

# IRRIGATION & green industry

JUNE 2018

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

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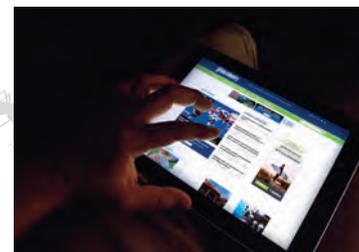
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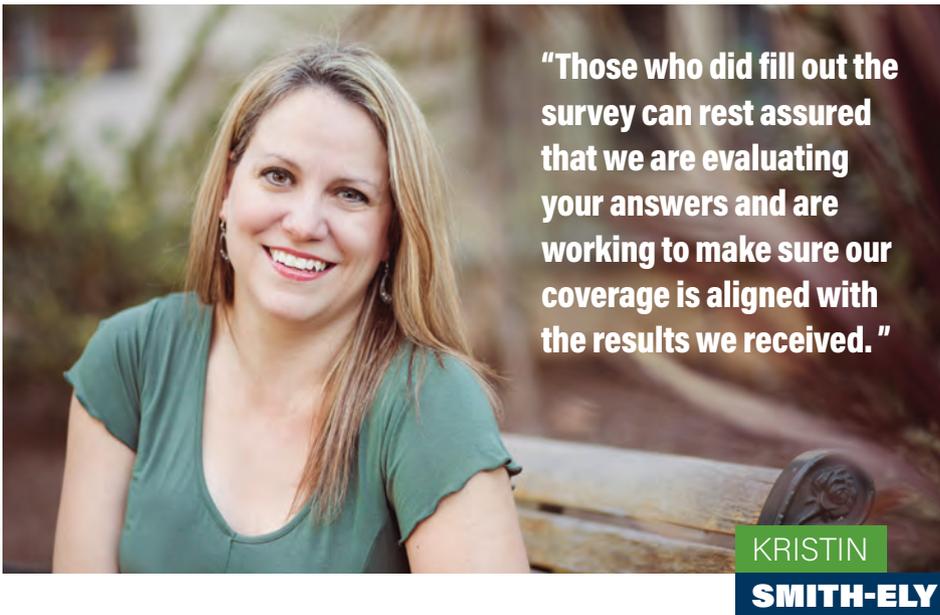
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## And the survey says ...

As consumers, we are inundated with surveys and rating systems. How was your stay? Were you satisfied with your service? How would you rate your call? Have a bad meal? You bet Yelp is going to hear about it. A bad experience with a landscaping company? Google may be the place where someone airs his grievance and gives the company one star out of five.

Surveys and ratings are everywhere these days. And if you choose to ignore them, you are well within your rights. But those who do take the time to fill them out or provide a review are giving critical feedback to those making the decisions in that business. If a company takes the time to send you a survey, it is because they want to understand you better so it can serve you better.

John Georgio, who was featured in the Close-up Profile in the February 2018 issue of *Irrigation & Green Industry* magazine, decided to enter the family business in part because of the praise-filled surveys Gotham Landscaping in Los Angeles got back from its customers. He realized his family was providing something special, and he wanted to be part of it.

IGIN embarked on a survey of its own in March 2018. We sent it to our readers because we wanted to understand their reading habits. What will we do with this information? We will take it into consideration when deciding what topics to cover in the magazine and in our e-newsletter offerings. For example, we launched a monthly Product Round-up e-newsletter in May after our readers who completed the survey overwhelmingly said they wanted information on new products.

Other content decisions and areas of coverage will be driven by the feedback we received from the readers who took the time to fill it out. We gave our readers the opportunity, and it was up to them whether they took us up on our offer. Those who did fill it out can rest assured that we are evaluating your answers and are working to make sure our coverage is aligned with the results we received.

Over the course of the year as we work to gain insights from you, you will likely hear from us again. Of course, the choice is yours whether you choose to participate. But believe me, your feedback is important to us and we do indeed make decisions based on what you share with us. 🍃

# IRRIGATION & green industry

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INVESTORS CORNER

# ScottsMiracle-Gro makes major hydroponics acquisition

The ScottsMiracle-Gro Co., Marysville, Ohio, a leading marketer of branded consumer lawn and garden as well as hydroponic growing products, has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire the assets of Sunlight Supply Inc., Vancouver, Washington. It's a transaction that will greatly enhance the ability of SMG's wholly owned subsidi-

throughout the United States.

Hawthorne, which had 2017 sales of approximately \$290 million, owns leading hydroponic brands such as Gavita, Botanicare, Can-Filters and General Hydroponics. Sunlight Supply is the largest distributor of hydroponic products in the U.S. Within the last year, Sunlight opened



supply industry, according to the company. By being able to ship directly, Hawthorne will have greatly enhanced relationships with hydroponics retailers, giving it greater visibility into current market trends, retail inventory levels and point-of-sale data.

**“We are creating a game-changing moment for ScottsMiracle-Gro, for Hawthorne, the hydroponic products industry and the users of our products.” – Jim Hagedorn**

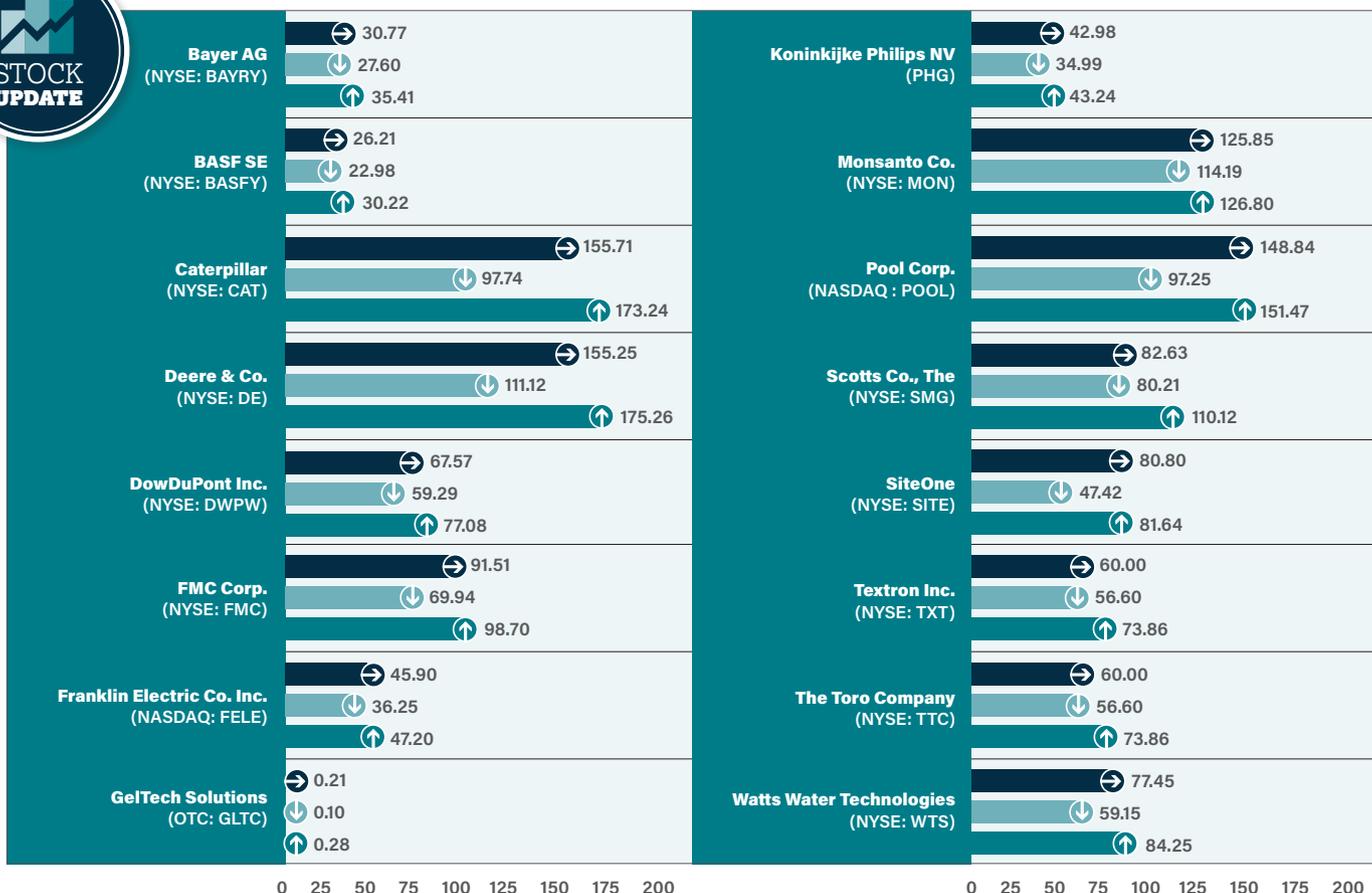
ary, The Hawthorne Gardening Co., to meet the needs of the rapidly evolving hydroponic products marketplace, the company says.

The transaction will create a direct distribution model for Hawthorne that will service more than 1,800 hydroponics retail customers

a 350,000-square foot distribution center in Vancouver, Washington, and has eight other distribution facilities across North America.

With this transaction, Hawthorne will possess one of the most technologically advanced supply chains in the hydroponics

“We are creating a game-changing moment for ScottsMiracle-Gro, for Hawthorne, the hydroponic products industry and the users of our products,” says Jim Hagedorn, chairman and CEO of ScottsMiracle-Gro. “Combining Hawthorne’s industry-leading product portfolio with Sunlight’s unparalleled distribution capabilities and complementary portfolio will benefit consumers and all stakeholders in the hydroponic marketplace.”



↔ Last trade (5-18-18) ↓ 52 Week low ↑ 52 Week high; Source: Bloomberg.com

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**IRRIGATION**

**NASA satellites reveal major shifts in global freshwater**

Scientists have combined an array of NASA satellite observations of Earth with data on human activities to map locations where freshwater is changing around the globe and to determine why. The study, published in the journal Nature, finds that Earth's wet land areas are getting wetter and dry areas are getting drier due to a variety of factors, including human water management, climate change and natural cycles.

A team out of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, used 14 years of observations from the Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment spacecraft mission to track global trends in freshwater in 34 regions around the world.



They pulled satellite precipitation data from the Global Precipitation Climatology Project, NASA/U.S. Geological Survey Landsat imagery, irrigation maps and published reports on agriculture, mining and reservoir operations to understand the Earth's freshwater change. Results are available at [www.nasa.gov/earth](http://www.nasa.gov/earth).

**HARDSCAPES**

**Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute releases survey**

According to the 2018 Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute Contractor Industry Report, conducted for the Institute by Industry Insights, Columbus, Ohio, gross sales for concrete paving contractors in the U.S. and Canada increased by 7.7 percent during 2017, while four out of every five contractors reported difficulty in recruiting and hiring quality employees. The study's other key findings include:

- The residential market remains strong, representing 69.5 percent of sales, and commercial and governmental projects are surging with 30.5 percent of sales. This is an increase of 6.5 percent from the previous year.
- About 90.1 percent of contractors provided work site safety training to their employees.
- A 5 percent median wage/salary increase occurred in 2017, while a similar 5 percent median rise is forecasted for 2018.
- The study also includes data on technologies contractors use to monitor and reduce exposure of crew members to respirable silica, as well as on company promotion and certification trends.



Left to right: Ian Downing, Mikyoung Kim Design and Eugene Ryang, Waterstreet Studios

**LANDSCAPE DESIGN**

**Design team selected for central Virginia botanical garden**

The McIntire Botanical Garden Board of Directors has announced its selection of Mikyoung Kim Design of Boston and Charlottesville, Virginia-based Waterstreet Studios as the landscape architecture team that will design the new Charlottesville garden project.

The mission of the McIntire Botanical Garden is to cultivate a public garden that reflects the unique character of the Piedmont region while promoting knowledge, enjoyment and conservation of native and site-adapted plants through displays, education and research.

Mikyoung Kim Design has won numerous awards from the American Society of Landscape Architects and the International Federation of Landscape Architects. Waterstreet Studio has designed residential properties, commercial and institutional campuses, rural conservation tracts, civic spaces and urban streetscapes.

The board plans to finalize the design by the end of the year.



Rendering of Sustainable Education Garden at the Santa Rosa City Hall.

**IRRIGATION**

**Garden tour focuses on low-water-use sustainable landscaping**

Some San Francisco Bay Area gardening enthusiasts participated in the Eco-Friendly Garden Tour on May 5, checking out landscapes in Sonoma and Marin counties.

Sponsored by the Sonoma-Marín Saving Water Partnership, the tour focused on low-water-use sustainable landscaping. While visiting the 18 gardens featured on the self-guided tour, participants learned water-saving strategies and gardening advice from those who tend to them.

An irrigation controller programming workshop and a visit to the new Sustainable Education Garden located on the grounds of the Santa Rosa City Hall were also part of the tour.

In addition, the California Native Plant Society, Milo Baker Chapter, presented five California native gardens in Santa Rosa. The Marin Municipal Water District presented four gardens in San Rafael and San Anselmo.

The Sonoma-Marín Saving Water Partnership consists of 10 water utilities in Sonoma and Marin counties that have joined together to provide a regional approach to water-use efficiency.

**LANDSCAPE**

**Augusta National Golf Club begins major landscaping project**

The Augusta National Golf Club, Augusta, Georgia, has begun a major landscaping project as part of its fifth hole renovations.

According to an Augusta Chronicle report, the site plans call for the addition of more than 600 new trees, plants and bushes to be planted along the western edge of the course.



Preliminary site plans show the 455-yard hole will be lengthened by moving the tee box across the road. Construction was scheduled to begin May 1, 2018, and is expected to be completed by Nov. 1.

Augusta National typically closes from late May until October.

The club's fifth hole is named Magnolia and was the sixth hardest hole in the 2018 Masters, the PGA golf tournament that is played there annually.

**LANDSCAPE**

**Heaviland becomes first California company to receive NALP accreditation**

Heaviland Landscape Management, Vista, California, has announced that it was designated a Landscape Industry Accredited Company by the National Association of Landscape Professionals, Fairfax, Virginia.

It's the first such designation awarded to any landscape company in California and one of only six in the nation. Heaviland earned the seal of approval from NALP by demonstrating its commitment to customer satisfaction by upholding superior financial and ethical standards and business practices, and by employing Landscape Industry Certified staff to provide the best customer experience.

The company is a previous recipient of the Better Business Bureau's Torch Award in Marketplace Ethics. This award is given to businesses that consistently demonstrate the high values and standards promoted by the organization.



**QUICK TAKES**

**North Carolina landscaping firm expanding**

The Loving Group plans to relocate from Charlotte, North Carolina to historic downtown Gastonia, North Carolina by early June, according to its president, Mike Haynes.

The company is reportedly one of many newcomers to make a long-term commitment to downtown Gastonia's historic business district. Haynes plans a staff event in mid-June to celebrate the new location.

**Wayside Landscaping & Nursery celebrates 50 years of service**

Wayside Landscaping & Nursery, Niagara Falls, New York, is celebrating its golden anniversary.

The family-operated business has provided Niagara and Erie county residents commercial and residential landscaping and design services for the past five decades and also operates a nursery stocked with annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs. It also sells Amish-made furniture made from recycled plastics.

**SunValley Landscaping opens new greenhouse**

More than 30 community members turned out to help SunValley Landscaping of Ansley, Nebraska, celebrate the opening of a 3,000-square-foot greenhouse, also located in Ansley. A range of products and services for landscaping and gardening are available at the new greenhouse.

The company offers landscaping and landscape maintenance services such as installation, mulching, pruning and bed cleanup, and hardscaping such as building retaining walls, pathways and patios. The new greenhouse features annuals and perennials, grasses, vegetables, hanging baskets, trees and shrubs.

**Texas city approves water conservation credit program**

The Lewisville, Texas, city council has approved a water conservation credit program for single-family homes. It allows utility customers to apply for credits to their water bills if they install certain water-conserving home improvements.

The credits include up to \$50 for a low-flow toilet, up to \$75 for a high-efficiency washing machine, up to \$25 for a rain barrel and up to \$50 for an irrigation system inspection. It also requires that only licensed irrigation professionals registered with the city do the inspections.

**"Put that grass back," says judge**

A Missouri couple may be legally required to replace the turf in their yard. Janice and Carl Duffner had turned their front yard into a flower garden due to an allergy Janice reportedly has to grass. But a city of St. Peters ordinance requires that at least half of residents' yards be covered by grass, according to the Kansas City Star.

The couple asked for an exemption but were denied. A compromise offered by the city allowing them to plant just 5 percent grass was reportedly refused in favor of taking the issue to court.

After a mixed ruling by the Missouri Court of Appeals, the Duffners then turned to federal court. However, in April, the federal judge sided with the city, issuing a ruling stating that "aesthetic considerations constitute a legitimate government purpose." The couple plans to appeal.



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BY JEFF CAROWITZ

## Your price is too high ... or is it?

A booming economy has not killed off the bargain hunters out there. Sales people are still hearing price objections from these types of buyers.

Understand that price objections are not always what they seem. Sometimes the buyer is serious; other times it's just a negotiating tactic.

I have a client who automatically responds to every quote with, "I don't like the price." It's a planned flinch he uses consistently because it works.

Inexperienced salespeople feel a need to respond, and they do. It yields his company lower prices from half of his vendors. (As one of his grumpier vendors, I just humorously reply, "I didn't ask you to like the price. I just asked you to pay it." He does.)

Economists estimate that 30 percent of consumers are classic "pure price buyers," who make decisions based solely on the price offered.

My greatest wish for you is that fewer of these price-focused people knock on your door. Let them charm your competitors.

So what do you do when you get a price objection? Will adjusting the price make the rest of the sale flow easily? Not a chance.

A lower price seldom makes up for buyer doubts, discomfort or indecisiveness. A price objection is often an effective way for the buyer to stall the sales process.

You can prepare yourself for when they say, "Your price is too high." Here are some tips you can arm yourself with.

**1 Price objections signal your buyer's interest.** Simply raising the objection indicates interest in you and in your proposal.

If the competitor had won, he would already have the order. Sometimes your best move is to stand your ground.



### Understand that price objections are not always what they seem to be.

Sometimes the buyer is serious; other times it's just a negotiating tactic.

**2 If a decision is being made on price, you're not doing a good job in differentiating your value.**

What's value? It's often the intangibles: trust, confidence, experience, qualifications and credentials. This shows up time after time in customer surveys. Consumers tell us they're willing to spend a little extra to work with a company that they have confidence in and/or that makes them feel comfortable.

Remember, the kind of first impression you make gives the buyer a taste of what a long-term relationship with you will be like. So, show up on time, respond quickly to phone messages and don't forget to send a follow-up note or email afterward. Listen carefully to the buyer's requirements. Be that reliable pro they want to hire.

Sometimes value is also transactional: the ease of doing business, fewer hassles, flexibility in timing and so forth. Often the winner is the one who removes roadblocks and matches a customer's need for reduced friction in the contractor/client relationship. Dig deep to understand your customer's priorities and preferences.

**3 Giving the client a lower price ultimately makes everyone unhappy.** Yes, really. For you,

the amount comes right off your bottom line. An extra 15 percent discount on a 30 percent margin sale cuts your profit in half. You're clearly unhappy. The client is unhappy too, because he saw you were willing to jump at a 15 percent discount. Maybe he should have asked for a 20 percent discount? Or worse, the buyer now feels he might get reduced service or an inferior product.

**4 Avoid a "low price provider" reputation.** "The

most important thing you can say about your product or service is its price." I heard this at a conference many years ago. It is just as true today. Your product's price signals its quality, efficacy and overall value. What is your price saying?

**5 Be equally worried that your price is too low.**

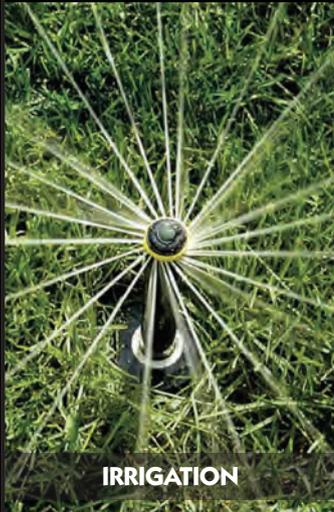
In this time of rising inflation for both materials and labor, I should be getting more calls from owners who are concerned their contractors' prices are too low. Take the time to really test where you are versus the market. Quite often leaders price too low because they're afraid to be too high! 🍀



Jeff Carowitz advises landscape industry firms on marketing and business strategy. He can be reached at [jeff@strategicforcemarketing.com](mailto:jeff@strategicforcemarketing.com).

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BY MARY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS-VILLANO

# LABOR CRISIS

**THE CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE IS HAVING A MAJOR IMPACT ON THE GREEN INDUSTRY AND ITS ABILITY TO HIRE THE RELIABLE H-2B WORKFORCE IT HAS COME TO DEPEND ON.**



If you've been a landscape contractor for any length of time, you know that there is a labor crisis in our industry. You have work, but not enough workers to get it done. And when you do get people, they often don't stay, or aren't able to perform the tasks you've assigned them.

Dustin Davis knows how that feels. Says the president of Metro West Lawn & Landscape LLC, St. Charles, Missouri, "We're in a predicament now where we have quite a backlog of work, and we've hired everyone we could find. But it's not enough. There's so much training involved, and there are just not enough experienced people out there that are willing to work."

What's a contractor to do? Well, he can apply to the Guest Worker program, which brings in temporary workers from other countries. It's nicknamed H-2B after the visas the workers are issued. The visas are only good for as long as the work lasts, however many months that is. Then, the workers go home, back to Mexico or Guatemala, where the majority of them live.

The consensus among contractors who've

used the program is that it works well, when it works. Too often, however, it doesn't.

Glenn Jacobsen started Midland Park, New Jersey-based Jacobsen Landscape Design and Construction 40 years ago. He's also a past president of the board of directors of PLANET, now the National Association of Landscape Professionals. He used the H-2B program for 15 years, from 2001 to 2015, when he stopped.

"We used to hire about 15 or 20 H-2B workers every year," Jacobsen says. "And for the first 10 years or so, it was a very positive experience. They became trained personnel who enjoyed working here for those nine or 10 months."

So why did he stop using the program? "They're always changing the rules, making it more restrictive every year, and the process so difficult and expensive that it really wasn't worth it anymore. We still never had a guarantee of getting our men, and it's hard to run a company when you don't know when your workforce is coming in."

And that's not the workers' fault. They come when the U.S. Citizenship and Im-



Workers requested through the H-2B program have been slow to arrive this year and have left some landscaping businesses in trouble.

migration Service, the arm of the Department of Homeland Security that administers the program, says they can.

No contractor I've ever spoken with has had anything but praise for the H-2B workers they've hired, including Jacobsen. "I have a lot of respect for them, because they work very hard. The quality of the people is very, very good."

Chris Kristek, president and co-owner of Wickman's Garden Village, Springfield, Missouri, usually requests 50 H-2B workers for the season. This year's group was supposed to arrive April 1. When I spoke to him on April 25, they had still not arrived.



**H-2B Q&A: WHAT ARE AN EMPLOYER'S OBLIGATIONS TO CONTACT ITS FORMER U.S. EMPLOYEES?**

The employer must solicit the return of any U.S. workers employed during the previous year in the occupation and place of employment for which the employer is requesting H-2B workers. This includes employees laid off within 120 calendar days before the date of need, but not those employees who were dismissed for cause or who abandoned the work site. Contact may be made by mail or other effective means; it must disclose the terms of the job order and solicit the worker's return. The employer must maintain documentation sufficient to prove such contact. (Source: [www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs78b.pdf](http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs78b.pdf))

When I asked Kristek how much his business would be hurt if doesn't get those workers soon, he said, "I would not use the word 'hurt.' I would use the word 'crushed.'"

He says, "We've already had to bail out of some jobs. Even if they come some time next month, it's to the point where it's greatly affecting the continued viability of my company, one that's been around since 1922."

The number of guest workers allowed per year is capped at 66,000 divided into two quarters. Half of them, 33,000, arrive Oct. 1, the other half come April 1. Our industry draws from that pool, along with the reforestation, hospitality, restaurant and seafood processing industries. Landscape companies use up the lion's share of the April 1 allotment. Occasionally the cap is raised, but never by enough to meet the demand.

The process is costly in both money and time. First, there's a huge stack of paperwork — "three-quarters of an inch thick," says Stephen Faulkner, owner of Faulkner Landscape and Nursery Inc., Hookset, New Hampshire — to get through. "You have to dot every i and cross every t, or you could have your application rejected," he adds.

Because the process is so drawn out and difficult, many contractors hire companies like Labor Consultants International of Coeur D'Alene, Idaho, to cut through the red tape for them.

"You have to prove your need, that you have the work, and that there are no American workers who'll take those jobs," explains Terry Forrester, LCI owner and general manager. "The Department of Labor requires that you place help wanted ads in your local Sunday newspaper and another weekday edition. A single Sunday ad can cost anywhere from \$500 to \$3,000."

"Then there's the \$1,825 application fee," continues Forrester, "the consulate fee of \$190 per worker; the cost of their inbound and outbound transportation; all the FedEx's back and forth; and our fee. Most contractors end up spending around \$10,000, once you add up everything."

"The recruitment effort (taking out the ads) is expensive," confirms Kristek. "We're already into this for many thousands of dollars, just trying to get our visas for this year. I'm out all that money, without

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enough workers to create any production to help earn that back. I'm drowning."

When I spoke with Paul T. Mendelsohn, NALP's vice president of government relations on April 25, he'd just gotten off the phone with another contractor who also hadn't received his workers on April 1. "A lot of people haven't gotten their workers yet, and they're very upset and frustrated. Congress authorized the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Labor to issue a certain number of visas but gave them discretion about whether they would do it or not."

Kristek says, "Right now, I don't have any firm answer from the government on when my guys might be able to show up. If I had a timeline where I knew when they were going to be here, that would help ease the pain. Otherwise I'm going to have to walk out on some contracts, and we've already lost some."

"Thus far the administration has not acted, nor given us a timeline of when they plan to act," says Mendelsohn. "We don't know if they are going to raise the cap — issue additional visas — or by how many. We're very concerned that they are slow-playing it. We might run into a situation such as we

had last year, where there were around 90,000 businesses that were certified as having met the need, but they only authorized 15,000 additional visas."

#### Playing politics?

The program has always been something of a political football. Some senators and members of Congress like the program, and some others don't. One has to wonder if the anti-immigration tone coming out of the White House is affecting the way the program is being administered.

"It is affecting it, without a doubt," says Mendelsohn. "Some of our congressional champions who've had direct discussions with the White House or the Department of Labor keep being told that these people are taking jobs that would otherwise go to citizens and are artificially holding down the wages of American workers. That's along the lines of the anti-immigration rhetoric we've been hearing."

But what they're being told just isn't true, according to Mendelsohn. He cites independent research that shows every H-2B visa issued creates or sustains 4.64 jobs — exactly the opposite of what the program's critics are claiming. "It helps drive salaries



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## H-2B Visa Program

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Landscape contractors all over the country are having trouble finding enough workers to fulfill their contracts. The reasons are varied: the work is hard, it's seasonal, and currently, the unemployment rate is low, American workers have their pick of opportunities.

up. When H-2B workers are getting the prevailing wage, as is required by the Department of Labor, it drives up wages throughout the entire company.”

Faulkner can attest to that. “I have 16 regular employees and bring in six H-2B workers every season. Those six guys are so proficient and well-trained that I can afford to grow my company and pay my American workers better money.”

And, they're failing to take into account what Mendelsohn called “the downstream impact,” or rip-

## REAPING THE H-2B REWARD

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, an arm of the Department of Homeland Security, administers the H-2B visa program, in consultation with the Department of Labor.

To qualify for the program, an employer must establish that there are not enough U.S. workers who are able, willing, qualified and available to do the temporary work, that employing H-2B workers will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers, and that the need for the prospective workers' services or labor is temporary, regardless of whether the underlying job can be described as temporary.

An employer's need is considered temporary if it is seasonal (as landscape work is). A petitioner claiming a seasonal need must show that the service or labor for which it seeks workers is traditionally tied to a season of the year by an event or pattern and is of a recurring nature.

The H-2B program is capped at 66,000 workers annually. The cap is split into two sides, 33,000 workers for the first half opening Oct. 1 and 33,000 workers for the second half, opening April 1 each year.

An employer should start the application process at least 180 days before the date of need. More time is preferred, as filing with DOL for wages and then all the other recruitment and filing deadlines with DOL are very time consuming. A contractor that would like workers for next April would need to start planning this summer and start the process by late summer or fall.



ple effect, that denying or delaying the H-2B workers has on local economies.

Kristek can attest to that. “I've been wanting to buy some new equipment, but if I don't have people to install the jobs, I don't need them. We won't buy nearly as many materials — mulch, plants, pipes — and that affects our suppliers and our suppliers' suppliers.”

The guest worker program gets lumped into the immigration debate. But it shouldn't, because the H-2B's aren't immigrants. As Mendelsohn points out, an immigrant is someone who plans to permanently move to another country.

“The H-2B program doesn't allow that. They have a date when they're supposed to go back, and 99 percent of the people abide by that. They have families and responsibilities back home. The program allows them to provide for a better life for their family in their home countries without needing to move to the United States.”

## Why is this such a crisis?

In the five-plus years I've been writing articles for this magazine, I've heard contractors all over the country, in every region, say repeatedly that they have trouble finding workers. When they do, they discover that many of them fibbed about their skills, had bad attitudes, or weren't prepared for how hard the work is.

A few have stopped doing pre-employment background checks and drug tests saying that if they did them, they'd have no employees at all. “And it's not a wage issue, either,” says Davis. “Offering more money doesn't get you better people, necessarily.”

Theories persist about the current state of affairs. Alex Salazar, co-owner of The Salazar Landscape Co., Sun Valley, California, says his company has not had any luck hiring people between 18 and 25. “They have a very poor work ethic, and they don't stay on. Our field is very intense, very labor-heavy, and often it's something they just can't handle.”

Davis is even more blunt. “The American workforce has gone soft,” he contends. “I know that's a broad statement that doesn't apply to everybody. But they seem to have a lot of personal issues that get in the way of them coming to work — ‘my grandma died,’ and so forth. ‘Oh, didn't she die last month, too?’ Meanwhile, there are six H-2B guys sharing an apartment who have to be deathly ill before they'll miss work, because their families back in Mexico are depending on them.”

Right now, we have a very low unemployment rate. That's a factor, too. So is the seasonal nature of our business. Many good American workers are lost



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because they have to find other jobs to fill out the rest of the year; they often don't return.

But the H-2Bs do. Many work for the same contractor for 15 or 20 years, becoming interwoven into the fabric of the business. "That's what happens," affirms Jacobsen. "They become part of your family."

Faulkner, who owns both a landscape company and a nursery, depends on the skills of his returning H-2B workers. "You need a lot of people, when you're getting 10 or 12 tractor-trailer loads on a Monday. My guys know my irrigation system, know where I like to put everything. It took four or five years for them to learn that."

Last year, he couldn't get any of them. "And it was hell around here. We were stacking trees on top of trees, just to get them off the trucks. A lot of the trees were damaged or died."

### Taking on the problem

Clearly, our industry needs to start attracting young people. NALP is trying to do that via its Industry Growth Initiative. "We want the public to fall in love with this industry, to see the benefits of healthy lawns and landscapes, and for the best and brightest to seek

careers in it," says Missy Henriksen, NALP's vice president of public affairs.

NALP recently launched a Landscape Industry Careers website. "In January, we launched an annual Landscape Career Day, supported by a host of planning and promotional materials. We developed a 22-page toolkit to help companies put on successful career day events, such as hosting community service projects in their neighborhoods or working with a local scout group," Henriksen says.

The idea is to reach out to students, parents, educators and even working adults who don't like their current career paths, make them aware of all the opportunities offered by our industry and also dispel any misconceptions they may have about it.

This is clearly the way to go. If we can encourage young people to view green industry careers as the well-paying, opportunity-filled, satisfying occupations that we know them to be, we can assure a willing, able and competent workforce that will take us into the future. Don't we have to? 🌿

The author is senior editor of *Irrigation & Green Industry* magazine and can be reached at [maryvillano@igin.com](mailto:maryvillano@igin.com).

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Eric Santos is passionate about water, particularly where he can save it for his clients. And as vice president of irrigation services for BrightView Landscape, he has many opportunities to do just that. Photos: Dawn Harmer Photography



## OVERFLOWING WITH PASSION

INSPIRED BY HIS GRANDFATHER, BRIGHTVIEW'S ERIC SANTOS HAS A PASSION FOR WATER CONSERVATION, WHICH IS EVIDENT IN THE EFFICIENT LANDSCAPE IRRIGATION SYSTEMS HE AND HIS TEAMS BUILD.

BY KRISTIN SMITH-ELY

**F**rom an early age, Eric Santos knew his calling. Like many kids who aspire to be like their role models when they grow up, Santos was no different. The person he admired and aspired to be like was his grandfather, Jose Arias. And if his grandfather could see him now, he would surely be proud of all that his grandson has accomplished.

The now-vice president of irrigation services at BrightView Landscape, Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, first became interested in growing and agriculture as a child.

Arias, his grandfather on his mother's side was an irrigator who worked on an alfalfa farm in Nevada. He was from Mexico and came to the U.S. in the 1960s through the Bracero Program, similar to today's H-2B program, to work for a rancher. He eventually brought his family over to the states.

"Growing up I would spend summers over at the farm, and I would always admire his work ethic and loved the fact that he worked outdoors," explains Santos. "I just thought what he did was the coolest thing. I knew I wanted to pursue a career in agriculture, specifically on the water side of things."

Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area,

Santos excelled in math all through school and decided he would major in agricultural engineering at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo is home to the Irrigation Training and Research Center. Dr. Charles Burt was his academic advisor, a man who has been recognized multiple times by the Irrigation Association for his industry contributions. Looking back, Santos now realizes how fortunate he was to study under such an industry icon.

The summer of his junior year, Santos started an internship for Jensen Landscape Services, Cupertino, California, in order to gain some experience in irrigation. Put to work on an irrigation crew, he quickly learned the true meaning of manual labor.

The following summer, in 1994, he decided to look for more formal training and a more structured internship program. ValleyCrest had what he was looking for.

"Even though I was studying agriculture, at that time, innovation in landscape irrigation seemed to be advancing quicker," Santos explains. "Coming from where my family was, in the Bay Area of Northern California, there were many more career opportunities in landscape irrigation because it's more geared toward urban areas."



Eric Santos enjoys working with crews and passing on knowledge of landscape irrigation, a principle instilled in him during his time at BrightView Landscape.

**"IT WAS MY DREAM JOB, DOING SOMETHING I WAS REALLY PASSIONATE ABOUT. I REALLY ENJOY WORKING WITH WATER."**

**— ERIC SANTOS**

### A lasting impression

The internship at ValleyCrest made a lasting impression. Though the company now goes by a different name, Santos has stayed with it ever since.

Around the time Santos began that internship, California was in the midst of a drought. ValleyCrest had just formed a division called WaterWise under the maintenance side of the company, then known as Environmental Care, in response.

"I specifically learned WaterWise irrigation and water management services for my internship," says Santos.

Something just clicked. "I knew it was exactly what I wanted to do, and upon graduation I was offered a fulltime position," says Santos. "It was my dream job, doing something I was really passionate about. I really enjoy working with water."

WaterWise was a small division of ValleyCrest when Santos joined the company. There were seven WaterWise branches across the country, and he focused on becoming a WaterWise branch manager. "It started me down a path of always being focused around irrigation and water conservation and uti-

lizing new technology to save our customers' water."

Being one of the most knowledgeable people in landscape irrigation was important to Santos, so soon after starting his new job, he began pursuing Irrigation Association certifications. "At the time, being fresh out of school, it was very easy to take these certification exams and pass them. In my first five years I had a majority of the certifications that were offered," he says.

Santos learned the material needed to obtain the certifications inside and out. Because of his broad knowledge, in the early 2000s, the company asked him to start putting on irrigation training seminars for employees.

"Up until that point we never had a formal irrigation training program," he says. "Being a teacher forces me to stay abreast of not just the basics but even the new technology."

WaterWise and Environmental Care rebranded in 2002 under the ValleyCrest name and in 2014 merged with Brickman. That merger was a major deal for the landscaping industry and for the two companies that came together in it, Valley Crest, based on the West Coast, and Brickman, based on the East Coast. The combined company was re-named BrightView.

"Internally, it took a little bit of adjusting to get used to. No matter what side of the company you came from, you had a new name," Santos recalls.

Both companies were similar in size and didn't operate in many of the same markets. ValleyCrest had four divisions: construction, tree growing, golf maintenance and landscape maintenance. Brickman was heavily into the landscape maintenance side of the business and a major player in snow removal "so it was a very complementary merger between the two organizations," Santos says.



Eric Santos travels to various locations assisting irrigation managers with projects, clients and crews.

Today the combined company has four divisions: the BrightView Design Group, which takes on large landscape and irrigation projects such as the new Apple campus in Cupertino, California; BrightView Tree Co., a tree growing operation with locations in Northern and Southern California; a golf maintenance division which cares for 80 golf courses; and a landscape services division, which is the maintenance arm of the organization.

Santos oversees irrigation and water management services, which falls under the landscape services division and has 600 employees. Company-wide, BrightView has 22,000 employees.

#### Just another day

Santos works out of BrightView's Pleasanton, California, branch. But he's often out in the field,

providing support to irrigation managers, training employees and assisting with large proposals, estimates and client presentations. He's worked with some big clients.

"I've been very fortunate that my position gives me the opportunity to work on some large innovative projects," says Santos. Apple, Google, Facebook and Walmart are just a handful of the companies with sizable projects that he's been involved with at BrightView over the years. "And on those projects and others, I get to work with the industry's best irrigation designers, irrigation consultants, manufacturers and distributors. There's definitely never a dull moment, and it makes for a very rewarding career."

The maintenance aspect of the projects is also interesting to Santos. "It's not just the construction of the projects that I get a lot out of," he says. "It is the long-term maintenance and managing of water on these properties."

But the thing that gives Santos the most satisfaction in his work is when he can find a way to save water. "What really drives me is when I see water being wasted and I have the opportunity to save it. It's definitely fulfilling when you see that you can cut a customer's water use in half and deliver those financial savings."

The best clients are the ones who choose to re-invest that savings. Santos says customers want to save water for a myriad of reasons: regulatory, financial or simply because they want to do the right thing. When the money saved is used to continuously invest in more water efficiency, Santos says, "Those are the fun customers to work with."

Working his way up through the ranks over the last 24 years has never gotten boring for Santos. He enjoys training others and was taught that the om-

"I CAN'T SEE MYSELF DOING ANYTHING ELSE THAN IRRIGATION. IT'S REALLY WHAT EXCITES ME."

— ERIC SANTOS

## A SLICE OF APPLE

Apple's new campus in Cupertino, California, contains some landscaping features that are really testing the capabilities of modern irrigation, and BrightView Landscape is at the helm.

The Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania-based company is making sure it is irrigated right. The main building is a ring-shaped, 2.8 million-square-foot building clad entirely in panels of curved glass, but equally as impressive at the 175-acre campus is the landscape.

The site is more than 80 percent green space. It includes orchards of plum, apple, apricot and cherry trees; shrub beds containing rosemary; and 15 acres of native grassland. But the most interesting part of the site has to be man-made hills and the transfer and implantation of oak trees.

Steve Jobs reportedly wanted the campus to include rolling hills and majestic oak trees that replicate the Palo Alto, California, area where he grew up.

BrightView has installed a two-wire irrigation system,

which works off of soil moisture sensors. Eric Santos, vice president, irrigation services, explains the process: "With soil moisture sensing systems, sensor placement is very important. In addition, pressure regulation is key on systems with flow management and flow optimization capabilities."

During commissioning, the system has to undergo a sort of training process called "learned flow." Just as it sounds, the flow sensor "learns" or memorizes patterns and the amount of water allowed to go through each valve. Irrigation is initiated on its own based on the soil moisture conditions in different areas.

"Working with innovative products is very gratifying," says Santos. "Water management is more than simply installing water-efficient products and walking away, its utilizing technology as a tool to manage water more effectively, making sure everything is dialed in to the customers' expectations."

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### CLOSE-UP PROFILE



BrightView's Eric Santos says being able to speak to Spanish-speaking team members in their first language is invaluable.

### ¿HABLAS ESPAÑOL?

Want to have an effective team? Eric Santos, vice president of irrigation services at BrightView Landscape, Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, says one of the biggest things you can do is speak their language, literally. "My number one piece of advice would be to learn Spanish."



In Santos' role he often encounters irrigation managers that are extremely intelligent but have a communication barrier with their team. "A lot of our irrigation technicians understand English, but English is not their first language; and they feel a lot more comfortable communicating in their first language," he says.

Santos admits his Spanish isn't the greatest, but when he works with a Spanish-speaking team member he tells him, "Please speak to me in Spanish."

He finds that making that gesture puts the interaction on a completely different level. The team feels more comfortable if they're able to discuss the issues they're up against on a project in their first language.

He notes that it's easier for most people to understand a foreign language than to speak it. "I clearly see a huge difference in how an irrigation team at a BrightView branch operates when that irrigation manager can communicate effectively with the team members. It's pretty amazing."

pany's future success depends on having successful people who can fill the pipeline. "That approach has really made me enjoy my time here," he says.

Santos remembers the words of ValleyCrest's founder, Burt Sperber. "Treat your employees and your customers well," he would say, "and everything else will fall into place." Santos has not only adopted that philosophy, he's taken it a step further and applies it to manufacturers and distributors as well.

Santos plans to continue doing what he's doing for BrightView "as long as I have

the opportunity to learn new things and work with extremely intelligent people."

He adds that the company has always given him the green light to pursue further industry education and certifications. It is that type of commitment from the company that gets him out of bed every morning, not fully knowing what the next water challenge will be. Whatever it is, Santos will be ready. 🌱

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



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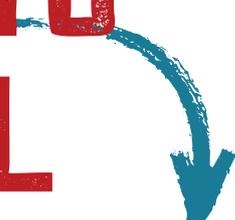
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# TAKE A SWAT AT MOSQUITO CONTROL



CONTROLLING THESE SUMMER PESTS CAN PAY OFF BIG-TIME FOR CONTRACTORS AND MIGHT EVEN SAVE SOMEONE'S LIFE.

I recall being at a friend's Master's-degree-awarding party at her mother's home one June afternoon. It was held outdoors, by the pool. Even though it was a hot day, no one was in it, because it was ... well ... let's just say, not in the best condition. Okay — it was green.

As evening approached, my bare arms started itching. Obviously, that green pool had become a breeding pond for mosquito larvae. After receiving a dozen or so bites, I decided it was time to go home.

Mosquito bites used to be a minor spring and summer annoyance, causing itchy welts on people like me who are susceptible. Even if you're one of the lucky ones who isn't allergic to their saliva, no one likes clouds of 'skeeters buzzing around their faces. That's a sure way to ruin a nice summer evening.

But now mosquitoes are much more than mere irritations, they've become health hazards, a vector for serious diseases such as West Nile, Zika, EEE (Eastern equine encephalitis) and even the tropical scourge malaria.

Along with Lyme-disease-spreading ticks, they're to be avoided, repelled or annihilated at all costs.

Why are we telling you this? Because there's money to be made in keeping people's yards free of these bedeviling virus-injectors. Many landscape contractors, realizing this, have added mosquito and tick control to their menu of services.

"There's just a huge need for this here in Georgia," says Elijah Thomas, owner and partner at Atlanta Landscape and Fertilization in Dawsonville. "We have hot, humid summers, and our winters are typically wet. And we also have plenty of lakes and ponds and places with standing water where they breed."

Thomas got into mosquito work after several of his customers requested that he come to their homes and spray. "We saw the need for it about five years ago, got certified as pesticide applicators and decided to offer it as a secondary product, an adjunct to our primary service."

He started by soliciting interest from his already-established custom-

ers. "After a while, it proved to be in such demand that we saw a market for it outside of our current client base. Now we offer it by itself as a stand-alone item, not bundled with any other lawn care services."

Has it been profitable? "Very," says Thomas. "We continue to see exponential growth every year; We're looking to have it become 20 to 25 percent of our overall revenue stream here in the next couple years."

Mark Kelbacher, owner of Stay-Green Lawn Services in Chicopee, Massachusetts, has also found mosquito control to be "a great revenue stream for us. There's a need for it from a homeowners' perspective with the West Nile virus out there and the tick population growing at a rapid pace."

Climate change has played a role in keeping the mosquito and tick populations thriving. "We're not getting the harsh winters like we did," says Kelbacher. "We used to get some kill over the winter; that helped keep down the numbers."

## Protecting pollinators

We're talking pesticides here, and we must be concerned about their effect on our beleaguered pollinators, the honeybees, Monarch butterflies, and other beneficial bugs. This presents a conundrum for ecologically conscious property owners and contractors. On the one hand, home and business owners feel compelled to do something about outdoor experiences that would be ruined by flocks of disease-bearing mosquitoes and ticks. On the other hand, no one wants to contribute to a possible extinction event.

"Obviously, the bees are important; they're everything, life itself," says Bill Plummer, director of operations at Mainely Grass, York, Maine. The company offers a chemical-free approach that uses cedar oil or rosemary oil instead of bifenthrin.

Bifenthrin is one of the most commonly used pesticides, a synthetic pyrethroid with a neurotoxic effect. It will kill bees and other pollinators if they have direct contact with the chemical.

Because of that, Plummer and the

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// BY MARY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS-VILLANO

**"SOMEBODY SPRAYED AND BECAUSE THEY HAD. WE WERE ABLE TO SIT OUTSIDE ALL NIGHT WITHOUT GETTING BIT. I REMEMBER TELLING MY WIFE THAT IF SOMEBODY MARKETS THIS PROPERLY. IT COULD BE A GREAT BUSINESS."**

**- STEVE CLARK,  
MOSQUITO JOE OF  
EAST MEMPHIS**

other contractors all say that they train their applicators where — and where not — to spray to protect the beneficials in the yard. Blooming or about-to-bloom plants are to be avoided. "If there are flowers around, we generally stay away from that entire area," says Plummer.

"Mosquitoes love shade, so we're always looking at cool areas they like to rest in, such as the undersides of leaves," says Steve Clark, owner of Mosquito Joe of East Memphis, Tennessee. "We're training our guys to look for sources of standing water (not fish ponds) where they can lay their eggs, and then we treat the water sources as well to prevent those eggs from hatching."

### **What about client conversion?**

This ancillary service can net you customers for your core business as well. Mainly Grass is mainly a lawn care operation, but a percentage of its customers subscribe to both the lawn care and tick-and-mosquito control programs.

Atlanta Landscape and Fertilization does mowing and maintenance, irrigation, weed control and fertilization, landscape design and installation. "Virtually anything needed outdoors, we're pretty much doing it," says Thomas, including designing landscapes and building patios and rock paths. He's had many mosquito-control-only customers convert to regular landscape clients and vice versa.

"We've found that both products create synergy off each other. We use internal email marketing leads, so that once someone becomes a client, we offer him our full range of products."

### **The franchise route**

A fast way to get into mosquito and tick control is to get on board with a franchise. There are several out there: Mosquito Squad, Mosquito Shield, Mos-

quito Buzz and others. Clark, who started out with a lawn care business called Southern Lawn and Pest in Memphis, got involved with Virginia Beach, Virginia-based franchisor Mosquito Joe after attending an outdoor concert in 2013 with his family.

"In our area the mosquito pressure is just unbelievable. We're right by the Mississippi River and two others, the Wolf and the Hatchy. In the summertime, you literally can't go outside and enjoy the night with your friends and family — whatever you're trying to do, you just can't do it."

Nonetheless, Clark did attend that concert. "Somebody sprayed — and because they had, we were able to sit outside all night without getting bit. I remember telling my wife that 'if somebody markets this properly, it could be a great business.'"

Later, Clark's dad showed him a magazine article about someone who was having success with a Mosquito Joe franchise. After checking into it, he signed up. "We started in business January 14, 2014 and started spraying [that] April."

Clark says the franchise folks made the startup learning curve a lot easier. "The training part is huge. They give you a manual, plus have all these training videos. They even provide the content for the help wanted ads you need to place to get your technicians and office staff."

He feels he's getting his money's worth for the cut the franchisor takes. "It took exactly four years for the mosquito business to outgrow my lawn care business, which has been around for 11 years. From 2015 to 2016, we grew by 92 percent, and last year, from 2016 to 2017, by 125 percent. My goal the first year of actual spraying, 2014, was to do \$40,000 in mosquito control alone. We did \$100,000. In 2015 we [more than] doubled that, to \$222,000."

How long does a mosquito treatment typically last? "The general rule of thumb is 28 to 30 days, in

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MOSQUITO-BORNE ILLNESSES

**West Nile** - Cases of this virus have been reported in all of the continental United States. Most people experience mild or no symptoms. However, about 1 out of 150 infected people develop serious, sometimes fatal, illness.

**Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE)** - This is one of the most severe mosquito-transmitted diseases in the U.S., with approximately 33 percent mortality and significant brain damage to those who get encephalitis, a brain

inflammation, from it. Fortunately, it's rare in humans, and only a few cases are reported in the U.S. each year, mostly in the Atlantic and Gulf Coast states. Most people who get it experience no symptoms.

**Zika** - Symptoms of this virus are mild in most people, but if a pregnant woman gets infected, the virus can cause serious birth defects, including microcephaly. In 2018, no local mosquito-borne Zika virus transmission has

been reported in the continental United States. Previously, it has been reported in the Miami-Dade County area of Florida and in Brownsville, Texas.

**Malaria** - Rare in the U.S., between 1957 and 2015, just 63 outbreaks of locally transmitted mosquito-borne malaria have occurred and usually were the result of local mosquitoes biting people who had returned after visiting countries where it's endemic.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control*

an ideal situation,” says Clark. “But, it depends on the environment, on how much rainfall there is, and on what’s in or near the location. If it’s a heavily wooded area, the mosquitoes may encroach quicker.”

Environmental factors include whether or not a property is close to a pond or any standing water. That’s where their eggs are laid, and the larvae grow. Even an upturned bottle cap can hold enough water for mosquitoes to breed in.

A regular program at Clark’s company is about six applications throughout the summer. Someone who lives in a heavily wooded area might need more.

**Shoo!**

Another way to deal with the nasty pests is to simply repel them. This could be a good alternative for a customer who doesn’t want any chemicals sprayed in his yard.

One of these products, called Haven, looks like a landscape lighting fixture. It works by heat-atomizing the contents of a little replaceable bottle of meto-fluthrin, a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved repellent that’s safe for humans and pets (DEET is not used because it’s designed to be ap-

plied to the skin). The company claims it’s 92.5 percent effective.

“They don’t want to land on you, and just want to get out of the area,” says Jeremy Yingst, global category manager for manufacturer Broan-NuTone, Hartford, Wisconsin.

Each fixture covers about 110 square feet. “An average-sized deck or patio would need about four fixtures,” says Yingst. Each bottle lasts about 216 hours.

Thomas prefers killing to the repellent approach. “With repellent, some bugs will still get through,” he says. “But spraying the habitat and killing the larvae gives you 28 days of effectiveness, with zero mosquitoes.”

Keeping these annoying and even dangerous pests from ruining your clients’ summer outdoor fun can be a lucrative side service. Want to take a swat at it? 🍃

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



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# TENDING TO YOUR CLIENTS:

## A LESSON FROM THE HOSPITAL BED



### **TAKING A CUE FROM THOSE IN THE NURSING PROFESSION MIGHT JUST MEND YOUR BUSINESS AND GIVE IT A HEALTHY FUTURE.**

**A** short while back I had the good fortune to have my appendix removed. I say “good fortune” because the procedure saved my life. It also gave me the opportunity to experience some incredible examples of off-the-charts customer service.

Here’s what happened. One Sunday morning, I had abdominal cramps. I told my wife, and she wondered if it could be my appendix. I promptly retorted, “I doubt it,” because no one in my immediate family, including my father, mother, three older sisters and younger brother has ever had his or her appendixes removed. But as the pain grew worse, I wondered if I could be the first.

The pain continued to grow worse and worse, and Monday morning I made the decision to go to see our family doctor. After some tests, my doctor informed me that I needed to proceed to the hospital immediately. My appendix was highly suspect and would probably need to be removed.

Upon arrival at St. John’s Medical Center in Novi, Michigan, and after more tests and X-rays, I was informed that I would indeed need to have my appendix removed urgently. It was removed, and three days later I was sent home, only to develop post-operative ileitis, an inflammation of the ileum, the farthest segment of the small intestine. This complication got so bad that 10 days later, I was readmitted to the hospital for six more days.

As I lay in my hospital bed recovering, I discov-

ered a team of doctors and nurses and other support personnel who behaved as though they were on an important mission. It’s a mission they take very seriously, which is to give their patients a caring and supportive environment in which they can heal.

Of all the team members involved in helping me recover during those nine days, three nurses stood out among all the others with whom I came into contact. They’ve given me permission to use their first names. The three super nurses are Sheila, Kelly and Leslie.

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**A team effort**

These nurses worked three-day shifts of 12 hours each, either day or night. The first day shift began at 7:30 a.m., and Sheila was the lead nurse.

She walked into my room with a big smile, greeted me by my name, and introduced herself and her assistant. She explained to me in a very caring and concerned tone that their job was to help me recover enough to be able to go home. She communicated to me all the latest information about my condition, and how important it was for me to feel comfortable.

She welcomed all the questions I had, and explained that my healing and recovery would be a team effort between the hospital staff and me. She explained my options as to the medications and how they would be administered; how often I would have my vitals, such as blood pressure and temperature, checked; and showed me the button on the remote that I could use to call a nurse if I needed assistance.

One thing stood out about Sheila. Often she'd be whistling a happy tune as she walked into my room; I called her my whistling nurse. It was a little thing, but it meant a lot to me because it added such a cheerful and personal touch.

The next two nurses, Kelly and Leslie, worked as a team on the 7:30 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. shift. Sheila introduced them to me. I must tell you that after having spent 12 consecutive hours with Sheila, I felt that I really knew and liked her; I didn't want to see her leave. Now I'd be under the care of two strangers whom I didn't think would be nearly as good as Sheila. I was wrong.

Both Kelly and Leslie bubbled over with enthusiasm and positivity. They struck me as people who are following their true calling and who really love what they do. They, too, told me their purpose was to help me heal and recover. They'd be on night shift duty for the next three days, and I felt really fortunate that I would have them watching over me during that time.

Kelly impressed me with her willingness to listen. She'd stop what she was doing, look directly at me, and listen, giving me her full attention. She listened to me as long as was necessary, and then a bit longer, creating such a presence of caring and concern that it was as if time stood still. I could literally feel a healing energy coming from her.

As for Leslie, I could tell that she was an experienced lead nurse who knew how to facilitate the healing process. She also radiated caring and compassion, making her an even more effective therapeutic presence. Together, Sheila, Kelly and Leslie were a powerful combination. I felt assured that I had the right team to help me on my road to recovery.

These three nurses weren't just working a job, they were living out their life's calling. They had a purpose and a mission they truly embraced.

**Applying their lessons**

You may be asking, "That's great Tom, but what does

all this have to do with business?" Let me boil down for you exactly what these three nurses accomplished and what lessons every organization that has clients or customers can learn from them and apply.

First, they answered my four silent questions. They're the same four questions your clients and customers have for you and your green industry team but will never say out loud. The questions are:

1. **Do you like me?**
2. **Do you care about me?**
3. **Can I trust you?**
4. **Do you know what you are doing?**

Sheila, Kelly and Leslie answered my first question, "Do you like me?" by the way they smiled, made eye contact and called me by name; by the words they used to introduce themselves; and by the positive vibrations they emitted when they were in the room with me.



**Make a commitment to your team to invest in their constant learning and improvement process.**

When they reach the level of professionalism demonstrated by the three nurses who took such good care of me, your organization will be in a class by itself.

They answered the second question, "Do you care about me?" by carefully explaining what they were going to do, answering my immediate questions, and assuring me that if I needed help, all I had to do was push the call button on my remote.

They answered the third question, "Can I trust you?" by their consistent professional demeanor.

And finally, they answered my last question, "Do you know what you're doing?" by demonstrating knowledge about my condition, by regularly checking with the doctors handling my case and by instantly accessing my reports and test results online.

**The big takeaways**

Here are the takeaways that I want you as a leader to get from my experience.

- Make it your goal to hire people with the right attitude, who love what they do and are committed to doing it well.
- Help them to learn, understand and embrace your company's mission and its goal of giving every client the highest possible level of service.
- Teach them to have a reverence for helping their clients get what they need and want.

Nurses and other professionals take continuing education courses throughout their careers. Make a commitment to your team to invest in their constant learning and improvement process. When they reach the level of professionalism demonstrated by the three nurses who took such good care of me, your organization will be in a class by itself. 🌱



**Tom Borg** is a team performance and customer experience expert who works with small businesses and organizations in the green industry to improve customer acquisition and retention. He helps these organizations through his consulting, speaking, training and mentoring. He can be reached at 734.404.5909 or at [tom@tomborg.com](mailto:tom@tomborg.com), or visit [www.tomborgconsulting.com](http://www.tomborgconsulting.com).





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with location. Soil survey data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture-National Cooperative Soil Survey is also accessible with the app.

It was eight years ago that Apple trademarked the slogan, "There's an app for that." This is truer now more than ever for the green industry. 🌿

The author is digital content editor, *Irrigation & Green Industry*.

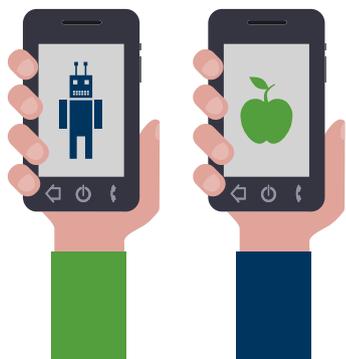
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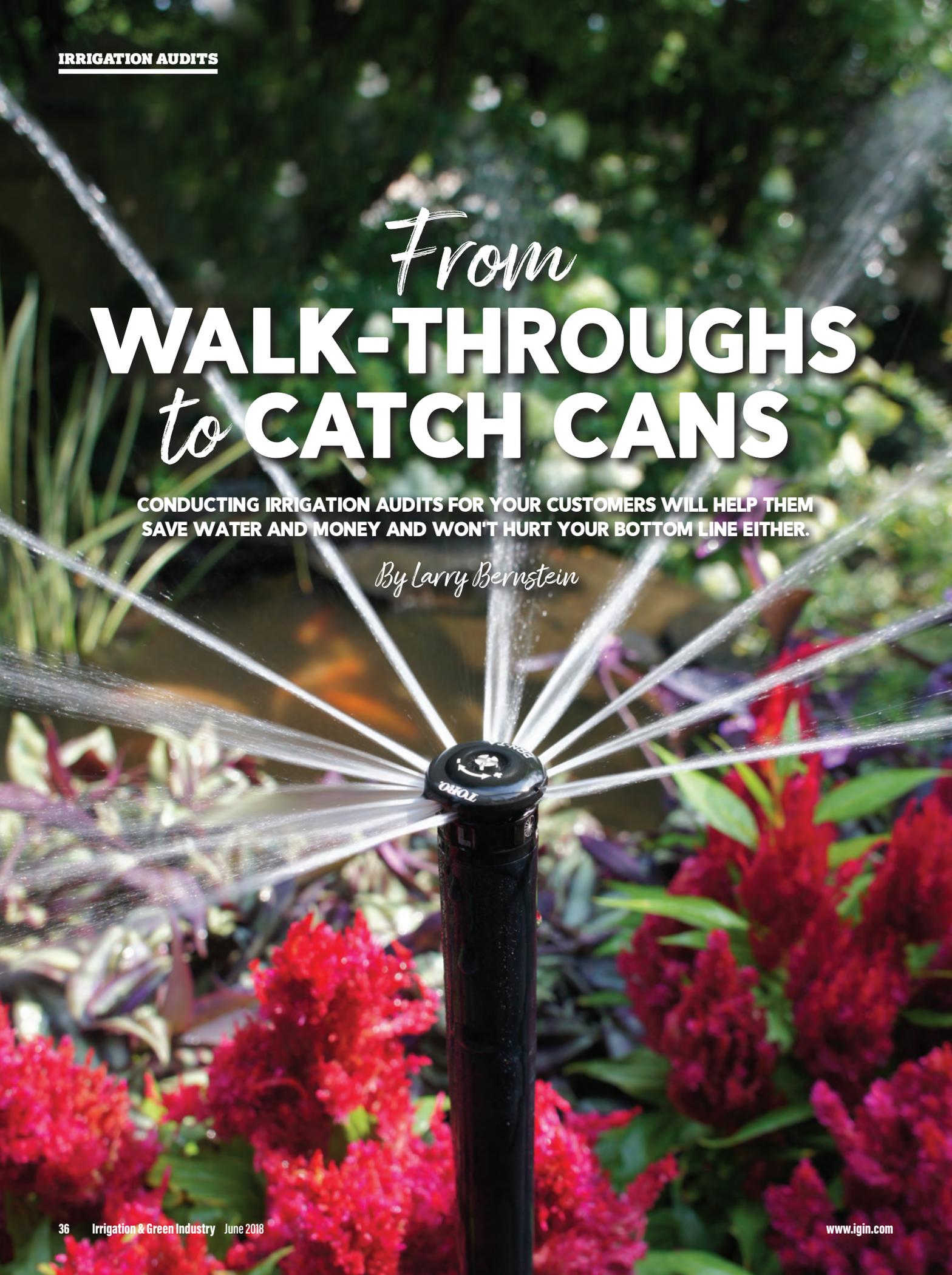
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**CONDUCTING IRRIGATION AUDITS FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS WILL HELP THEM SAVE WATER AND MONEY AND WON'T HURT YOUR BOTTOM LINE EITHER.**

*By Larry Bernstein*

**W**ith over 70 percent of the Earth's surface covered by water, it's easy to forget how precious a resource it is. Sure, we all hear about droughts on occasion, but they're always in other places, reported by weather forecasters trying to stir up the viewer's interest. Yet, conserving water is an imperative for all of us, particularly those of us in the irrigation and landscape business. One way to ensure water is being used optimally is by conducting irrigation audits.

Irrigation audits are best performed by certified landscape irrigation auditors. According to the Fairfax, Virginia-based Irrigation Association website, to become a CLIA, one must pass an exam and submit a complete landscape irrigation audit, which is then verified by an IA-certified professional. Obtaining this certification means one is able to quantify and analyze landscape irrigation water use.

Irrigation audits are a key element of site surveys. For many landscapers, an audit might conjure up memories of high school and college math classes rather than images of water conservation. Yet, this is one of those cases where math is integral to the

process of ensuring the correct amount of water is being applied.

**What's involved**

There are two steps or stages to a water audit. Tim Malooly, president of Minneapolis-based Water in Motion and a CLIA contractor and designer describes what he calls "a stage one audit." This is a walk-through of an irrigation system by an experienced professional.

He looks for the low-hanging fruit, easy fixes that will tune up the system. Examples of commonly reported issues found in stage one include leaks, broken or maladjusted sprinklers, broken or missing rain sensors and poor scheduling practices. If you stop there, without proceeding to the next stage, you've done an irrigation evaluation. Though short of a full audit, it can still greatly increase a system's efficiency.

The second stage of the irrigation audit is more scientific and math-based. Malooly says, "Stage two is a scientifically measured, defensible evaluation using catch cans configured in a grid to measure how much water is actually being delivered to the areas being measured."

**AUDIT TIP #1**



**A walk-through can greatly increase a system's efficiency.**

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# VISUAL CUES

Irrigation system problems are often visible before conducting a formal irrigation audit. We've compiled some of the prevalent issues that can be easily identified during a walk-through and how to solve them.

**PROBLEM #1**

Missing coverage

**SOLUTION #1**

Verify proper nozzle pattern or arc adjustment.



**PROBLEM #2**

Fogging

**SOLUTION #2**

Install a pressure regulator in individual sprinklers or at the zone valve.



**PROBLEM #3**

Bubbling sprinkler

**SOLUTION #3**

Indicates a missing nozzle or cracked or broken riser.

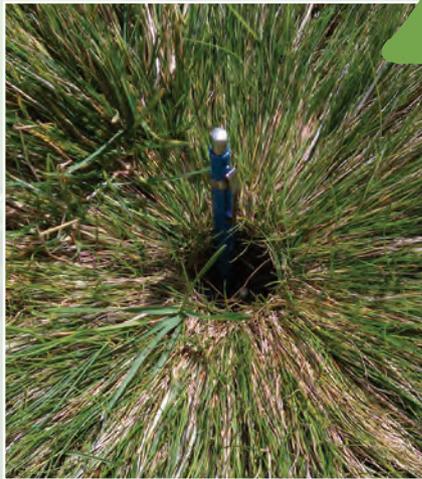


**PROBLEM #4**

Sunken sprinkler

**SOLUTION #4**

Raise the sprinkler and pack dry soil around the body of the sprinkler.



**PROBLEM #5**

Flooded valve box

**SOLUTION #5**

Could indicate a leaking valve, or a cracked or broken fitting/pipe nearby; if not reduce run time and frequency.



**PROBLEM #6**

Tilted sprinkler

**SOLUTION #6**

Reset sprinkler to be plumb and at proper grade.



A catch can test involves placing small containers about the size of a tuna tin in strategic spots in each zone that is being watered. After the zones have been watered for a few minutes, it's time to read the catch cans and determine how much water was actually applied versus how much is really needed.

"A catch can test helps you to determine the distribution uniformity, of each sprinkler zone," says Andy Slack, owner of Buckeye, Arizona-based Slack Landscape and Irrigation Consulting. "It's the measuring stick for how well or badly sprinklers are performing and is part of the process of determining irrigation efficiency." According to Slack, it's ideal to do an audit on each irrigation zone then factor the results into your report with recommendations for improvement and therefore, water savings.

Eric Anderson is president and general manager of Valley Soil Inc., a water conservation company in Temecula, California that services residential, commercial and governmental clients. He says, "When doing a catch can test, we're trying to measure what a system's output is so we can manage the results. It can help determine how much water to apply for the plant needs per day while taking physical and environmental factors into account."

Before doing a water audit, you need some infor-

mation. First, you'll need an accounting of how much water has been used over at least the last 12 months. This gives you a baseline for computing how much water is needed. You also need to know the type of soil involved and its infiltration rate and the square footage of the turf and/or landscape. Slack uses AutoCad or Google Earth to measure the square footage accurately.

Russ Jundt is founder, vice president and brand leader of Conserva Irrigation, a landscape irrigation company whose entire focus is water conservation. The company, which was founded in Minnesota and now headquartered in Virginia where it oversees franchises around the country, designs, specifies, and installs new systems and retrofits existing residential and commercial systems with new equipment to make them more efficient. He notes Conserva utilizes 40 years of historical weather data from partner, The Toro Company and a long algorithm it created. Conserva then uses this information to create a baseline of how much water should be used.

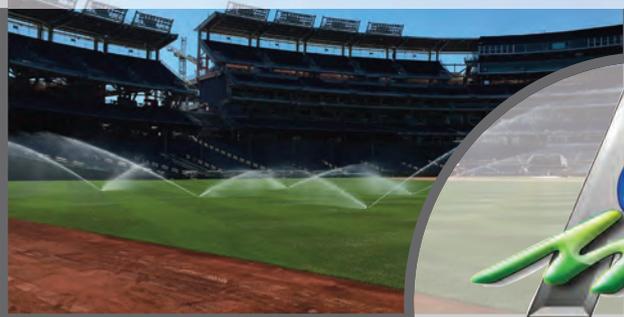
Sounds complicated, right? Well, Malooly emphasizes focusing on stage one and the search for the obvious issues. Jundt says, "It's about having boots on the ground and a professional going through the system and assessing what is going on hydraulically. This

**AUDIT TIP #2**



**Know the soil type and infiltration rate prior to starting the audit.**

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should be the first step.” Being more thorough by going through a full audit process offers added benefits.

### Offering an irrigation audit

You may be wondering why bother with the catch cans and the other elements associated with a formal irrigation audit? An audit can be complicated. Becoming certified as an auditor is also complex and

takes time, and much of the process of ensuring the irrigation system is working can be done visually. Jundt emphasizes, having CLIA behind one’s name “is a differentiator. It shows a level of professionalism, justifies your existence and quantifies the experience to the consumer.”

Malooly agrees. “Landscape irrigation professionals should become certified and offer water audits because it’s the right

thing to do when operating a landscape irrigation business. Water use and water issues in urban landscapes are of increasing importance to society.”

While no one denies conserving water is meaningful and both fiscally and ecologically responsible, a business only exists as long as it makes money. Anderson, who says every landscape contractor needs to become a CLIA, asserts the value of that certification is priceless. Offering a water audit is “a great sales tool,” he says. “It’s a service that has a very good return on investment.”

Malooly and his team at Water in Motion found that one audit client, a public school, was wasting up to 85 percent of its irrigation water. “The system was in such dramatic disrepair due to a lack of maintenance that we advised them to shut it off until it could be repaired properly. We gave them a prioritized list of tasks that needed to be done that, if acted upon, would have enabled the system to approach a 60 percent operating efficiency, which is a common design goal for broadcast irrigation.”

According to Jundt, the typical savings residential customers enjoy after having a water audit is a 40 to 60 percent reduction in water use. Commercial clients benefit even more. Conserva serves more than 300 Target stores. The national retail chain saved more than 36 million gallons of water at 85 of stores in 2017 after performing water audits. That savings is expected to increase to over 150 million gallons at those stores in 2018.

Valley Soil helped a homeowners’ association improve its efficiency from 34 percent to 78 percent using irrigation maintenance best management practices and product upgrades, according to Anderson. Run times were subsequently reduced by 20 percent and runoff was lowered to 0.5 percent.

Unless you’ve been living in a cave for the last 30 years, you know that people are paying attention to the environment and want to do things to “save the planet.” The problem these environmentally conscious people often have is they don’t know where to begin. Recycling is an obvious one, but they may not realize that another step they can take is right in their backyards.

“People want to be green but don’t know what to do,” says Malooly. “We’ve also learned that whatever actions are taken can’t impact a person’s day too much nor cost too much money. From a water use

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bang-for-the-buck perspective, improving the efficiency of a landscape irrigation system is actionable, measurable and is the right thing to do.”

Slack agrees water audits are, “the right thing to do environmentally. Having one done makes it clear the end user is environmentally conscious.”

**Selling water audits**

With the environmental and money saving benefits clearly established, getting clients to buy this service should be an easy sales pitch. Yet, that’s not necessarily the case. Often governmental agencies are the ones using this service or provide incentives so that homeowners and businesses will make use of water audits. They are regularly done in partnership with these governmental entities as they encourage people to strive to be more ecologically minded and efficient with resources.

Audits can be done for the smallest residential property up to the largest municipal user. A water agency may note high water usage at a particular property. Then Valley Soil is contacted by the agency that then reaches out to the customer explaining the situation and offering to do an audit. The majority of customers are receptive, particularly when the local water agency grants funding or pays outright for the service.

But water audits are not something to be performed just once and then walk away. Beyond taking action based on the information gleaned from an audit, it’s also essential to commit to doing them regularly, because things change over time: plants grow, sprinklers wear out and so forth. Jundt recommends that property owners have a water audit performed once a year. Conserva regularly tracks its commercial clients, and Jundt says an annual water audit is sufficient for these clients as well.

So, what makes for a successful water audit? Anderson says, “By the time you walk away, the customer should know how much water it’s going to take to keep his plants healthy, plus what upgrades or repairs the system needs for maximum water savings. If you are going to try and manage an irrigation system but don’t do what’s required, it’s like shooting in the dark.”

Installing a smart irrigation system does not mean the end of irrigation audits. All a smart system can do is send an alert if and when a problem arises. Jundt says, “The most important reason you should have an audit is to ensure that the tools of an irriga-

tion system are being used properly. With systems running at night and installed in-ground, many things can happen and go undetected.”

Landscape professionals want to ensure the right amount of water is used to keep their customers’ landscapes looking lush and vibrant without wasting any. Being able to do water audits will allow them to help their customers use water in the most

efficient way possible while still maintaining a high standard for their landscape’s appearance. They’ll be happy you saved them money and helped them go green. You’ll also benefit from the added service offering and eco-friendly reputation. 🌱

The author is a freelance writer. For more information or to contact him, visit [www.larrydbernstein.com](http://www.larrydbernstein.com) or email him at [larry@larrydbernstein.com](mailto:larry@larrydbernstein.com).



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BY GREG RUBIN

Mastering  
the

A long-time California native landscaper explores the misconceptions and intricacies of turning a backyard into a beautiful extension of nature.

# delicate

balance

Few subjects in landscaping engender more controversy than California native plants. Most designers avoid them like a bad case of the measles. Often this is based on experience; nearly every native they've ever planted has died quickly, or at best lived a short, pitiful life.

Drought tolerant plants that are not native to the area seem to be easier, less fussy. There may be liability issues involved as well when plants die, so it's understandable that our own native plants take a back seat to the tried-and-true cast of characters typically seen in most drought-tolerant landscapes.

This was the state of the art that I found myself confronting in the mid-1980s. Forty to 60 percent mortality was considered normal and even acceptable. Most of the time it was blamed on the plants themselves. Everyone knows Ceanothus is short-lived, right? Okay — so then, why do they live to 100 years in the wild?

**An unlikely path**

I came to native landscaping from a different background than most. I was a budding aerospace engineer, still attending university but already designing native landscapes for friends and family. It was a hobby that grew into an obsession.

As an engineer, trained in logical problem solving, it didn't make sense to me that natives were thriving on the hillside behind my house, but dying in my landscape. There was a logical disconnect there, and even while working as a successful engineer, I made it my mission to figure out why indigenous plants seemed to be such a pain to work with.

I was fortunate enough to encounter some extraordinary mentors as I began my education, chief among them the late Bert Wilson from Las Pilitas Nursery in Santa Margarita, California.

The great disconnect became quickly apparent. We in the landscape industry were attempting, often unsuccessfully, to apply traditional ornamental horticulture principles and practices to native plant landscapes. It seems that nearly everything we were taught to do with ornamental horticulture species was expressly designed to kill native plants.

700-plus native landscapes and 23 years later, we've found success by emulating native ecology in our installations rather than working against it. A mortality rate that once ran as high as 60 percent is now less than 10 percent. Sixty percent plant losses did not make for a viable business model, believe me. However, the emulation approach has yet to achieve universal acceptance in the landscape industry. Instead, many myths have persisted. Here are some of them.

*Myth #1*

**Drip irrigation is the best form of water delivery for all drought-tolerant plants, including natives.**

This is probably the one item that engenders the most controversy. Non-overhead drip irrigation, originally developed in Israel for agricultural use, might be the single greatest contributor to native plant failure. If one looks at emulating the natural ecology of native plants, clearly the only analogy to this localized hyper-saturation is marsh or stream-side ecology.

Interestingly, plants that naturally occur in these conditions, such as spike rush, sedges, seep monkey-flower and others do just fine on drip. On the other hand, the more drought tolerant upland species, which form the majority of plants in low-water native landscapes, evolved over millions of years being irrigated by nature's sprinkler — rain.

Native plants are organized into plant communities (think chaparral, coastal sage scrub, oak woodland, etc.), and are highly symbiotic within these communities. In other words, they help each other survive. Their roots are connected by mycorrhizal fungi, which, among other things, pull nutrition from inorganic soil and store water, moving these items around to where they are most needed in the community.

The fungi are adapted to receiving moisture more or less evenly over an entire area. Some of the fungi

*Trade tip:*

Since native plants naturally exist in symbiotic communities, it is important to pay attention to what plants you are putting together. However, through experience, it has become apparent that the most important consideration when grouping plants is what form of mulch they prefer.





Including lots of evergreen plants of different habits and sizes with colorful leaves helps avoid a dormant appearance. Perennials that bloom at different times of the year assure color in every season.

also pull nutrition from the duff layer that forms as rainwater infiltrates through this natural mulch. Therefore, the closest way to emulate this system is with low volume, high efficiency, overhead irrigation, not with isolated zones of soil saturation that never penetrates the mulch nor washes off the leaves, which happens in nature and helps hydrate the plants.

Even grid-type drip systems don't do this; all you do is you move from localized hyper-saturation to generalized hyper-saturation. Instead, we've found great success utilizing rotary nozzles such as MP rotators and similar nozzles by other manufacturers. These wash off the leaves, retard evapotranspiration, infiltrate the mulch and cover areas more or less evenly at a rate similar to a gentle rainstorm.

We use 12-inch pop-up sprinkler bodies with 30- to 40-pounds-per-square-inch pressure regulators because we need the spray to reach higher than a typical lawn sprinkler would over foliage and ground covers. We also learned not to position shrubs directly in front of the heads.

One of the limitations of rotary systems is that they're not good at irrigating small areas and planters. We usually compensate for this by putting strip-type micro sprays between any two plants in a planter. This avoids spray blockage and allows for more even watering of the containerized plants.

Micro spray heads are a great way to convert existing drip systems to overhead delivery. In the narrowest planters, we use Vortex or other multistream emitters on 6- to 12-inch stakes.

In general, watering frequency should approximate the amount of rainfall that the native plant community would naturally receive. However, in Southern California, we tend to exhibit a bias toward the high end of water tolerance to help the plants look their best. During normal winters we don't water much, except for new plantings during the first day of a Santa Ana condition with its hot, dry winds.

In this region, we do most of our supplemental



### Trade tip:

The worst thing you can do to a native plant bed is to add lots of organic matter and fertilizer to it, no matter how bad you think the soil is. One of the remarkable aspects of native plant communities is that they can tolerate a wide range of soil conditions.

irrigation in the summer (especially in the inland areas). The amount of water deposited, normally about 0.25 to 0.5 inches, is similar to a summer thunderstorm happening about three times a month and is well within the tolerance limit of most native plant communities. Plants that evolved in the wetter, more northern areas of California may require more water.

One last note on overhead versus drip irrigation. Many exotic plants, fruit trees and vegetables do just fine on drip systems as they are not in their native environments and are immune to most of the pathogens and pests that native plants succumb to. But neither are they as potentially drought-tolerant or low maintenance as a truly native landscape is, nor do they convey a sense of regional identity or have as much value for wildlife.

### Myth #2

**All soils must be amended, native or not.**

We've been taught that all garden soils must be "improved" regardless of the plant species that will be deposited in it. Sandy soil? Add organic amendments. Clay soil? Add organic amendments. But if we look for natural analogs, the only type of environment that regularly experiences disturbance and high levels of organic matter is, once again, a marsh or streamside ecology. Upland, drought tolerant, mycorrhizal plant communities evolved in the absence of organic matter and fertility.

The worst thing you can do to a native plant bed is to add lots of organic matter and fertilizer to it, no matter how bad you think the soil is. One of the remarkable aspects of native plant communities is that they can tolerate a wide range of soil conditions. The key factor is drainage. With heavy clay soils, most often all you need to do is make certain that water has a path to escape so it doesn't just sit there.

There are many exceptions to what I've said here, but in general, natural soils aren't terribly restrictive, even under fill conditions, as long as the levels of toxins such as boron or salt are low. The mycorrhizal fungi, if given the right conditions to promote development, should do all the work of metabolizing the nutrients required by your native plants. Adding fertility only causes the plants to drop their fungal partners, and the soil biota convert from fungi-based to bacteria-based almost immediately.

### Myth #3

**One need not be concerned about what plants to put together nor what mulch to use.**

Since native plants naturally exist in symbiotic communities, it is important to pay attention to what plants you are putting together. However, through

experience, it has become apparent that the most important consideration when grouping plants is what form of mulch they prefer. Well, you have two basic choices: organic or inorganic.

Organic mulching occurs naturally when the plant communities are densely packed with evergreen, summer deciduous species and leaf litter is constantly dropping and forming a duff layer. Think chaparral, oak woodland, mixed forest or coastal sage scrub. (In fact, coastal sage scrub can take mulch or leave it; you would do just as well to put a 6- to 12-inch boulder right on top of its roots.)

Inorganic mulches consist of sand, rocks, pebbles and gravel. This predominates in plant communities that are rather open, with the plants somewhat thinly branched or in communities where the plants are small and lack substantial biomass. Desert plants would fall into the first category; coastal strand and grasslands in the second. Interestingly, you can even mix these plant communities together, as long as you give shade to coastal varieties when planting them inland or in the desert.

One type of mulch common to virtually all plant communities is rock. Nearly all native plants, regardless of the type of community they belong to, seem to love having 6- to 12-inch boulders placed right on their root balls — not in a campfire-type ring, but with just enough space for the trunks to grow. Coastal sage scrub is sort of in-between on mulch preference, but we've had great luck putting rocks right on its roots and then mulching between the rocks.

Rocks are a great way to keep mulch from impinging on shrub trunks and potentially rotting stems by holding moisture against them. The rocks can also provide micronutrients to the fungal grid at a very, very slow rate. In fact, mycorrhizae can secrete compounds that slow the decomposition of mulch, thus limiting the nutritional loading.

Not all organic mulches are created equal. We have found, short of grinding up chaparral, that shredded redwood bark, aka "gorilla hair," is one of the best top dressings. Its biochemistry and slow rate of decomposition imitates the natural duff layer that forms over time, but which needs to be artificially supplied in the sort of chicken-and-egg scenario that is inevitable with new landscapes (where the plant community creates the mulch and the mulch helps determine the plant community). Gorilla hair is pricey, but well worth the investment, especially given its longevity.

The next best organic mulch is clean tree trimmings (especially if they don't contain a lot of pepper tree). Ground oak and pine are the best in this category. The last type of mulch we would ever use is dump mulch, as it potentially contains unknown quantities of chemicals, pathogens, weed seeds and trash. Even composted, dump mulch can contain so much nitrogen from lawn clippings as to act almost like fertilizer, which is the last thing your native plants need or want. It also breaks down so quickly

that it can overload plantings with nutrition.

Since the relationship between the mulch and the soil organisms is so crucial, we normally avoid using landscape fabric to control weeds. Studies have suggested that the volatile organic compounds contained in it can deter the ability of plant roots to signal mycorrhizal fungi that it's okay to colonize them.

Regardless, the interface between the mulch and the soil substrate works better when it's unhindered. Instead of using fabric to control the annual weeds in a new landscape, we often use pre-emergent herbicides, anticipating that additional pulling or spraying may be required for the near future. Once a native landscape achieves approximately 60 to 80 percent canopy coverage, it often develops a natural weed resistance, since the fungal ecology and lack of free nutrition often discourages weeds.

## Myth #4

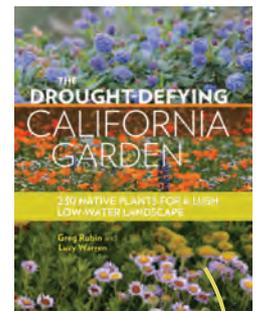
### Native gardens must look dead or dormant for half the year.

The mistake most designers make is to rely solely on colorful flowering perennials and sub-shrubs. But it's sort of "Landscaping 101" that every landscape should have a strong evergreen backbone. To avoid the dead/dormant appearance, we include about 75 percent evergreen plants of all habits and sizes with colorful leaves for texture and contrast. The other 25 percent will be color-spot perennials planted next to paths and flatwork where the color can be easily seen and maintained. Finally, we mix in perennials with different flowering periods so that something is always in bloom.

### Bottom line for success

When I first started out in native landscaping, following all the usual practices — applying fertilizers, soil amendments and inappropriate mulches and installing drip irrigation — my results were as bad as everybody else's. However, as I learned to better emulate the natural ecology, plant mortality dropped closer to 5 percent. My mantra has always been "clean, lean and mean" — clean water, lean soils and mean conditions. The result will be an easy care, truly drought tolerant, bird-and-butterfly-attracting piece of California heaven. 🌿

The author is founder and president of San Diego-based California's Own Native Landscape Design Inc. and was recently named the 2018 Horticulturist of the Year by the San Diego Horticultural Society. He is a licensed landscape contractor who has been working with California native plants since 1985 and can be reached at [greg@calowndesign.com](mailto:greg@calowndesign.com).



## Further reading

Greg Rubin is co-author with Lucy Warren of "The California Native Landscape: The Homeowners' Design Guide to Restoring its Beauty and Balance," published by Timber Press, 2013. This popular native horticultural literary work covers all aspects of native landscape design. Rubin and Warren now have a second book, "The Drought Defying California Garden," also published by Timber Press in 2016. More information is available at [www.calowndesign.com](http://www.calowndesign.com).



## Industry associations have an active spring by creating initiatives, opening new headquarters and other major announcements

### New irrigation research initiative created

The Irrigation Association, Fairfax, Virginia, has announced the creation of the Irrigation Innovation Consortium, a collaborative research effort to accelerate the development and adoption of water-efficient irrigation technologies and practices through public-private partnerships.

The \$5 million Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research grant was matched by initial participants, including the IA, for a total investment of \$10 million to support research and collaboration costs over five years. The IIC is composed of the following initial founding members:

- California State University, Fresno
- Colorado State University
- Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute at the University of Nebraska
- IA
- Jain Irrigation
- Kansas State Research and Extension, Kansas State University
- Lindsay Corp.
- Northern Water
- Rubicon Water
- Texas A&M AgriLife Research

Deborah Hamlin, CEO of the Irrigation Association, announces the creation of the Irrigation Innovation Consortium in Denver in April.



The IIC formally launched in Denver during the Water in the West Symposium in late April hosted by Colorado State University. Deborah Hamlin, IA CEO, made the announcement and was joined by representatives from the supporting organizations, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue and former USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack.

The IIC will be based in Ft. Collins, Colorado, and will be governed by an executive committee made up of FFAR, the five initial research institutions and the IA.

### From the basketball court to the podium

Former NBA star Mark Eaton will deliver the keynote address at the 2018 Irrigation Show and Education Conference in Long Beach, California, Dec. 3-7.

At 7 feet, 4 inches tall, Mark Eaton was a force to be reckoned with on the basketball court during his 12-year career in the NBA playing for the Utah Jazz.

Today, he has distilled his experiences on the court and off into valuable principles and coaching techniques. He teaches these principles and techniques to organizations to help them be more successful.



Landscape and irrigation professionals will have the opportunity to hear his valuable message Wednesday, Dec. 5 at 8:45 a.m.

Eaton will share his “Four Commitments of a Winning Team” crafted to help industry leaders, teams and individuals outsmart, outlast and outperform the competition and achieve record-breaking success.

He will share his journey of how he went from being a 21-year-old auto mechanic with no future in basketball to becoming an NBA All-Star.

Eaton’s message is designed to help professionals inspire, strengthen and motivate their teams, while increasing commitment between co-workers and creating an environment that fosters safety and trust.

More information about the 2018 Irrigation Show is available at [www.irrigation.org/2018Show](http://www.irrigation.org/2018Show).





### A changing of the guard

The National Association of Landscape Professionals' new board of directors took office on May 1, 2018, with terms running through April 30, 2019. Jeff Buhler, senior vice president of customer service at Massey Services, Orlando, Florida, will serve as the president of the Fairfax, Virginia-based association.

Sabeena Hickman, CEO of NALP says, "We have assembled a very talented and committed group of industry professionals to lead our association and the industry. I am excited to work alongside of them for the betterment of the lawn and landscape industry."

New members of the board include: Bruce Allentuck, Jeff Fedorchak, Phil Key, Joe Munie and Tim Portland. The board consists of the following officers and directors:

#### Officers:

- President - Jeff Buhler, Massey Services Inc.
- President-Elect - Andrew Ziehler, Landscape Industry Certified, Ziehler Lawn and Tree Care
- Secretary/Treasurer - Shayne Newman, LIC, YardApes
- Immediate Past President - Jon Cundiff, Weed Man

#### Directors:

- Bruce Allentuck, Allentuck Landscaping Co.
- Jason Becker, Landscape Industry Certified, Caterpillar
- Mike Bogan, LIC, LandCare
- Pete Farno, LIC, Bayer
- Jeff Fedorchak, TruGreen
- Paul Fraynd, LIC, Sun Valley Landscaping
- Bob Grover, LIC, Pacific Landscape Management
- Phil Key, Ruppert Landscape
- Roscoe Klausung, LIC, Klausung Group
- Joe Kujawa, Kujawa Enterprises Inc.
- Frank Mariani, LIC, Mariani Landscape
- Joe Munie, Munie Greencare Professionals Inc.
- Tim Portland, Yellowstone Landscape

### Opening doors and new opportunities

More than 100 members, partners, and friends were on hand as the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute officially opened its new headquarters building in Alexandria, Virginia, May 7, 2018, marking what the organization says is a new stage in the growth of the association.

"This building represents a new chapter in OPEI's story," says Kris Kiser, president and CEO of the trade group. "Thanks to record levels of membership and member engagement, we had a good problem — we outgrew our old space."

"This is an exciting moment in the history of OPEI. I'm proud to officially open our new headquarters for business," says Dan Ariens, chairman and CEO of Ariens Co., Brillion, Wisconsin, and OPEI board chairman. "Since it was founded more than 60 years ago, OPEI has grown in scope and stature, and it's well-positioned to continue its advocacy on behalf of the outdoor power equipment industry."

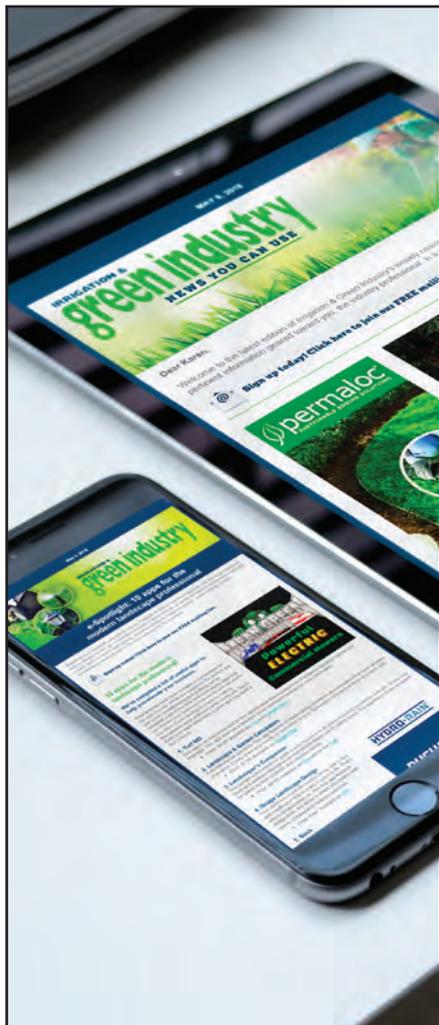
Thirty years ago the OPEI Board of Directors moved the association headquarters from Washington to Alexandria, Virginia, to build and own its headquarters building. In 2017, OPEI's board voted to sell its existing building and acquire 1605 King St., representing a multimillion dollar investment.

Conveniently located, the new building in the heart of Old Town Alexandria sits one block from a Metrorail station and 4 miles from Reagan National Airport. It features a conference center designed to accommodate OPEI's increasingly large committee meetings.

"Evidencing the shift away from out-of-house meeting spaces, our Engine and Fuels and Hand-held Products committees met here this week, debuting our new conference center," Kiser said in early May. "We're excited to begin the next phase of our growth in our continued service of the outdoor power equipment industry."



OPEI hosted an open house May 7, 2018, to debut its new office building in Alexandria, Virginia, to industry stakeholders.



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### VERDANT VOICE



BY JUDITH GUIDO

## Gathering data the right way

**W**e all know that data is powerful. But it's only powerful so long as the data you're collecting is 1) useful; 2) you're properly analyzing it; 3) doing something productive with it; 4) and informing the people from whom you've collected the data how it will benefit them. While all this may seem daunting, when done correctly it's quite easy, inexpensive and valuable for everyone involved.

To leverage data properly — and crush your competition — start at the top. Remember, as goes its leadership, so goes a company. Company leaders must embed this into their company's DNA and lead by example.

Each week, the leadership needs to connect with at least two key customers. Those customer touchpoints could take the shape of a face-to-face meetings, a phone call, or an online connection (think FaceTime or Skype), whereby you can

and science of having real conversations with your key customers as opposed to only having MUEs (mandatory uncomfortable exchanges).

Some of the key benefits of conversing include collecting valuable intelligence and market-growth information; developing and strengthening relationships; and increasing referrals. These are the kinds of things that can only be attained through a conversation.

Ask these four simple yet invaluable questions to extract the most value out of your exchange:

1. How are you doing?
2. What's going on in your industry, neighborhood, HOA or company?
3. What are you hearing about our competition?
4. What are you hearing about us — how are we doing?

Sit back and listen. Take notes. Then act on what you've just learned. People appre-



Some of the key benefits of conversing include collecting valuable intelligence and market-growth information; developing and strengthening relationships; and increasing referrals.

physically see one another and observe each other's body language.

You must collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Unfortunately, most companies only focus on the quantitative, such as revenue, gross margins or retention while ignoring the qualitative. This not only causes imbalance in a company, it also ends up costing it money and time.

To do this right, balance your quantitative data with good old customer feedback (aka qualitative data.) Learn the art

ciate it when leadership takes the time to connect. Quite simply, it says, "We care."

Once you've collected the information, sit down with your team and share it with them weekly. This incredible qualitative data will help you fix problems, leverage new opportunities, create differentiation, increase sales and energize your entire team.

And don't forget to thank your customers and to let them know how they'll benefit by having shared that information with you. 🌱



Judith M. Guido is chairwoman of Guido & Associates, a business management company. She can be reached at [judy@guidoassoc.com](mailto:judy@guidoassoc.com).

*Smart practices. Smart technology. Smart business.*



## This July, join in the Smart Irrigation Month industry campaign.

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### **Irrigation Technology Tuesday — July 10**

A kickoff to Smart Irrigation Month 2018

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Smart Irrigation Month is an initiative of the Irrigation Association, a nonprofit industry organization dedicated to promoting efficient irrigation.

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## NIGHT LIGHTING



BY KEVIN SMITH

## Keep kids outdoors longer with play illumination

**W**e can all remember how exciting summer nights were when, as kids, we were allowed to stay outside and play much later than at other times of the year. It was the best.

Well, summer 2018 is finally here, and today's kids can stay out even later as they benefit from the improved and expanded outdoor lighting options we now have for illuminating play areas and structures. Keeping children safe and seen as they play on these structures is essential, yet many times that consideration is left out of landscape lighting designs.

Proper illumination of play structures will require extra attention to detail in wiring and fixture selection. As with normal low voltage systems, a transformer will be required. It should be installed completely out of sight and away from the play structure. Kids are curious and may want to investigate what's inside that shiny stainless steel box.

There are several different ways to run cable through these structures. First, it's very important that the cabling be hidden. On wooden structures, some contractors use an electric wood router to carve out a groove, with a cut wide enough to lay in the low-voltage cable. A good practice is to glue the cable every 18 inches to keep it in place. A thin layer of veneer should be adhered over the groove as a cover.

On metal structures, where you can't simply cut a groove, polyvinyl chloride conduit can be used as a chase for the cable. Be sure the conduit and clamps are very smooth, and out of the reach of small

hands. Select plastic or round junction boxes without sharp edges. Use the appropriate fittings for all junctions and sand off any sharp mold buttons or burrs.

Next, when fixtures will be mounted directly to outdoor play structures, it's vital to select the right ones. Several styles can provide adequate illumination. Puck lights, hardscape bar lights and some sconce styles are good choices.

### **Proper illumination of play structures will require extra attention to detail in wiring and fixture selection.**

For safety reasons, choose only lensed fixtures with lower-wattage lamps and good thermal management. They should be smooth without any sharp edges. Before installing the select-

ed fixtures, test them to see how warm they become. Lower power outdoor LED tape or strips can be used in areas where light sources could be touched. Test these, too.

The placement of the fixtures should provide illumination over swings, the ceilings and peaks of playhouses, above sand boxes and under slides. Play areas and structures can also be illuminated without mounting fixtures directly on them by using decorative post lights such as those found in city parks. A series of 12-volt directional fixtures can be attached to mounting poles or tall trees to pour light into the play area. A normal landscape lighting transformer can be used to power these applications.

These play areas and structures are quite costly. You can boost their value even higher by presenting these lighting options to your homeowner clients and increase your revenue stream at the same time. The parents will like the increased safety, and the kids will be thrilled with the extended play time. Happy kids, happy parents.

Here's wishing all of you a safe, happy and profitable summer. 🌿



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

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**1 Battery-powered backpack blower.** New from Greenworks Commercial of Charlotte, North Carolina is the GBB 700 dual battery port backpack blower. It's axial fan delivers 690 cubic feet per minute at 165 mph at the push of a button.

Features include a variable-speed trigger, turbo button and cruise control. A patented Automatic Battery Switch-Over feature allows uninterrupted runtime.

Brushless motor technology delivers more power for quieter operation and a longer life. The Power Station feature allows the blower to function as an auxiliary power source for any of the other 82-volt tools in the line.

The unit is designed for easier operation and a safer work environment with 50 percent less noise and five times less vibration than equivalent gas-powered products, protecting crews from long-term hearing damage and chronic conditions such as "white fingers" and arthritis.

 **Greenworks Commercial**  
[www.greenworkcommercial.com](http://www.greenworkcommercial.com)



**2 Wide-area mowers.** John Deere, Moline, Illinois, announced updates to its 1600 Turbo Series III wide-area mowers, including the addition of a Final Tier 4 compliant engine.

The updated 1600 Series III mower's FT4-compliant, liquid-cooled, four-cylinder engines have been optimized to maintain a high level of performance, efficiency and serviceability. The power has been boosted to 60 horsepower at 3,000 rpm to further improve performance.

A new standard air-ride seat maximizes comfort, and the high seat back features body-contoured seat cushions, standard armrests and multiple color-coded, easy-to-use controls for quick seat adjustment. Additionally, seat suspension reliability has been improved, according to the company.

 **John Deere**  
[www.deere.com](http://www.deere.com)



**3 Saddle system.** The KwikTap toolless saddle tee system from Dawn Industries, Arvada, Colorado, has 41 percent less flow restriction than standard insert tees, according to the company.

The system is designed to provide up to 13.6 gallons per minute at 40 pounds per square inch in independent lab tests, reports the company.

The patented design has no snaps, straps or latches that will fail and result in callbacks. The toolless system means no more time lost cutting and installing an insert. The system installs six times faster than insert fittings with screw clamps.

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

**SUPPLIER IN THE NEWS**

**Toro awarded WaterSense certification for its range of 570Z series spray heads**

The Toro Company, Bloomington, Minnesota, has been awarded WaterSense certification by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for its range of 570Z Series spray heads with built-in pressure regulation.

The certification was awarded after a thorough evaluation and third-party testing in accordance with the EPA's WaterSense Specification for Spray Sprinkler Bodies.

The spray heads met or exceeded the specification's requirements, which include restrictive tolerances for flow and pressure characteristics to qualify for the WaterSense certification.

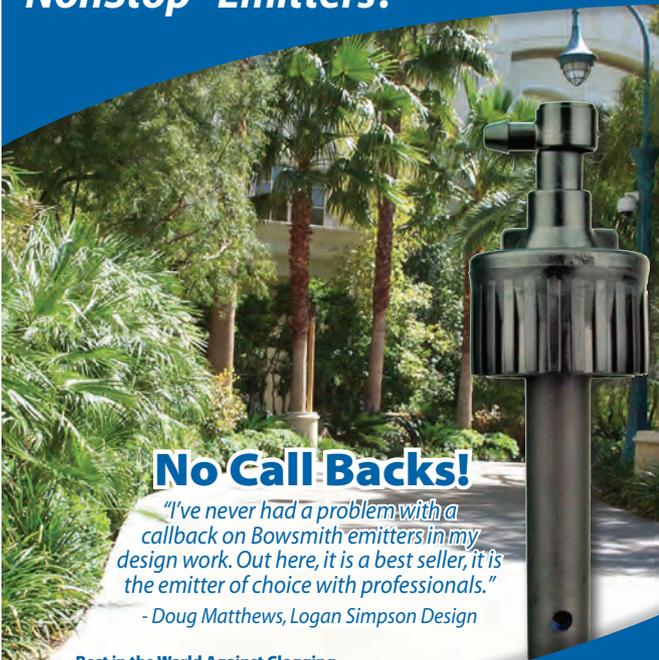
The certification is sponsored by the EPA and is a voluntary partnership between manufacturers, retailers,

distributors and other stakeholders that allows for products to be labeled as water-efficient when they meet particular requirements specified by the EPA.

The WaterSense label makes the identification of water-efficient products easy for professional contractors, homeowners and consumers and certifies that labeled products and services use at least 20 percent less water than non-labeled models.



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**4 Tie-down tracks.** Tow-Rax, a division of Phoenix USA Inc., Cookeville, Tennessee, has introduced three new styles of wall/floor tie-down tracks.

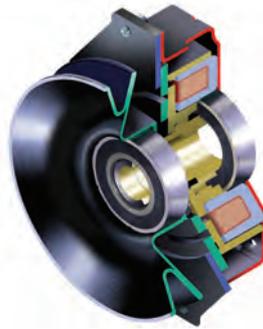
The company's familiar 2.5-inch wide, mill finish aluminum tapered track, offered in 24-inch and 72-inch lengths, is now available in a black powder-coated finish.

Also new is a 2-inch wide, black powder-coated track with a domed top, and a 1.2-inch-wide, black powder-coated, low profile L-track. It can be flush mounted to a trailer's floor or walls or installed in corrugated truck beds.

All of the new tracks are made of aluminum and are available in 6-inch, 12-inch and 18-inch lengths. Counter-sunk holes are distributed across each length for easy mounting. All track styles accommodate both single- and double-stud tie rings that lock in place every inch.

A round, single-point unit is available for tight spaces or when load security is unnecessary.

 **Phoenix USA**  
[www.phoenixusa.com](http://www.phoenixusa.com)



**5 PTO clutch brake.** Ogura Industrial Corp., Somerset, New Jersey, has introduced the first patented power take-off clutch brake design for lawn tractors and zero-turn mowers in over 20 years. The PTO is an electric clutch with a mechanical brake to help slow down cutting blades to help meet industry stop-time requirements.

The company says the new design offers improvements in both performance and cost. The 1.5 design features two large opposing brake pads (flip-set). When the clutch is worn, the two bolts holding the pads can be removed, and the pads can be flipped extending overall cycle life.

The clutch/brakes are well-suited for use on original equipment manufacturers' mower brands, both domestic and foreign. This new patented design will also help dealers and distributors retain future profitability on service parts.

 **Ogura**  
[www.ogura-clutch.com](http://www.ogura-clutch.com)



**6 Class 8 truck.** Hino Trucks, Novi, Michigan, has unveiled an all-new lineup of heavy-duty diesel trucks, the XL Series, for its first foray into the U.S. Class 8 market. The XL7 and XL8 models will be powered by the company's A09 turbo diesel 8.9-liter inline 6-cylinder engine that produces 360 horsepower with 1,150 pound-feet of torque and a B10 life of 1 million miles.

The XL Series will be offered in a variety of straight truck-and-tractor configurations, with gross vehicle weight rating ranging from 33,000 to 60,000 pounds, and gross combination weight rating up to 66,000 pounds. Tandem axle and fifth-wheel configurations with wheelbases up to 304 inches will be available.

Other features will include new active safety solutions such as electronic stability control (standard on tractor versions), as well as collision mitigation systems and payload management suspension options. Many luxury features such as air conditioning are standard equipment.

 **Hino**  
[www.hino.com](http://www.hino.com)

**SUPPLIER IN THE NEWS**

**Ewing Hardscape Supply acquires All Star Materials**

Ewing Hardscape Supply has announced the acquisition of All Star Materials, adding three additional retail locations in Phoenix. All Star Materials has served the Phoenix market since 1982. The company will immediately become Ewing Hardscape Supply and retain its current staff of 22.

Ewing Hardscape Supply offers contractors and homeowners bulk material, including decorative rock, boulders and rip rap, flagstone, river rock, sand, topsoil, soil mixes and mulch, as well as pavers, travertine, wall blocks, building material, lighting, grills and fire pits, artificial grass, tools and accessories.

"Expanding Ewing Hardscape Supply provides more

convenient locations for our customers. This will only help us better provide the great products and services Ewing customers have come to expect," says Dave Sawyers, Ewing Hardscape Supply general manager.

In addition to the Ewing Hardscape Supply locations, Ewing has a strong presence throughout the Phoenix valley with 14 Ewing Irrigation & Landscape Supply stores.

The two Ewing companies are working in conjunction to provide contractors and homeowners with the products to create and maintain complete landscapes and outdoor living spaces. Contractor customers can visit any Ewing Irrigation location to order Ewing Hardscape Supply products.

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## July is Smart Irrigation Month

With the goal of advancing its mission of promoting efficient irrigation, the Irrigation Association, Fairfax, Virginia, will once again be celebrating July as Smart Irrigation Month. You can leverage this smart irrigation campaign to set your business apart.

Smart Irrigation Month is a great time to ensure your customers understand how your company's efficient irrigation practices and trained professionals can save them water and dollars without sacrificing the health of their landscapes.

This year, your business can also join the celebration by participating in the Smart Irrigation Month video contest. Contest submission is easy. Just create a short video that showcases what smart irrigation is to you and share it on your public Twitter or Instagram using #SmartIrrigationMonth.

For more ideas on how to promote Smart Irrigation Month, visit [www.smartirrigationmonth.org](http://www.smartirrigationmonth.org).



## DON'T FORGET THE SUNSCREEN

Taking a few simple precautions can prevent a lot of suffering and lost work time due to sun-related illness. Here are some helpful tips from the Centers for Disease Control to help keep your employees safe this summer.



Supply your crew members with a broad-spectrum sunscreen — that's one that protects against both UVA and UVB — with an SPF of at least 15 or higher, and make sure they apply it generously. Schedule breaks in the shade and allow workers to reapply sunscreen throughout their shifts.

Long-sleeved, light-colored clothing and long pants should also be worn, along with wide-brimmed hats that shade the face, ears and back of the neck. Don't forget sunglasses!

Some large pieces of power equipment have detachable sunshades. Use them wherever possible.

Bright or shiny surfaces such as concrete can magnify sun exposure. Cover them with a tarp if possible if your crews are working near them. If possible, schedule mowing for early mornings and rotate workers.



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