

By Gregg Wartgow

Managing Growth on the **ATLANTIC COAST**

Atlantic Landscape Management LLC is celebrating its 10th year in business with a rebooted talent roster, transformed culture and just as much profit on a lot less stress. Now sustainable growth can commence.

The Atlantic Landscape Management LLC team consists of (counterclockwise): Pedro Hernandez, maintenance operations manager; Stephanie Windsor, office manager; Josh Doebert, company owner; and Dave Watson, turf and ornamental division manager.

Things are booming in and around Virginia Beach, Virginia, and we're not just talking about the roar of fighter jets flying to and from Naval Air Station Oceana, a U.S. military airport. Because the area has such a heavy military presence, the economy remains quite strong and did even during the 2008 to 2010 recessionary years. A lot of landscaping companies

grew during that otherwise troubling period for the industry, including Atlantic Landscape Management LLC.

That sales growth continued until a few years ago when the company leadership decided to hit the pause button. The growth felt good, but it also felt like some things were on the verge of getting harder to control. The company reviewed accounts to identify where it

was and wasn't making money. It reviewed its routes to determine where excessive drive times could be limiting additional growth. It reviewed its employees and systems to determine where things could—and, in some cases, had to—get better.

“We began the process of basically transforming the company this year,” says Josh Doebert, company owner. Step one was people. “Many months ago, we decided that it makes more sense to search for the right employees and train them rather than just hire someone with a lot of experience who might not be a good fit for our company,” adds Stephanie Windsor, Doebert's sister-in-law who runs the office and acts as his right hand. Windsor joined the company three years ago after leaving her sales career in the medical devices field.

The philosophy of hiring attitude over experience was amplified when Atlantic Landscape Management LLC started working with GreenMark Consulting Group late last year after winning a contest for free coaching for a lucky reader of *Green Industry Pros*. “In working with Steven Cohen [chief innovation officer] and Bill Eastman [business management consultant] from GreenMark, we focused on identifying the key attributes we look for in the different positions we fill and then promoted those attributes in the help



Atlantic Landscape Management LLC now has a 10-year track record of providing high-quality, horticulturally sound landscape management.



wanted ads,” Doebert relates. Doing so helped attract some high-quality candidates.

The timing was perfect. Atlantic Landscape Management LLC, like other industry contractors, was experiencing difficulty finding qualified candidates to fill its roster for the upcoming season. This momentary panic quickly turned to optimism for Doebert and Windsor upon working with GreenMark Consulting Group. A recent notable hire is industry veteran Pedro Hernandez who joined the company as its maintenance operations manager. He was instrumental in helping to rebuild Atlantic Landscape Management LLC’s culture.

“There is definitely a change in the air here,” according to Doebert. “I think it’s the dynamic of our company that is helping us attract good people.

“Right now I’m overseeing the landscaping crew, but as owner, I really need to be focusing on other things, like business development and planning, as we look to grow.”

We’re straight shooters and compensate fairly.”

One appealing trait is the company’s now 10-year track record of providing high-quality, horticulturally sound landscape management. That helps establish a strong foundation from which to grow—and growth is definitely back on the agenda.

Ownership Mindset from Top to Bottom

Purging the bad apples from its workforce was step one of the transformation. Adding a good mid-level manager like Hernandez was step two. Since both crews are new, he spends a lot of time in the field training them to company standards. He’s also creating job folders for each property, complete with Google Earth imaging and notations, to assist crews.

Now Doebert is looking for someone like Hernandez to take charge in the

landscaping division. This is proving to be a more difficult position to fill due to the nature of the work and knowledge base required.

Atlantic Landscape Management LLC currently fields one three-man landscaping crew. “We could easily put on a second crew,” Doebert says, in which case a second Hernandez would be vitally needed. “Right now I’m overseeing the landscaping crew, but as owner, I really need to be focusing on other things, like business development and planning, as we look to grow. I want to be able to sell a landscaping job and then hand the project off to my manager knowing that it will be completed correctly.”

While the search for a reliable landscape division manager continues, Doebert already has a great leader to oversee the turf and ornamental division. Dave Watson joined Atlantic Landscape Management LLC not too long after the company was founded in 2007. He is indispensable, helping out wherever he is needed, but the goal is to keep his focus on lawn applications.

HOW TO TRANSITION FROM OWNER TO EXECUTIVE

Sometimes the consultant benefits from collaboration as much as the client and Josh Doebert proves this true.

The most difficult transition for any owner is to stop acting like one. It is an easy trap to fall into. Atlantic Landscape Management LLC's success is based on its technical competence, drive and persistence. Now those factors are becoming barriers to further growth. The future is all about mindset: The owner must think like a CEO.

One of the things I noticed about Doebert was this frame of mind. He acted

like the best Fortune 500 executives I know. Before worrying about what the company is doing and how it is being done, these executives focus on the why: Should we be doing this?

Doebert looked at every facet of his business and asked that very question. Why worry about doing it right until you determine if it is the right thing to do?

Our relationship focuses on the why behind the maintenance, landscaping and turf care lines of his business. Although these are traditional landscape services, it does not mean they should

be. Like any executive, Doebert takes nothing for granted.

Once certain of the why, Doebert turned his attention to selecting better talent, people who fit the Atlantic Landscape Management LLC culture and know how to use technology to improve efficiencies. All of this is creating a solid core to build the future on. I can't wait to see Atlantic Landscape Management LLC in five years.

– Insights from Bill Eastman, business management consultant, GreenMark Consulting Group

Watson is currently a one-man division, performing the applications themselves, while also providing customer service and estimating, and interfacing with vendors. Doebert and Windsor concur that lawn care presents a tremendous growth opportunity for the company. As this division grows, the goal is for Watson to transition into a managerial role overseeing numerous technicians.

The same can be said for Hernandez as the maintenance division grows. "I envision a day, not too far off, when Hernandez's maintenance crews will be self-sufficient so he won't need to

be in the field as much as he is right now," Doebert says. "Then he'll have more time to work on account management and selling enhancements, and looking for ways to improve systems and productivity."

Systems development is another big focus as Doebert and his team work with GreenMark Consulting Group. As an offshoot to that, accountability and empowerment are also taking center stage.

"We want every employee to feel like their project, crew or department is their own little company," Doebert says. He and Windsor are working out

the details of a new incentive program designed to usher in that ownership mindset. "We want our culture to be about quality, details and efficiency," Doebert adds. "We're establishing company-wide goals and also goals for each crew. The hope is that everybody will push each other and help each other to get better, because then everyone will be rewarded."

Putting Admin on Autopilot

It took about a month's worth of adjusting, but everyone is now benefiting from the company's adoption of Service Autopilot, a cloud-based management software.

"The antiquated paper system we were using just wasn't efficient anymore," Doebert says. "You could spend half a morning trying to decipher scribbles and ketchup stains."

"We started using Service Autopilot when our new foremen came in, which made the transition a lot smoother," Windsor says.

Each foreman has a smartphone with access to Service Autopilot. They clock their crews in and out of jobs. They're able to type in notes as things are observed on properties. They also have access to customer information, which comes in handy when a client has an issue that needs to be addressed immediately.

"Having all of this information and data in real time is proving to be a huge advantage," Windsor says. "It provides a much better visualization of what's going on for the day. We're also able to analyze jobs in a very timely fashion to determine where we're going over on



The company is working out the details of a new incentive program designed to usher in a ownership mindset.



JOHN DEERE

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Introducing the all-new John Deere IR Cab Tractor – until you don't need the cab. That's when the new IR is truly open for business. Removable doors and nearly 90-degree extension of your front and rear windows let you work in total comfort to get after those lawn and landscaping jobs.

And just think, when green season starts to give way to autumn, you can close up shop in a nice, heated cab. Now that's versatility from America's Tractor, the IR Cab from John Deere.

Circle 5 on card or visit greenindustrypros.com/10155839

www.JohnDeere.com/IFamily

**INTRODUCING
THE ALL-NEW 2017 SUPER DUTY® CHASSIS CAB**

SUPER POWERS WITHOUT THE STUPID CAPE



Class-leading capabilities where it counts:

Best-in-class GVWR — 40,000 lbs.†

Best-in-class payload — 7,540 lbs.†

Best-in-class gas mileage — 430 B.-E.†

Most available configurations in its class

THIS IS THE NEXT LEVEL.

FORD.COM 

Maximum payload limited by distribution. †When properly equipped. Check local regulations. Class is 2017 GM Equinox. GVWR is maximum gross vehicle weight rating. Actual payload capacity limited by distribution and equipment. See owner's manual. ©2016 Ford. All rights reserved.



man-hours: Are we understaffed, are we using the wrong equipment, or do we maybe need to rework our routes? Having this information so readily available, without getting swallowed up by paperwork, is tremendous.”

“There is a lot of front-end loading that has to happen when switching to a software system like this,” Doebert adds. That’s why he and Windsor decided to implement Service Autopilot in phases, starting with the two maintenance crews before moving on to lawn care and then the landscaping crew.

Perfect Fits

Advancing in increments is really how one could describe the way Doebert and Windsor go about growth in general. The company was bigger in the past, but never better or as profitable. With the

proper people and systems now in place, it’s time to look at growing again.

Doebert says, “We like small to mid-size commercial accounts—such as office buildings and shopping centers—the kind where you can put on a three-man crew and deliver a nice, consistent level of service that is appreciated.

“In the past, we did some larger maintenance accounts and they just didn’t work out,” Doebert continues. “We could see it in our guys’ eyes: They hated it!

“These accounts were not the norm for our business and didn’t align with our business model. The accounts only wanted a certain level of service and it just wasn’t the level of service our guys were accustomed to providing. We didn’t rebid these contracts the next year. We decided to move on and focus on what we were good at.”

Like many commercially focused landscape maintenance companies, Atlantic Landscape Management LLC does have some residential accounts. The company is unique, though, in that it doesn’t cater to the super high-end of the residential market.

“Middle America is very good to us,” Doebert says. “They value the service we provide. There is one high-end neighborhood that some view as the pinnacle of landscaping around here. But there are a hundred landscapers working there. It’s very cutthroat, which is not where we want to play.”

Atlantic Landscape Management LLC knows where it wants to play. The growing company wants to service clients that fit its maintenance model and then build landscape enhancement

A MOWER FOR YOU

Joytick Steering

Kohler and Kawasaki Engines

Welded Steel Deck

Stand-Up Deck

42" - 72" Cut Widths

Pivoting Front Axle & Deck

MADE IN THE USA

COUNTRY CLIPPER
ZERO TURN MOWER

CountryClipper.com



Circle 6 on card or visit greenindustrypros.com/10155746

BLADES THAT STRIKE WITH FORCE!

COPPERHEAD
MOWER BLADES

BUILT FOR POWERFUL PERFORMANCE.

rotary

Call 1.800.841.3989 or visit rotarycorp.com



Circle 7 on card or visit greenindustrypros.com/10155905

sales off of that base. It wants to grow its higher margin turf and ornamental care division—perhaps even branding it separately to allow for the pursuit of subcontracted work from other area landscape companies.

That’s in the future, though. Today the company will continue working on systems and processes to help facilitate its profitable growth—which could soon eclipse the million-dollar mark if things continue going according to plan.

“We’re very thankful for the great team we now have in place,” Doebert says graciously. “I’m also thankful for our vendors who stood by us and helped us get started 10 years ago. One notable vendor is our equipment dealer Land & Coates. I truly view the company as a real partner in my business.”

Feeling blessed and eager to pay it



Atlantic Landscape Management LLC’s profitable growth could soon eclipse the million-dollar mark if things continue going according to plan.

forward, Doebert maintains his company’s involvement in the GreenCare for Troops program, which helps to provide landscaping services to families of deployed military members. It only

makes sense, seeing as how Atlantic Landscape Management LLC is such a staple of the great military community. Like everything else it does, it’s a perfect fit. >

Make Your Competitors Green with Envy.

A versatile machine for all types of jobs:

- Over 150 attachments
- Minimal turf impact
- Low operating and maintenance costs
- Articulated, compact sized
- Excellent lift to weight ratio

To learn how an Avant loader can help you work more efficiently, call us at **847-380-9822**, or visit our website.

AVANT
All in One Solution

www.AvantTecnoUSA.com

Circle 8 on card or visit greenindustrypros.com/10822298