this course will be a win-win for students, employers, and the entire industry. 

Cultivating Careers

Budding Professionals Thrive at Brigham Young University

Visitors to Brigham Young University (BYU) have described the campus as one of the most scenic in the world. Landscape experts agree—the college was recently named a finalist for the “America in Bloom” national beautification contest. Situated at the foot of the Wasach Mountains, south of Salt Lake City in Provo, Utah, the grounds are canvassed with more than 14,000 trees and 130 species, offering a living classroom for the university’s top-ranked horticulture and arboriculture program.

“We have a very strong partnership between education and practical field experience,” said Roy Peterman, grounds director for BYU. “Our mission is to



Real-world experience prepares BYU students for the future.

create an atmosphere of inspiration and learning by providing facilities that are always clean and beautiful.”

Under the guidance of Max Darrington, a 1986 BYU graduate and ISA-certified arborist, the student grounds crew painstakingly maintains the sprawling 670-acre campus. The intensive, four-year internship provides wide-ranging, hands-on training.

The work is intense, but demand for participation is high. Students wait months for crew positions to become available.

“The job gives students the opportunity to understand that work in this industry is strenuous. The real-world experience prepares them for the future and equips them for success,” Darrington said.

Crew members work year-round averaging 20 hours per week during the school year and 40 hours per week in the summer.

“We just acquired a computer program will allow us to monitor the trees we care for electronically,” Darrington shared. “We will appraise each tree in winter to determine its needs for the following pruning season.”

While computer technology will help Darrington’s team keep track of their work, they rely on STIHL to get the job done. His crew uses a fleet of STIHL equipment including the MS 200 T arborist saw, MS 440 ground saw, BG 85 handheld blower, HT 101 pole pruner and more.

“STIHL equipment provides the power we need to complete our work efficiently. Not only are our STIHL units the most reliable, they offer durability that can’t be matched,” Darrington said.

Investing in the proper equipment has also improved the crew’s efficiency.

“The HT 101 extended pole pruner has changed the way we work,” Darrington noted. “With the university’s abundance of younger trees, the pole pruner is invaluable in maintaining them appropriately. It gives us the reach and power we need to complete pruning work much faster.”

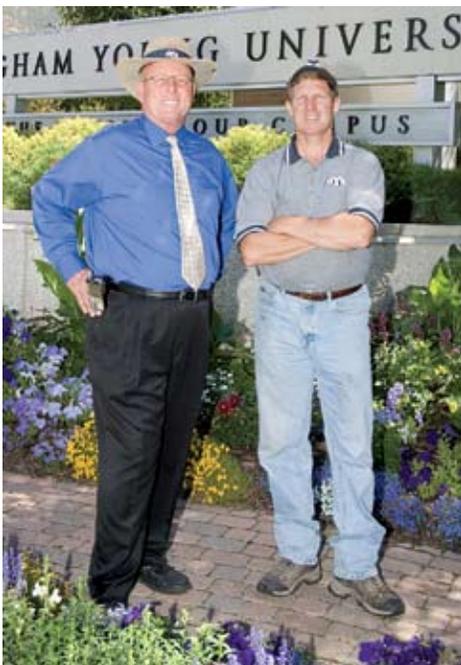
“The job gives students the opportunity to understand that work in this industry is strenuous. The real-world experience prepares them for the future and equips them for success.”

*Max Darrington, head arborist,
for Brigham Young University*



Photography courtesy of Mark Philbrick, University Photographer, Brigham Young University.

With the university's abundance of younger trees, the pole pruner is invaluable in maintaining them properly.



Roy Peterman, grounds director, and Max Darrington, head arborist, for BYU.

The students' work experience beautifies the campus, but it also positions them as standouts at national competitions. They frequently earn top honors at Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Student Career Days and International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) student events—an important part of BYU's horticulture education.

"Educating young people about jobs in horticulture and arboriculture is vital to the future of our industry," Darrington said. "Providing them with firsthand opportunities to learn about the field and interact with seasoned professionals exposes them to a variety of career paths."

Because of today's educational oppor-

tunities, the work of associations including ISA, PLANET, and Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), and contributions from outdoor power equipment manufacturers such as STIHL, he believes the future of the green industry is bright.

"Our industry is advancing as a whole—and that means we're going to be better able to serve customers because of increased knowledge," Darrington concluded.

There's no question that experienced students make well-qualified employees. For the BYU grounds crew, the campus is the classroom—nurturing budding careers as they beautify their university. •



THE POWER of the INTERVIEW

How important is finding the right candidate for a position? How important are the interview and other assessment tools you may use to help make your decision to hire an employee? Karin Senneff, co-owner of Plant Interscapes, Inc., in San Antonio, Texas, says it best, "Hiring the wrong individual to come to work for you is like inviting someone to go for a boat ride and then having that person kick a hole in your boat. To keep afloat, you and your fellow riders spend valuable time bailing water and trying to plug the hole when you should be enjoying the ride."

Sound familiar? It should, because there's nary a green industry contractor who hasn't made a poor hiring decision at some point. The most successful owners and managers put a premium on their hiring practices, hone their interview skills, and offer new jobs to those individuals who will not only get the job done, but will be a good fit for their companies' culture.

Rabbits don't fly

Senneff has spent more than 20 years developing a hiring regimen. Among other practices, it involves using the Wonderlic Personnel Test and the Predictive Index Survey to measure a candidate's intellect and workplace-related behavioral skills and conducting a thorough interview.

"It has been an employer's world in our market for the last several years," says Senneff, "but now unemployment is going down. Finding good employees from outside our company has been much more difficult, and we've found that promoting internally is not always the best solution."

She continues, "Just because one of our employees is an effective technician doesn't mean he or she will make a good manager. Technicians, for example, require a high level of patience, whereas effective sales people and managers often have to feel that sense of urgency. We're not in the business of teaching rabbits to fly."

To find birds instead of rabbits, Plant Interscapes administers a pre-interview test to pinpoint a candidate's strengths and weaknesses and then develops an interview question track based, in part, on the test results. The questioning track also works to assess ability to perform a specific job function.

For example, if Plant Interscapes wants an individual to fill a position in which multitasking is a requisite, Senneff may ask this

question, "Tell me about a time when you were working on a project that had a tight deadline and another client called with an issue." Or, maybe she wants a hard-driving sales person. In that case, she may inquire, "If you have a particularly bad day at work, what would you like to do when you get home that evening?" A hard-driver would likely not choose to relax, be alone, and read.

Consistency counts

Find a system that works and use it consistently, Senneff advises. She emphasizes the word *consistently*. Bozzuto Landscaping Company's Tom Davis agrees. The Laurel, Maryland-based company employs 1,200 people among all of its divisions and retains five full-time recruiters. "We brought in a consultant five years ago because we were all over the board when it came to hiring managers," Davis admits. "Now our recruiters and managers are on the same page. One of our recruiters will first conduct a phone interview with a candidate and then possibly invite that individual to come in for a formal interview, again with the recruiter and later with a couple of managers. By the time applicants get to me, I assume they are qualified to be part of our team. I'm just checking to see if they're a good fit in terms of character and ethics and if they have good team-building skills."

Like Plant Interscapes, Bozzuto relies on a combination of testing and interviewing to make a hiring decision. "The interviews are especially important for us," says Davis. "In an interview, we try to knock down barriers and find out as close as we can how individuals will act if they're hired. Even though some questions don't have a right or wrong answer, a candidate's response can be very enlightening."

For example, Davis may ask questions such as, "Tell me about a good moment in your previous job," or "Tell me about a scenario when you weren't happy with a previous employer." Badmouthing a previous employer would be a red flag, whereas taking accountability for a mistake would be a good sign.

"We look for character, especially among our managerial candidates because these individuals will be running our company," Davis emphasizes. Ever prepared, he has 20 key interview questions plugged into his Blackberry, many of which are used (you guessed it) to ferret out character traits.

According to this industry veteran, interviewing candidates and hiring individuals for a job is not as complex as it sounds. It's a matter

of being consistent, asking the right questions, and observing. The process is important, though, more important than ever. “As our customers’ expectations rise, so do our expectations of our new managers,” he says.

done about the company before the interview, an indication of both desire and thoroughness.

“We rarely, if ever, find someone who is a perfect fit for the company and a job description,” says Buck. “The idea is to get as close as you can, especially in key areas.”

One approach to getting a better understanding of a candidate’s potential is to do a little role playing. Tom Heaviland, CLP, CLT, president of Heaviland Enterprises, Inc., in Vista, California, has used this approach as both a training tool for managers and as an interview tool.

He gives an example of a typical role-play scenario, with the job candidate playing the role of the account manager:

SITUATION: An angry client (property manager) calls the office because the crew left a mess at the job site, and she has the regional vice president coming for a site visit the next morning.

CLIENT: *This is Ms. Jane Doe with ABC Property Management. Your crew just left our office complex and the place is a mess! I have an inspection with my boss tomorrow morning. If he sees the landscape like this, he will be fuming mad. What are you going to do about this?*

ACCOUNT MANAGER: *First of all, Ms. Doe, I want to thank you for calling and bringing this to my attention. Let me start by apologizing for our poor performance on your site today. Please understand that it is my responsibility to make sure our crews perform to your level of satisfaction. I would like to ask some questions to clarify some information.*

CLIENT: *I want to know how soon you can get out here to clean this place up, because if you can't, I'll hire someone who will.*

ACCOUNT MANAGER: *Rest assured, Ms. Doe, I will do all I can to make sure your property is ready for tomorrow's site visit. I will radio the crew and personally meet them at your site today. How late will you be there?*

CLIENT: *I have to leave at 5:30 sharp to pick up my daughter from soccer.*

ACCOUNT MANAGER: *Great, I will meet the crew at your site by*



Conducting the interview

Like many larger landscape contractors, Chapel Valley Landscape Co., located in Woodbine, Maryland, recruits all year long. In fact, Recruiting Director Jennifer Buck averages three to five interviews a week, in between visiting college campuses and having other recruiting responsibilities. All candidates for a managerial position interview with her and, depending on her assessment, she either sends them to a manager for another session or sends them home. Buck determines if an individual is a good fit for the company, while managers look more for skill sets and a job fit.

As an interviewer, she has three priorities: 1) check with the candidate to make sure facts on a resume are accurate, 2) learn about personality and a potential fit with the company culture, and 3) make sure the applicant understands what Chapel Valley is looking for. Throughout, she takes notes about candidates (e.g., were they punctual, professionally dressed, willing to make eye contact, and inquisitive about Chapel Valley?). She also finds out how much research they had



3:00. Will you be available to walk the property with me so I can see exactly what we have missed?

CLIENT: I have a tenant meeting at 3:30 so we will only have a half hour.

ACCOUNT MANAGER: Perfect, I appreciate you taking the time to walk with me. Approximately what time will your boss be arriving at the site tomorrow?

CLIENT: He will be here at 9:00 a.m.

ACCOUNT MANAGER: Great, I will schedule a crew for 7:00 a.m. to once again make sure your property is looking its best. Is there anything else I need to know or you would like to have me do?

CLIENT: No, I think it sounds like we can get things back on track. It's just some general cleanup. Overall, the crew here normally does a pretty good job.

ACCOUNT MANAGER: Okay, Ms. Doe, again my apologies for this inconvenience. I look forward to seeing you at 3:00. Thanks for your time.

Your candidate, the individual playing the account manager role, likely would not respond to all the client's requests in the ideal or preferred manner. Heaviland, like Buck, is not looking for perfection. In his words, he's looking for "the bright spots or kernels of truth" that indicate an individual's potential as a good employee. As the other interviewers also do above, he culls out those individuals who, as Senneff so aptly described, either cannot fly because they are rabbits or could punch a hole in her business. 

LEGAL VS. ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

AS PLANET'S HUMAN RESOURCE CONSULTANT BILL COOK EMPHASIZES, IT IS ILLEGAL TO DISCRIMINATE IN EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS BASED ON ANYTHING RELATED TO:

- AGE
- SEX OR GENDER
- RACE, ETHNICITY, OR COLOR
- COUNTRY OF NATIONAL ORIGIN OR BIRTHPLACE
- RELIGION
- DISABILITY
- MARITAL OR FAMILY STATUS OR PREGNANCY

DURING AN INTERVIEW, AVOID THESE QUESTIONS AND CONCENTRATE INSTEAD ON QUESTIONS THAT RELATE TO THE JOB. SAYS COOK, "IDENTIFY THE FACTORS YOU NEED OR WANT IN THE JOB AND FOCUS ALL THE QUESTIONS ON THOSE FACTORS." HE GIVES THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES:

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS:

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

DO YOU HAVE ANY PHYSICAL HANDICAPS?

DO YOU HAVE ANY CHILDREN?

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ARRESTED?

ARE YOU A U.S. CITIZEN?

WHAT IS YOUR NATIVE LANGUAGE?

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN THROUGH DRUG OR ALCOHOL REHAB?

OKAY TO ASK:

THIS JOB REQUIRES YOU TO DRIVE AND BE INSURED BY OUR COMPANY. TO DO THIS, YOU MUST BE 18. ARE YOU 18 OR OVER?

DESCRIBE THE REQUIREMENTS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE JOB FIRST, THEN ASK: ARE YOU ABLE TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THIS JOB? (FURTHER EXAMPLE: IF YOU CAN PLAINLY SEE THAT THE INDIVIDUAL HAS ONLY ONE ARM, YOU MIGHT ASK: CAN YOU DESCRIBE FOR ME HOW YOU WOULD PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THIS JOB?)

ARE YOU ABLE TO BE AT WORK ON TIME EVERY DAY? THIS JOB REQUIRES OVERTIME. IS THERE ANY REASON YOU WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO WORK OVERTIME?

HAVE YOU EVER HAD ANY DRIVING OR CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS?

ARE YOU LEGALLY ALLOWED TO WORK IN THIS COUNTRY? DO YOU HAVE THE REQUIRED DOCUMENTS?

CAN YOU SPEAK, READ, AND UNDERSTAND ENGLISH?

DO YOU USE ILLEGAL DRUGS? HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CONVICTED OF A CRIME RELATED TO ALCOHOL OR DRUGS?



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Novi, MI

Metro Community College
Ohio Turfgrass Conference & Show
Western Nursery & Landscape Association
Mid-America Horticultural Trade Show
Idaho Horticultural Exposition
Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition (TPIE)
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New England Grows
MGIA Trade Show/Convention



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PLANET RESOURCES

Executive Forum

February 15–18, 2007

Hyatt Regency Coconut Point — Bonita Springs, Florida

A three-day event designed for green industry company owners and managers, PLANET's 2007 Executive Forum offers the unique opportunity to learn the principles of lean management through hands-on exercises, while collaborating with green industry executive peers. Featuring Elliott N. Weiss, Ph.D., professor of business administration at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business, this year's Forum provides attendees with an interactive workshop to learn how to minimize waste, maximize efficiency, and integrate customer relationships using lean tools. It is also a chance to meet other top industry leaders while relaxing in the pristine beauty of Florida's Gulf Coast.

Using Lean Management in Your Business

Lean management is the business buzz for companies today. If you'd like to learn about lean management principles and how they can be applied to your green industry operation, you'll be glad to know that as a PLANET member, you'll receive a free copy of the new Crystal Ball Report #26, entitled *Lean Management for the Green Industry: An Operational Strategy That Delivers Value to Customers and Eliminates Waste*. If you'd like more copies or aren't yet a member, visit the PLANET Bookstore at landcarenetwork.org to purchase the report.

Join or Renew ... It's As Easy As 1, 2, 3

It's never been easier to join or renew your PLANET membership. Simply go to landcarenetwork.org any time, night or day, and click the join or renew button on the lefthand navigation bar. If you're currently a member, log in with your user name and password, click on the "Renew" button, select your correct annual sales volume, and then check out. While you're online, check out all the benefits that go along with your PLANET membership in the "Member Center."

Joining PLANET online is equally as convenient and easy. Our secure server protects your privacy and credit card number, and you're a member as soon as you submit payment. You then can shop online for publications or register for an event at discounted member prices. Visit the Web site often, as we make continuous improvements to ensure that your PLANET online experience is convenient and pleasurable.

Student Career Days

March 29–April 1, 2007

Michigan State University — Lansing, Michigan

Celebrate more than 30 years of successful Student Career Days (SCD) by joining PLANET at Michigan State University. SCD offers future green industry employees the chance to network with potential employers and provides the opportunity for businesses to recruit tomorrow's talent. Since 1977, SCD has grown to become the largest recruitment event in the industry, offering both recruiters and students an amazing opportunity to secure their future success.

PLANET Offers Business Solutions

Whether you're a small company or a large corporation with many branches, you'll gain valuable one-on-one advice from one of our industry experts, who will confidentially answer your specific questions. When companies or individuals join PLANET, they receive access to industry consultants who can provide business consulting on the following topics: public relations and marketing, human resources, legal issues, and safety and risk management. For more information about membership benefits, contact PLANET at (800) 395-2522 or join online at landcarenetwork.org.

New Member Benefit — Compliments of LESCO

As a PLANET supplier member, LESCO is pleased to offer all new PLANET members a \$50 gift card for use at any of its stores nationwide. (This new benefit only applies to new members and cannot be offered retroactively.) LESCO is one of the nation's leading manufacturers and distributors of a broad line of lawn care and pest control products for the professional turf care industry. LESCO realizes the challenges that green industry companies face and supports PLANET in its mission to help all green industry companies succeed in today's competitive business environment. In the upcoming months, PLANET will be expanding its partnerships with supplier members to bring additional business solutions and benefits to all PLANET members.

Joining PLANET has never been easier. To join PLANET today and receive your \$50 LESCO gift card, simply go to landcarenetwork.org and click on the "Join" button.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about any of PLANET's services:

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