

# The Brothers of TNT Horticultural Pros



Source: [www.TurfMagazine.com](http://www.TurfMagazine.com)

Recognize these plant varieties? Beefsteak. Cherry. Cluster on the Vine. They're varieties of tomatoes, of course, and, in the case of this story, they are hydroponically grown tomatoes.

You would hardly figure that tomatoes grown in a soil-less environment would figure into a busy, full-service, 38-year-old landscape company. But, [TNT Horticultural Professionals LLC](#), headquartered in Catawba Island, Ohio, is not your typical landscape company.

So what's the deal with the tomatoes, which brothers Tommy and Nate Thompson grow in greenhouses on the 5-acre site of their business in Northwest Ohio? They're just one of the crops offered in their thriving wholesale produce operation that's a separate revenue center within their landscape company. That part of the company produces and delivers fresh produce to local grocery stores, farmers' markets and other outlets in a radius of about 40 miles.

Apart from the tomatoes, the produce is grown on their 15-acre family farm just outside of Bellevue, Ohio, which is about 30 miles south of their landscape headquarters. The farm produces melons, peppers, raspberries, squash, pumpkins and more.

"People want fresh produce that is grown locally," says Tommy, 29. "They want to know where their produce comes from. That's been a big trend since the Recession."

Nate and Tommy started growing the vegetables as a "small hobby farm" in 2007. They sold what they grew – mostly beefsteak tomatoes, peppers and "a few other miscellaneous items" at their roadside stand during the summer, and at local farmers' markets, too.

As demand for what they produced increased (and it did rather quickly, says Tommy), they expanded the size and scope of the farm and, in 2012, after buying the company from their father Tom Thompson Sr., they rebranded the

landscape company to encompass the wholesale produce business as TNT Horticultural Professionals LLC. They took the name from their initials: Tommy and Nate Thompson.

## **Different responsibilities**

Not unexpectedly, the brothers divide the company's management responsibilities.

Nate, 25, company president, is the company's live plant person. He runs the company's day-to-day business operations while also overseeing the greenhouse and produce division. He is a 2010 graduate of The Ohio State University with a bachelor's degree in agricultural science with a focus on landscape horticulture and a minor in agriculture business.

Tommy is company vice president. He attended The Ohio State University ATI in Wooster, Ohio. He runs all of the hardscape design and sales, and also oversees the company's landscape and the maintenance divisions.

TNT Horticulture does work in much of north central and northwest Ohio. But, Catawba Island and the communities that surround it remain the primary service area for its landscape and lawn care services, and for its retail and vegetable trade.



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

TNT grows hydroponic tomatoes for local supermarkets and farm markets.

The brothers carefully weigh the time and expense of providing each of their various services and products against revenue. In that light, Tommy views the company's property maintenance services as not as profitable as it used to be, but vital, nevertheless, in providing ongoing cash flow.

"There are a lot of guys around here that are getting \$25 to mow a lawn. They may or may not have insurance, and some of them are probably just putting the money into their pockets," says Tommy.

"Contrast that with a company like ours that may roll up to a property with \$100,000 invested in a truck, trailer, mowers, hand-helds, workers, insurance and other expenses."

The Thompsons value their chemical lawn care service, "Mr. Lawn", as a valuable and trusted cash flow provider, as well. They're in the process of increasing its presence in the markets they serve, says Nate.

TNT Horticultural Professionals LLC is focused on serving the "estate market." The company is located within 15 minutes of perhaps a dozen condominiums, HOAs and residential developments with high-end vacation homes, Nate explains.

"We don't just mow lawns. We want to do everything on a property," adds Tommy. "We want to mow your lawn, trim your shrubs, mulch your beds, plow your driveway. We want to provide 12-month service." Even so, the company provides mow-only services on some of the bigger properties in their market.

Weather, as it always does, presents its share of opportunities and disappointments. This season is no different than any other in that regard. The opportunity in the form of winter revenue came as a result of record snowfall for the region: more than 75 inches when the "average" snowfall is 38 inches.

"We did more in snow this winter than we did in the last two winters combined," says Tommy.



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

The brothers maintain the properties of many second homes.

A very cold, wet March and early April posed the biggest weather challenge this spring. They had to delay the start of their services to allow customers' properties to dry out.

But the bigger challenge, agree the brothers, is a shortage of young, reliable and, in some cases, employable workers. Employable? If an applicant fails a drug test or has had a DWI they won't even be considered, says Nate. He adds that some of their best employees have turned out to be men near or at retirement age.

In spite of the weather and the seemingly never-ending challenge of finding and keeping reliable employees, the brothers are looking forward to a strong season.

## **Location, Location, Location**

Tom Thompson Sr., founded Thompson Landscaping, Inc. on a 5-acre parcel of property on Catawba Island, Ohio, almost 30 years ago. It was a smart decision.

For most of the 20th century, Catawba Island was known for its many peach and apple orchards. That's no longer the case. The majority of its fruit-growing heritage has been replaced by condos, HOAs, pricy vacation homes and trailer parks. The region has literally exploded in development since Thompson set up shop there almost 30 years. In fact, some of the most recent development on Catawba Island is now adjacent to the landscape company.

The company is now owned and operated by the founder's sons, Tommy Jr., 29, and Nate, 25. They bought it from their father almost three years ago and renamed it to better reflect the direction they are now taking it; its two

main revenue sources now being landscape services and locally grown wholesale produce.

For the record, Catawba Island is not really an island; it's a 6-mile-long limestone peninsula that juts into Lake Erie. Most of the real action on Catawba Island, however, happens on West Harbor, where TNT Horticulture Professionals LLC is sited.

West Harbor is a shallow-draft recreational harbor whose shoreline is almost completely developed with vacation homes and as many as 6,000 boat docks. Summer weekends see a stream of 20-to-50-foot pleasure boats glide out of the Harbour's two channels either for a short jaunt to Lake Erie's popular vacation islands or to fish for walleye, bass or yellow perch. The nutrient-rich and relatively shallow (averaging 30 feet deep) Western Basin of Lake Erie is the most productive sports fishery in The Great Lakes.

The region's beauty and the recreational opportunities attracted the elder Thompson to the region in the first place. Hard-working, knowledgeable and opportunistic, he built the business by developing friendly relationships at local yacht and country clubs, and by delivering high-quality service to match the promises he had made.

The sons say they will back up their promises with the same level of high-quality landscape and lawn care services.

## **Fast Facts about TNT Horticultural Professionals, LLC**

**Owners:** President Nate Thompson, Vice President Tommy Thompson Jr.

**Founded:** 1976 as Thompson Landscaping, Inc.; renamed and rebranded as TNT Horticultural Professionals LLC in 2012

**Headquarters:** Catawba Island, Ohio

**Markets:** North central and northwest Ohio

**Services:** Landscape design & installation, hardscaping landscape maintenance, irrigation, Mr. Lawn (lawn care), retail garden center, ponds, tree removal, landscape lighting and wholesale produce

**Employees:** Approximately 13