

## Service Call



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1888 LAWNTEC does everything from applications to aeration



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1888 LAWNTEC offers three different lawn care programs along with spring and fall aeration and overseeding services.

Photos courtesy of 1888 LAWNTEC.

With its phone number and website address built into the company name, 1888 LAWNTEC Services, Inc., is easy for customers to contact. But it has been providing quality service that's kept 1888 LAWNTEC in business for more than 25 years.

The company is based in Berkeley Heights, N.J., and also serves nearby Chatham, Summit, Basking Ridge, Warren, Watchung, Gillette, Millington, New Providence, Martinsville, Madison and Mountainside. "I really try to stay within those 12 towns, so things are close and my guys aren't driving all over," says Bryan Monty, who founded the company in 1985.

His goal is to offer a full range of lawn and landscape treatments. "Our core business is the applications, but in the spring and fall we're able to do a lot of seeding and aeration," says Monty. At first he did primarily landscape installations, but eventually moved to specializing in chemical applications. "Slowly we phased out of construction and now we focus on the turf and ornamental treatments," he explains.



**Owner:** Bryan Monty

**Founded:** 1985

**Headquarters:** Berkeley Heights, N.J.

**Markets:** Berkeley Heights, Chatham, Summit, Basking Ridge, Warren, Watchung, Gillette, Millington, New Providence, Martinsville, Madison and Mountainside, N.J.

**Services:** Lawn care; reduced pest lawn care; organic lawn care; new lawns, renovations and repairs; plant care services; tick & flea control; perimeter pest control; deer repellent; and landscaping and maintenance

**Employees:** 6

**Website:** <http://www.1888lawntec.com>

Monty primarily handles sales and management of the company. He has a total staff of six. "Three of them each have a truck and a route. We have about 600 [application] accounts," he states. The other three employees work together as a mowing and maintenance crew. "When we do lawn renovations in the spring and the fall, some of the maintenance guys will help out the technicians, because that work is so labor-intensive," Monty adds.

While its customer base for mowing is much smaller than for applications, every property that 1888 LAWNTEC provides mowing and maintenance is also a lawn care client. "Typically, if they don't want to do the chemical treatments with us, I don't want to do the mowing," says Monty.

In most cases, customers are scheduled for six visits per year, with four shrub and tree treatments spaced between turf applications. The same technician handles all so they are able to get to know the property.

### **Reduced pesticide option**

1888 LAWNTEC offers three program choices for customers. First is the "standard" program, which is built around chemical treatments. Next is a "reduced pesticide" program. "We'll talk with the client and, depending on their needs and concerns, we'll apply chemicals only a certain times of the year," says Monty. "It might only be the first two visits of the year to get a crabgrass preventer and weed killer down, then the rest of the year we'll just put organic fertilizer on."

The third option is a strictly organic program. "We tell people that, with this approach, you're going to get weeds. There's really no cost-effective organic weed control," he explains, noting that from a business standpoint it can be difficult to service customers who want an organic-only approach: "The people who want pure organic are passionate about it. They often want all sorts of different special organic products that I don't stock and there's a lot of time involved, so it's difficult to accommodate them." Unless the homeowners are satisfied with the Nature's Way organic program that he uses, Monty says he opts not to pursue that account. What's more, since the economic downturn started several years back, Monty says he's seen demand for organic-only lawn care drop off.

The middle option of “reduced pesticide” is proving to be a popular choice at the moment, says Monty. “People are jumping onboard with that and switching to it. The lawns look decent and we’re being good for the environment. People are moving in that direction.” Still, he doesn’t see it ever completely overtaking the standard treatment program. “I think that’s always going to be the number one choice, because people just want their lawns to look nice,” he observes.

1888 LAWNTEC also offers add-on options, such as tick and flea treatments, which Monty says customers greatly appreciate. It also provides winter deer spray. The product works but that particular service doesn’t generate much sales, he adds.

The lawn services it offers beyond applications are what set the company apart. These include lawn renovations and aerations. “We want to do aeration. The ground is very hard in many areas around here,” says Monty. 1888 LAWNTEC crews use Lesco walk-behind aerators. “They let us get in all the tight areas around houses,” says Monty. His guys overseed often overseed along with aeration. The aeration opens the soil to the seed, allowing for better seed germination.

Sometimes, aeration isn’t possible, for example on properties with invisible dog fencing or on properties where the irrigation is close to the surface because the soil is poor. The goal is not only to improve lawns but also to make a profit, which is pretty hard to do when you inadvertently break an irrigation line. “We like to try to aerate all the lawns, but there’s some that we have to stay away from them,” says Monty.

In cases where the company doesn’t want to take a chance with aerating, or when there’s a lot of thatch, they’ll use a slice seeder. “That really helps pull the thatch out, so we’re able to do two things at once,” he explains.

For situations where a more extensive lawn renovation is required to improve the health and appearance of the turf, Monty prefers to start in the spring. This gives crews a chance to apply crabgrass preventive and other weed treatments, as well as fertilizer to get nutrients into the soil.

“Then, by the fall, we have a clean slate. I don’t like to just use RoundUp and start from scratch. I prefer to maintain what’s there and get rid of some of the problems, and then do an aeration and overseeding in the fall so things come up well the following spring. When you just use RoundUp, you’re still going to get weeds that are in the ground,” he explains.



## **Selling all year**

While the crews are out doing all of this work, Monty focuses his efforts on sales. “I’m basically selling all year,” he reports. He takes a wide-ranging approach. Renewal and pre-pay options are sent out to existing customers in February and includes an offer for discounts when referring a neighbor. “I’ve started doing some Internet and Google search engine advertising, which is

working well," he explains. He's also worked to ensure his company website is at the top of the search list in the dozen towns that 1888 LAWNTEC services. "I've stopped doing Yellow Pages advertising; that's just not working. I also don't do direct mailing anymore; that used to work years ago, but doesn't seem to work now," adds Monty.

There are also some local landscape contractors that will refer customers to 1888 LAWNTEC for applications. And Monty's own technicians are routinely selling to existing customers, as well, by making recommendations based on each property. "We evaluate the properties and analyze them throughout the year, and then make recommendations and sell the service for aeration or slice seeding, depending on the terrain of the property," he says.

## **Block leading works**

In the off-season, he does "block leading" to bring in new customers. "We estimate the square footage of properties to the right, left and across the street from our customers. We put that information into our software and that lets us send them a postcard with a customized price," he explains. "Eventually they start calling us, because they keep seeing us at their neighbors. That's really the best way we sell: By keeping the lawns we work on looking as good as possible."

Monty uses Real Green Systems software for billing and nearly all other aspects of managing the business. "Except for the routing feature," he explains. "The software will batch accounts together, but I don't like to do that because it puts them in a different order every time. I program it to 'Day Codes' so that each account has a specific day and it's in the same order. It's more structured and seems to just work better. If they don't finish one day because of weather, they can just finish the next day and then continue on. It just seems more efficient."

Much of the equipment used is from John Deere Landscapes, along with one recently purchased sprayer from Gregson-Clark in Caledonia, N.Y. "They made us a custom unit to fit inside a van," says Monty. The crews use Perma-Green ride-on units to actually make applications on the lawns. "We do only a minimal amount of pulling hose now," says Monty. The ride-on units have made the applications much more efficient versus the methods used in past years, he reports.

But more important than the equipment are the people who use it, he emphasizes. "The technicians I've had have been here a long time. I pay them really well, with a salary plus a commission based on how much they do every day," Monty explains. "It's very hard to find a good employee. I'd rather pay more and have less aggravation."

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