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Connecticut Landscapes helps out their clients in difficult times



Connecticut Landscapes' service crews provide weekly planter bed maintenance by removing any weeds and dead-heading perennials as needed.

Photos courtesy of Connecticut Landscapes.



The company's lawn cutting teams thoroughly clean properties during each visit to ensure complete debris removal.

Connecticut Landscapes, operated by Greg Mikos and Steve Collis, has been in business for 20 years. The Fairfield, Conn., company does landscaping design, building and maintenance, and 10 years ago, bought a Weed Man franchise. The company has an average of 15 employees and does predominantly residential work and some commercial work. Connecticut Landscapes services Fairfield County and also does landscape and hardscape projects in Westchester County in New York. The company stays within Fairfield County for maintenance work to minimize travel time.

Grounds maintenance includes fertilization programs (including Weed Man), lawn cutting, spring cleanup, fall cleanup, shrub trimming, pruning, mulching, seeding, aerating, edging, snowplowing and clearing work. Connecticut Landscapes has a variety of equipment, such as mowers, backpack blowers, skid steers and hedge trimmers from manufacturers such as Scag, Bobcat and Echo, as well as a mix of trucks from Ford, Chevrolet and Mitsubishi.

Mikos says the Weed Man franchise, which has its own customer base, helps his company to cross-market. "The systems they have in the Weed Man organization we've used to some degree to implement into our landscaping company," he says. "It's been a positive experience, adding to what we're currently offering. It's solidified what we knew as far as fertilizer goes, and it's helped in terms of our marketing campaigns. It's helped us make sure we were getting the most bang for our buck in terms of how our marketing money was spent."

Connecticut Landscapes handles most of the landscaping work on a client's site, except for the irrigation work, which they subcontract out. This enables the company to completely service its clients without having to make a financial investment in that sector.

"It keeps everything under one roof," says Mikos. "We try to cover all of the bases. Most of our clients prefer that. They don't want to have to talk with six different people on their property. They like the idea of having one contractor who is communicating with the other subs so that everyone's on the same page working for the same goals, the same look."

"We try to incorporate as many qualified subs and build those relationships with them. We work well together and know what to expect. We're not competing against each other, either. If someone else on the job notices something that requires attention on our end, we'll communicate so that everybody's happy with the end result."

The company has maintenance contracts for the most part, but they are tailored toward clients' desires and budgets. To differentiate his company from others, especially larger national companies, Mikos always tries to build a rapport with clients and create relationships that transcend the typical customer/contractor one.



The lawn cutting team members strive for the perfect cut.

"They see me on the property, they see my partner on the property, and we try to maintain a contact level with them so that we know it's not just our guys going in there once a week, or whatever the service agreement is, and they're in and out with no communication," he says.



The lawn cutting team members strive for the perfect cut.

"We always try to provide a value for the client, especially in the current economic conditions that we're in," he says. "We're in one of wealthiest communities in the United States. Some of our clients' work in the past few years has really been hit hard because they're in finance and money management. It was to the point where we were doing A to Z for them on their properties and they were telling us they can only do 'A' right now, and we're fine with that."

The company will cut back considerably on work it has done for the cash-strapped client in the past and re-create the service level primarily on what the client's current budget is, as opposed to what the person may have done three years ago.

"Some people are so financially strapped that they couldn't even do the

service, but we continue to provide the service for them, knowing that they're going to get back on their feet," Mikos says. "We have people who owe us a lot of money and it's still kind of a gamble, but they've been clients of ours for years, and we're not all of a sudden going to cut them loose because they ran into some rough times. It's paid off for us in the past. We're taking a chance with some of them now. Hopefully things will turn around and they'll get back on their feet and we won't be stuck with a large receivable."

Connecticut Landscapes is cushioning itself against that blow by increasing marketing efforts, including cold calls to the commercial sector. "It has generated leads and made a huge difference," Mikos notes. "One of the advantages of the downturn in the economy is that people have been more receptive to entertaining other offers."

Mikos says the recession has created a learning curve with respect to the company's pricing levels. "We've had to adjust accordingly, so we're trying to compensate to where we increase the volume to offset the revenue that was lost from the service levels we were providing before in the past," he says.

One of the company's biggest challenges is competing against national landscaping companies to do work for national chain stores, Mikos says. "It's a difficult bidding process," he says. "It's hard when you put all of that time and effort into it and you don't even have the opportunity to present yourself and your company. I prefer to meet with a client and try to sell my business, sell myself and sell our advantages."

"It's really difficult when you're given a number, and you've spent a lot of time going to look at multiple properties, and you talk to the regional head, and they try to tell you it's not based on numbers, but it really is, so it's frustrating."

Mikos has seen work awarded based on prices "that are so ridiculously low that it wouldn't even pay for my guys." Connecticut Landscapes has lost business to a store that is part of a national chain because the company does business only with a national landscape provider. Mikos contends the level of service the larger company provides is "not even remotely close to what we were doing," but he sees a trend now where companies are coming up with a national budget to maintain the properties and are giving unit managers more leeway and funding in terms of how their properties look.

Going forward, Mikos sees the industry as ever-evolving. "We're trying to incorporate some of the technology that's out there, both in streamlining our systems in our company, as well as being able to market our company. The way to try to recoup some of that revenue is trying to become more efficient as a company where we monitor and gauge every aspect of our company," he says.

"We're trying to make sure we're focusing on how it's being done and do it the right way. It's all about time. If we could be more efficient, we could pass on more of the cost savings to the client, and become a more profitable company and more competitive in the market as it becomes potentially a more nationalized competitive market with the bigger players. It's just a matter

of trying to get your company as efficient and streamlined as you can so you can be more competitive.”

Carol Brzozowski is a member of the Society of Environmental Journalists and has written extensively about environmental issues for numerous trade journals for more than a decade. She resides in Coral Springs, Fla.