

TAKING GREEN TO THE NEXT LEVEL

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It takes a village of stewards to raise a healthy landscape. Just ask the members of Next Level Network, an executive peer group of progressive, sustainable landscape contractors from around the country who have aligned their companies' strategy and spirit with environmental responsibility. "It's more than just good business," said Andrew Key, president of Heads Up Landscape in Albuquerque, New Mexico (www.headsuplandscape.com) and a LEED¹-certified green building professional. "It's a necessity." And indeed it is for the Land of Enchantment, a state where it's largest city, Albuquerque, averages only 9" of rain per year.

Contrast that with the liquid sunshine in Oregon where it may rain 9" in a week, and you might wonder how sustainable best practices work to environmental and competitive advantages in such diverse geographic regions and markets.

We thought we'd find out. We asked the Next Level leaders to share examples of how sustainability as both policy and process changed their business, transformed the customer's landscape, and had a positive impact on the communities they serve.

¹LEED, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, was developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) in 2000, as a rigorous rating system for sustainable site development and environmentally responsible building.

High Desert

Drought-tolerant landscapes are a natural for Heads Up, the Albuquerque firm located in the expansive Chichuahuan Desert and founded by CEO Gary Mallory in 1974.



“Our region hosts a fragile eco-system richly endowed with a variety of plant life. The extremes of hot and cold, the varied terrain with altitudes ranging from 2,000–10,000 feet, and the fact that it’s the most thickly vegetated desert in North America, presents more than its share of opportunities for landscapers to work in harmony with the whims of nature,” said Heads Up President, Andrew Key.

Both fans of native desert plants, Key and Mallory are experts in the landscape palette of northern New Mexico and have worked with their customers to restore many properties to a sustainable desert aesthetic, installing regionally indigenous plants and high-tech water conservation and irrigation systems.

Heads Up’s xeriscape conversion program and its commitment to creating and maintaining sustainable sites, “long before it was a formal initiative,” noted Key, puts Heads Up in the ranks of companies well-

positioned to partner with architects and developers seeking to achieve energy-efficiency status through LEED. In fact, resource conservation is the prevailing cultural spirit in New Mexico, according to Key. The Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Authority recently announced it met its water mandates three years before the state deadline and saved billions of gallons of water in the process. “Getting the public on board with environmentally responsible commitments is exciting,” adds Key. “It gives us the opportunity to be the go-to resource throughout northern New Mexico for environmentally responsible and energy efficient landscapes and public spaces. When we can collaborate with our customers, it makes us all partners for a green alliance.”

Organic ECO-nomics

Landscape Architect and President Paul Fields is Lambert Landscape Company’s sustainability driver who said deep drought patterns, tough water restrictions, and aquifer constraints give their Dallas-based



company an opportunity to lead the resource management discussion with their customers on water use and earth-friendly practices.

Founded in 1919, Lambert’s (www.lamberts.net) committed to become environmentally conscious in 1986 and was 100% organic in three years. Today the firm captures rainwater in an on-site harvesting and storage system. The water is collected from the roof of their 6½-acre facility. From this, they brew their own compost tea—a high-quality, proprietary nutritional product used to enrich and condition their clients’ soil. “It’s all about the soil,” said Fields. “A healthy soil leads to healthy plants and a healthier ecosystem,” a motto and business model for sustainable landscape practices that earned the



company a Sustainable Company Award from PLANET, the Professional Landcare Network, in 2011.

Fields noted that Lambert's is continually improving on its organic gardening knowledge and uses its campus and project sites to research and test new products, applications, and ways to optimize and improve the sustainability of their gardens. Texas accounts for being one of the driest and hottest regions during the summer and is quickly becoming a hub in America's growing rainwater harvesting industry. Lambert's has seen a rise in the demand for cisterns, well water, and catchment systems and is active in educating clients about their sustainable benefits.

Liquid Sunshine



In Portland, Oregon, Bob Grover, CEO, Pacific Landscape Management (www.pacscape.com) has turned perennially damp weather into a teachable moment for the community. Grover hosts annual sustainability fairs to showcase rainwater harvesting technologies, vertical landscapes (green walls), and rainwater gardens at the company's green-centric corporate facility—a sustainable site where architecture and landscape come together and challenge notions

of public space. "It's a learning lab," he said, that illustrates the best of what the future holds for energy efficient environments, inside and out, and an example of how they've re-engineered their company to minimize its impact on the environment.

Named by Oregon Business Magazine as one of Portland's Best Green Companies, Grover said they've only just begun. "Sustainability is not a destination," he said, "it's a process." Whether they are achieving high standards for running an ecological business, recycling everything, or contributing to reductions in storm water runoff to protect the salmon watersheds of the Pacific Northwest, Pacific Landscape Management is generating more than its own electricity. They are generating ideas and solutions for the region's ecological future.

Progressively Green

A week without rain in Oregon may be a drought, while an entire winter without rain is normal for most of California, a state that has long been a leader in passing progressive environmental regulations. Chris Angelo, CEO of Stay Green Inc. (www.staygreen.com), a company that covers the arid San Fernando Valley northwest of Los Angeles, knows first hand the impact environmental issues have on water-dependent southern California, and has made sustainability synonymous with the firm's brand.

In 2011, Stay Green announced a program geared to reduce its customers' carbon footprints and raise the bar for environmental leadership. "In landscape management, sustainable practices are best practices," said Angelo.

"Our company has always strived to provide responsible environmental stewardship, and our new emphasis on sustainability practices brings this approach to the forefront of all of our service lines: maintenance, water management, tree care and plant health care – saving money and helping the planet at the same time."

"We're addressing regional air quality with reduced emission/energy efficient vehicles; re-cycling our customers' green waste and introducing custom soil blends; using organic fertilizers and pest control products; and high-tech irrigation and water management systems – and doing so willingly to set a higher standard for ourselves and our work," he added. "We expect to see an increase in environmental regulations and incentives from the government in the coming decade and a lot more companies—our customers—will invest in green strategies. We're ready to help them succeed," said Angelo.

Great Lakes Watershed

Mariani Landscape (www.marianilandscape.com) in Lake Bluff, Illinois, finds its customers



easily engaged in the water smart conversation. Metropolitan Chicago abuts to an ecologically rich region that supports a wealth of biological diversity.



Rainwater garden, Pacific Landscape Management ©

“Our customers are committed to environmental responsibility on principle – it’s the right thing to do,” said landscape architect and LEED-savvy garden designer John Mariani. “We don’t see as much dryness as other parts of the country, but our customers in general are passionate about the natural beauty of Lake Michigan’s unique watershed and are respectful of our region’s natural resources. This makes conversations about water use technologies, alternatives to overused plants in the landscape, and sustainable best practices easy to have.”

John’s brother, company CEO Frank Mariani agrees. He was awarded “Mentor to the (Green) Industry in 2011, and said the family firm founded by his father 50 years ago is not content to grow, but to prosper by adding value. “We use eco-friendly practices to enhance our customers properties,

and that reflects our long-term commitment to being a steward of the land.”

The firm is also known for its stewardship of the community, offering its herbaceous experts, horticulturists, and LEED-certified designers to teach garden workshops. Some associates of Mariani Landscape volunteer their Saturdays to assist public land trusts and recreation areas by creating walking paths, enhancing nature preserves, and sharing their enthusiasm for the region’s diverse green space.

Heritage Meets High Tech

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, Ohio is one of only two states (the other is Alaska) that is entirely drought free. So no landscape problems in Ohio, right?

Not necessarily, says Todd Pugh, CEO of Envirosapes, a 25-year old firm located in Louisville (www.growinggood.com). Pugh says it’s easy to assume that because a landscape looks green, it’s sustainable. It’s not. Sustainable means that an attractive landscape – in any region, whether a park, private home, HOA, utility corridors, corporate campuses or recreation areas – can be useful as well as beautiful if they are planned and planted in a way that ultimately contributes to storm water control, protects limited resources such as water, reduces pollution and protects wildlife.

Located in northeast Ohio, Envirosapes embraced green early on. The company recently re-branded to reflect the firm’s sustainable initiatives. Pugh is proud to say that since 1994, they have recycled over 40,000 cubic yards of debris, reused

green waste, reduced the number of raw materials used on projects, adding it up to having conserved landfill space the size of a 10-story high football field.

Pugh's vision for sustainability is one of practicality. Whether recycling, or replacing fleet vehicles with hybrid and high mileage alternatives to improve fuel consumption, being green needs to make sense.

Noted Pugh, "At Enviroscapes, sustainability is a value proposition. We find that most of our earth-friendly practices are not only are profitable but also benefit our employees. This aligns with our corporate philosophy of "People, Planet and Profit." Pugh says all three can work in harmony when properly thought out and is educating its customers about what they can do to protect the environment. "We want to be experts and let them know that doing simple things can make a big impact," he said.

Where do we go from here?

If there is a crystal ball that holds the future success of the landscape industry, it is in the hands of Jim McCutcheon, Certified Landscape Professional and CEO of HighGrove Partners, an interdisciplinary land services company in Atlanta (www.highgrove.net). A landscape architect and chairperson for the Crystal Ball Committee of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), we end by looking to him to tell us what he sees.

"HighGrove decided a long time ago to integrate progressive water technologies and innovative resource programs into its daily suite of offerings. At the time, we were ahead of trend," said McCutcheon.

The proactive approach paid off. Georgia has weathered several serious drought cycles and HighGrove's *KnowWater* program has achieved measurable results. The program is currently saving 20%-40% water use and maximizing the efficiency of systems for customer's who've become proponents of the program.

According to McCutcheon, environmental responsibility and economic responsibility aren't mutually exclusive. "We all agree it's the right thing to do," he said. "But why wouldn't you want to? Especially when you can save water, reduce demand, and produce financial savings as a return on investment?"

HighGrove makes a strong case for the partnership role landscape firms play in helping decrease costs. Building owners and property managers – the commercial real estate that is the landscape industry's biggest base – are measuring and reporting energy cost use through real-time monitoring of building infrastructure systems. Many city managers and urban developers are also looking for savings. "Water management is where this becomes a formal stewardship effort," he concluded. "If the goal is a measurable reduction of water use over a specified period



of time, then we have an ability to make an impact in a significant way. Not only are our efforts as landscape professionals good for the environment, they are just good business."

Resource Stewardship

Although New Mexico lays claim to being the Land of Enchantment, the spirit of a sustainable landscape is also just that: a terrain of scenic beauty in the hands of award-winning landscape planners and contractors as resource stewards, each holding firm to regional traditions, respecting biodiversity and aesthetic preferences, and grounded in a shared commitment to enrich public and private landscapes, gardens and green spaces through environmental best practices. 🌱

"There is no group more well-suited to lead on this issue than the landscape industry. Our nation has millions of acres of private, living landscapes that are touched every day by contractors whose passion for creating and maintaining their beauty has the potential to transform the quality of our communities and the quality of life." — John Mariani

Next Level Network is a green industry peer group facilitated by Bruce K. Wilson, Wilson-Oyler Group.

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