

All in the Family



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Fourth-generation California green industry pro confident of continued growth

Scarlett's Landscape, Inc.

Management: Father and son, Tom and Jeremy Scarlett, and LA Jason Stetler

Founded: 2008

Headquarters: Ventura, Calif

Markets: Ojai, Ventura and Camarillo

Services: Design/build, construction, maintenance, irrigation

Employees: 12

Website: www.scarlettslandscaping.com

Jeremy Scarlett is a fourth-generation landscaper, but neither he nor his father made the industry a first career. Scarlett's first career was in the mortgage industry. His father, Tom, who worked in a pipeline construction business for more than two decades, eased into the business in the early 1980s after helping an in-law install a lawn. The family's heritage in the green industry began with Scarlett's maternal great-grandfather that provided lawn maintenance in Beverly Hills. "That was in the days when you had push mowers and when you did a job and you stayed on the estate all day," he says. Then there was his maternal grandfather who retired as superintendent of grounds after working 33 years at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

Tom began his own business as the result of an advertisement in a local

shopper offering to do clean-up work for people, as well as lawn installations. Recalls Scarlett, "I grew up working with him on Saturdays when he'd work on the landscaping business."



Tom Scarlett, left, and son Jeremy Scarlett took different paths to the landscape industry, but are now totally committed to growing Scarlett's Landscaping in the market just north of Los Angeles.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCARLETT'S LANDSCAPING, INC.

When Tom retired from his first job, after 25 years, he took what was then Scarlett's Landscaping full time. However, Jeremy, with a degree from UCLA, opted to go in a different direction, taking a job at a mortgage company.

"I did that for the better part of six or seven years, until the bottom fell out," he relates. "Then, I moved back to Ventura and started working with my dad again. I saw the potential and realized I could use my business experience to help take the company to the next level."



The two men incorporated the business in 2008 and are 50-50 partners. However, there's an important third principal in the business: Jason Stetler, landscape architect and a lifelong family friend. He became a full-time member of the company in 2008.

The majority of the Scarlett's Landscape's business comes from residential construction. "Maintenance is something we provide because our clients want it. Once we do an installation, our clients want to keep it looking like we installed it," says Jeremy Scarlett, adding that having the ability to offer design services also helps bring clients to the door, and then having a good design to work from makes the rest of the process, and especially ongoing maintenance, a lot easier.

While new home construction has picked up in the area recently, says Scarlett, the larger stream of leads are coming from people who are renovating and updating their landscapes are providing a stream of leads and sales. In some cases, their properties may not have been updated in 30 years.

Public works a growing niche

Just recently, the firm also tapped into the public works market for the first time. It was hired to construct a new entrance to the Ventura County Fairgrounds. "It's also really opened the door for us to other public works jobs," Scarlett says. "We've been getting bid requests and it's cool we're able to do them because we're a licensed company that can provide a certified payroll and insurance."

While the fairgrounds job might have been a little bigger than many others the company does, Scarlett's is not one to shy away from challenges. Generally, the firm will do anything that's yard-related. "We're willing to take on anything related to landscape construction, from barbecue islands and patios to pergolas to all the planting and irrigation," says Scarlett. "Our

motto has always been if we don't do it, somebody else is going to."

Along with the three principals, Scarlett's Landscape employs a staff of nine others, and a call to the company goes directly to Scarlett's desk, where he determines who will follow it up.

"If it's a design call, I'll set that up for Jason," he says. "If it's maintenance, I'll send our maintenance foreman, Luis Gonzales. My dad is real good with irrigation and irrigation repair, so he does a lot of the irrigation calls. And, I do most of the others, especially if it has anything to do with hardscape."

Scarlett adds that he's a certified Allan Block Wall installer, as well as a PLANET-certified landscape industry technician.

Scarlett explains that his company prepares written proposals including references and insurance information along with prices and services. And, he stresses, he's not selling on price. "The volume of leads we get is pretty high, so we're not scrambling for new ones," he says. "We have a certain price and if the customer doesn't appreciate the things we can do and the service we can provide, we're going to move on to the next job."

The quality of the company's work accounts for a strong number of referrals to help keep lead numbers up, but Scarlett's Landscape also employs a mix of old (including signs and Yellow Pages ads) and new (electronic media) marketing techniques to keep them there.

Old and new marketing

Scarlett says the company's cyber media campaign, which includes a website with an active blog, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn and more, is its most-effective approach.

Although Scarlett's Landscape works with a consultant on electronic marketing, the actual work of keeping it updated falls to Scarlett and to Stetler's design assistant, Chris Camarillo, who spends up to two days a week adding fresh content.

"One of the things I like about it is I feel the people who come in that way know a lot more about us when they call," he says. "Rather than just finding us in the phone book, they can watch our videos and see what our projects and our people look like."

It's certainly paying off for Scarlett's Landscape. The company has enjoyed double-digit growth each year since the younger Scarlett joined the operation, and plans for 2013 include adding another construction crew and, consequently, finding more space to house the operation, which currently consists of 2,800 square feet of enclosed space equally divided into offices and warehouse and a 2,800-square-foot paved yard.



Scarlett's Landscape, Inc.'s selection of a palm and several different colorful ornamentals planted within walled beds turned this property into a

tiny green oasis.

Pay for Performance

Things are going so well that the company is also in the process of adding profit sharing for its employees. “We pay our guys well already, but I don’t want them to feel stagnant,” he says. “I want to give them more, but I want it to be performance-based. If the company does well, they do well. It’s also a way to bring everybody together as a team. The more people work together and are efficient, the more profit it leads to.”

However, Scarlett’s Landscape is more than a team: it’s family. Scarlett has two young sons and three nephews, and he anticipates they’ll grow up working with him just like he grew up working for his dad. Where they take it from there will be up to them.

It goes beyond that, though. Stetler also has a young son, and some of the other employees have high-school-aged children. “They’ll work with us in the summer when we need extra help, and they’re off school,” he says. “That’s pretty cool, too.”

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