

## Sweeter the Second Time Around



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Maurice Amar survived Central Florida's housing crash and has Maurice Lawn Care growing again

### **Maurice Lawn Care**

**Owner:** Maurice Amar

**Founded:** 1990

**Headquarters:** Altamonte Springs, Fla.

**Markets:** Central Florida, (from Kissimmee to Deltona)

**Services:** Lawn maintenance, installation & design, pest control, and irrigation

**Employees:** 16

**Website** [www.mauricelawncare.com](http://www.mauricelawncare.com)

Maurice Amar's life has taken all kinds of twists and turns, including serving as an army medic, starting his professional career as a choreographer, operating a retail operation and taking, along life's bumpy trail, two turns as a landscape company owner, including Maurice Lawn Care, which he's now operating in the central Florida market.

Amar has lived and worked in several countries, has started businesses and experienced more financial and personal highs and lows than most of us will ever experience. But, the one common thread that has always stayed consistent throughout most of his adult life is his love for landscaping.



Maurice Lawn Care focuses almost exclusively on commercial accounts, and offers installation and maintenance services to clients in the central Florida area.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAURICE LAWN CARE.

Born in Morocco, Amar relocated to Israel with his family when he was just 6 years old and spent most of his life there. He waited tables to pay for his studies at an Israeli college, eventually earning a degree in dance. He then became a choreographer for the performing arts. While living in Israel, he also served in the army as a medic, and married his wife Tracey, an American who frequently visited Israel with her family. In the late 1980s, Amar abandoned his choreography career, and relocated to central Florida with his wife where her family lived. Because of his heavy foreign accent and unwillingness to go back to teaching dance, he struggled to find steady work.

It wasn't until a few years after moving to Florida that he decided to launch a landscape maintenance company. "I always loved the outdoors, to work independently and use my creativity," says Amar. "So landscaping seemed to be a natural choice for my own business."

With the urging and support of a good friend who also operated a landscaping company in the region, Amar bought a push mower and a Dodge Dynasty and took out a \$300 personal loan to launch Maurice Lawn Care. Before he knew it, he was providing lawn care for hundreds of homes with close to 20 employees and a fleet of electric mowers and trucks.

But even with his early success in landscaping, Amar and his wife still yearned for Israel. In 1998, they decided to table his landscaping business and move back to Israel. For four years, both of them launched new careers – Amar started a clothing store near the Ben Yehuda Mall in Jerusalem, and Tracey became a teacher at a methadone clinic.

"It was a happy time for us," he says. But what followed was unrest in the country with multiple bombing raids near his store due to the Iraq conflict. "It was very difficult to run a business under those circumstances," says Amar. "A lot of businesses failed during that time, including mine."

With the loss of his family's business, Israel's continued unrest and three kids to feed, Amar returned to Florida in 2002 to be with his wife's family and re-establish his lawn care company. "This time around, Tracey took on the marketing duties, tapping into relationships she made while previously working with nonprofits and networking groups," says Amar. "It was actually easier starting up the second time." Word-of-mouth throughout central Florida also began to circulate about Amar's talents as a landscaper, leading to more business for his firm.

Those networking skills, combined with a growing reputation for quality work, paid off handsomely for his company, gaining new larger clients, including ERM Development, Heliocol, Park Square Homes, Corinthian Builders and ABD Development. In 2007, he added a landscaping installation and design division and obtained an irrigation license. He was up to 800 customers, surpassing \$6 million in revenues.

Unfortunately, a year later, central Florida's real estate market crashed, taking Maurice Lawn Care with it. To make matters worse, Amar's wife divorced him and returned to Israel. "To put it mildly, the year 2008 and the three years that followed have been very humbling for me," says Amar. "For six

months after the divorce, I was so depressed that I never left the house and could barely make it in to work each day.”



After those six months following the divorce, Amar knew he had to snap out of it to keep his business going. With lower profit margins from customers who kept slashing their landscaping budgets 20 percent or more, he decided the best strategy was to drop several clients that were sucking him dry. He expanded his geographical customer base around Orlando from Kissimmee to Deltona. He shifted his ratio of 70 percent installations and 30 percent maintenance to 20/80, and focused almost exclusively on commercial accounts. The only residential accounts he kept were the private homes of the managers of his commercial accounts that he wanted to directly demonstrate his meticulous eye for detail, creative design and high level of service. He also added a pest control service instead of continuing to subcontract it out.

Amar stepped up his marketing practices, including delivering boxes of gourmet cupcakes with his logo to key HOAs and apartment management companies. He replaced his gas-powered 26-inch mowers with old-fashioned push mowers.

“When the economy plummeted in Florida, the competition was fierce,” says Amar. “All the installers like me shifted to maintenance lowering their profit margins closer to the zero mark. The ones who survived were able to lower prices while giving far superior service.”

Today, at the age of 64, Amar believes he’s back to an optimum place both personally and professionally. In the past six months, he has added several new commercial accounts and major installation projects. He’s back to his optimum weight after losing 60 pounds training for an upcoming marathon. He has never been closer to his three adult children, none of whom are involved in his landscaping business. And, he continues to mow his ex-wife’s family’s lawn, getting together with them regularly.

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