

Men in Blue Keepin' it Green



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Top New York cops enjoy second careers as lawn care pros

Lawn Doctor

Founders: Bob Magda and Tony Giordano

Headquarters: Holmdel, N.J.

Founded: 1967

Markets: About 500 franchise locations in 40 states and Puerto Rico

Services: Lawn, tree, shrub and pest control services

Corporate employees: About 40

Investment costs to own a Lawn Doctor franchise: \$68,387 to \$98,237

Website: www.lawndoctor.com

The rhetorical question posed in the Top Cops theme song is directed at the criminal element. But for two Irvington, N.Y., police officers it's also aimed at the weeds and pests they arrest.

Sgt. John Pelliccio (Officer of the Year) and Jean Marc Grolier fight crime by night, and as Lawn Doctor franchise owners, fight weeds and pests by day. Voted one of the country's best franchises by Success Magazine, Lawn Doctor's trained technicians use specialized equipment to provide quality lawn, tree and shrub care and pest control services to customers across the nation.

The right fit

After selling his two insurance agencies, Pelliccio was looking for a new supplemental business venture. His position as sergeant and the resulting rotating shifts and scheduling presented quite a challenge for the veteran officer.



Police officer Jean Marc Grolier, left, and Sgt. John Pelliccio counted on Turf Doctor support to get their lawn care careers off to a successful start. PHOTOS COURTESY OF LAWN DOCTOR.

"I had a lot of free time during the day, so I was searching for a good fit. It was a bit of a tough find," he says. In 2001, while surfing franchises on the Internet, Pelliccio found Lawn Doctor, catapulting him into the lawn care business. Central to Pelliccio's decision was the flexibility the franchise afforded. He wouldn't be tied down by the business.

Getting started

"I met with the people from Lawn Doctor, toured their facility; I looked at their equipment. I had no experience in lawn care whatsoever. I had no idea what I was doing," says Pelliccio who started the business with zero customers. "I was able to learn the business as I was growing it."

He says that support from the franchise during the first couple of years was crucial. "They were always a phone call away when I had a question." Also, the regional business director would ride with him monthly, ensuring that he was servicing the lawns correctly and performing proper operation and maintenance of the equipment.

As Pelliccio became more acclimated to the business, he needed them less, but in the beginning, "it was really important, because I had no idea how to market a lawn care business or how to service the lawns," he explains, adding that by the end of the first season, however, he was up and running and good to go.

Predecessors' legacy

"Lawn Doctor was basically built by a concept, which was a machine. It's a machine that nobody else had and nobody else currently has. The type of equipment we use sets us apart from everyone else"

Bob Magda and Tony Giordano, two Matawan, N.J., friends, founded the company in 1967. Giordano owned a small hardware store; Magda was honing his skills in the manufacturing industry. They decided to start a lawn care business together, and named it Auto Lawn.



Officer Grolier edged into the lawn care business, acquiring a Lawn Doctor franchise after buying a home with a severely neglected lawn.

Magda quit his manufacturing job and, incorporating his engineering skills, created the first automated lawn care machine in the industry. He earned a number of patents with his state-of-the-art machines and other innovations. After people in the community kept referring to them as lawn doctors, they took the hint and re-named the company and adopted the now-famous green thumb as their logo.

911 calls

Officer Grolier, Lawn Doctor of Wappinger Falls and Brewster-Carmel-Mahopac, worked in the restaurant business for several years, managing restaurants in France and Westchester County. Always wanting to be a police officer and realizing his dream for more than a decade now, Grolier edged his way into the lawn care business after purchasing a home with a sorely neglected lawn five years ago.

"The lawn was a mess. It was basically weeds," describes Grolier. Pelliccio became a lawn mentor for his friend.

"He got me into Lawn Doctor," says Grolier. "It all stemmed from him giving me advice on how to improve my lawn." Heeding his sergeant's recommendations, Grolier's lawn experienced "phenomenal results. My turf thickened up, no weeds, beautiful color. I enjoyed it so much – that I took something that was in very poor shape and transformed it into something beautiful – that I made the decision to go into the lawn care business."

Initially, Grolier opened his own "mow-and-blow" landscaping business. When a franchise came up for sale in Grolier's area, Pelliccio presented the opportunity to his fellow officer, who jumped at the opportunity.

Rapid success

A year ago, despite having purchased the franchise after the season had already begun, Grolier was able to increase his customer base by 40 percent. "This year will be our first full year," he says. "We did the marketing the right way – sending out letters, introducing new ownership, and we have already doubled the customers that we had."

Overwhelmed by the work demand last year and "running on fumes," laughs Grolier, "I knew right away that I needed an employee to help with the job. It has made it easier on me. I can focus on sales and service calls, and I have more time to spend with the customers."

The right stuff

Grolier, like other franchisees, operates a Turf-Tamer stand-on. "With the Lawn Doctor equipment, which applies three types of granular materials and one liquid all in one task, and all ground-metered, it meant that you really couldn't mess up," says Pelliccio.

"It's a cool machine," attests Grolier.

"The machine puts out the exact amount of fertilizer," Pelliccio adds. "It's calibrated. It's the type of machine where others in the lawn care business see it in use and ask, 'Where can I buy one of those?' because it's that good. It enables you to get a lot of work done in a shorter period of time." A factor Pelliccio insists has kept him pro-franchise.

"The closed-loop mixing system means that you never have to touch any control

products. Everything is in closed containers as opposed to hand-mixing the chemicals.” Their system eliminates spills and also takes the guesswork out of it, he says.

Pelliccio describes his experience as a franchisee as positive. “Because we’re associated with a franchise, we have really good buying power. We’re able to stock up on our fertilizer and weed control, purchasing at a substantially lower price because we are bonded together and form buy-groups; buying in large numbers unlike small operators who can’t afford to do that.”



Sgt. Pelliccio credits his company’s unique production equipment with giving it a competitive edge in his markets.

They also benefit from Lawn Doctors’ marketing.

“A guy like Jean Marc [a new franchisee] had over a million pieces [advertising] put in his territory from Lawn Doctor Corporate through our regional marketing efforts,” says Pelliccio. They also have a very strong presence on the Internet.

Transformation gratification

Grolier admits that as an active police officer, his greatest challenge lies in juggling the two careers and making time for his family. The positive feedback he receives is the most rewarding aspect of his job.

“When I have contact with customers and they tell me that they are so happy because their lawn has never looked so good,” he says, he likens it to the feeling a sculptor experiences with his finished piece.

Fellow officers in the department tease Grolier about following in the footsteps of his sergeant and his friendly “one-upmanship.” He and Pelliccio have the same first name (Jean, the French version of John, has the same pronunciation), both have wives named Karen, they’re both fathers of multiples, (Pelliccio of twins; Grolier of triplets), and both purchased their Lawn Doctor franchises as cops.

Pelliccio bought one starting out; Grolier bought two.

“He tries to one-up me, but it isn’t working,” laughs Pelliccio.

Pelliccio, the Lawn Doctor of Rockland, N.Y., has been a police officer for 23 years. Owner of several franchises (Pascack Valley, Rockland and half of Bergen County), he now spends most of his time managing the business.

Grolier hopes to remain a police officer until retirement, then plans to focus solely on his business. “I still have nine years to go with the department so I want to grow, but not to the point where I can’t handle it. I want to control the business, not have the business control me.”

Grolier finds the lawn care industry therapeutic. “It soothes me; I’m calm; I’m relaxed. It’s like the saying, ‘If you love your job, you don’t have to

work a day in your life,'" he says.

Lawn Doctor has approximately 500 franchises in 40 U.S. states and Puerto Rico. Pelliccio invites anyone interested in the franchise to contact him at 845-638-4999.

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