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SOUTH FEATURES
My Four Sons

by Tom Crain

Making the family business work



Corporate office building in contention for LEED EB certification, including the installation of efficient irrigation nozzles, smart controllers and the newest high-tech outdoor weather sensor. LSI originally installed the irrigation and landscape and maintained the site for over five years.

positions. So far, though, other family members aren't sporting the LSI ID tag. This actually bodes well for the company because other management positions are filled by nonfamily members, which sends a good message of opportunity to all staff.



Paul Stacey Jr. (foreground) and his four sons (left to right): Dan, Paul III, Pat and Doug.

With a staff of 175 year-round employees and an additional 280 seasonal employees, the company offers all aspects of landscape design, design/build services, ongoing maintenance, floriculture, irrigation, turf care and snow removal primarily to upscale customers in central Tennessee.

A band of brothers fall into the fold

It all began with Stacey, a construction sales rep, who started the landscaping firm out of his southwest Nashville garage in 1988 with a truck, a shovel and a lawn mower. This

The landscaping industry is represented by a significant percentage of family-owned firms. Although most often a plus in customers' minds, a family business can also be laden with pitfalls, often putting the company at great risk or out of business altogether. Sibling rivalries, unprofessional decorum and untrained and noncredentialed family members elevated too soon to high positions are just a few examples of the daggers that can create mortal wounds for family businesses.

For the past 24 years that two generations have worked together at Landscape Services, Inc. (LSI) in Nashville, Tenn., the company remained immune to these family business pitfalls, largely because of keen awareness and preventative measures.

"None of us were coerced into joining our father's business," explains Pat Stacey, who is director of commercial development for LSI. "Each one of us decided to come onboard on our own terms and at our own pace."

All four sons have signed up for full-time careers at LSI, taking on management

LSI doesn't want employees to think that nepotism is running rampant within its walls. "Currently, our heads of floriculture, administration, HR and many other areas consist of nonfamily members," says CEO and founder Paul Stacey Jr. The Stacey family emphasizes that there's a lot of opportunity to hold a top position, no matter what family you hail from.

LSI has annual revenues averaging over \$12 million and provides a full range of landscape services to office parks, commercial buildings, estate homes, homeowner associations, multifamily communities and municipalities.

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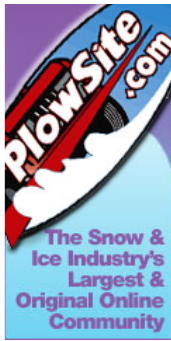
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was an ideal time to start a landscaping business, as the Nashville residential building boom was at its peak. Stacey soon developed relationships with many residential developers and individual homeowners, providing a consistent source of landscape-related work.

Throughout the '90s, he began acquiring "partners," his four sons, who began to join forces one by one as they graduated college. During this time, the company continued to grow, so the demand for their services made good business sense with their roles evolving to fill immediate needs.

First onboard was Stacey's oldest son Paul III, who is now director of residential business development with two bachelor's degrees, one in plant and soil science and the other in horticulture and landscape design; Pat followed with a bachelor's degree in forestry; Doug, COO-operations with a bachelor's degree in construction management; and Dan, accounting manager with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering.

Preventative measures ensure business harmony

"Our family is very close, and the thought of having the rare opportunity to work with family every day is very appealing to all of us," explains Pat. "I don't know that any of us necessarily would have been landscape contractors if the family ties and deep family bonds weren't present."

Stacey says that each one of his sons has talents in different arenas, so there isn't much competition for specific roles. "Sure, we all have had our differences, but we seem to work through those differences over time," he says. He also believes it's a real blessing that all four sons are involved in the family business, because there's a real sense of security knowing that his top employees will be there in good times and bad, the next day, month and year. "It helps us all sleep better at night," he says.



An LSI crew mowing the lawn at a 40-acre national headquarter site.

One proactive family measure was the joining of a local family business peer group.

Currently, LSI is the only landscape company represented in this group. On a monthly basis, family business members get together for roundtable discussions to collaborate on family business challenges with a facilitator in a professional group setting. "We find this group to be extremely helpful for us as we bounce ideas off each other and learn from others' experiences in family dynamics," says Pat Stacey.

LEED-ers in green

LSI has positioned itself well as an area leader in the green-friendly landscaping movement. LSI has been involved in a number of LEED-certified landscaping projects, installing and maintaining corporate office buildings, high-rise condos, several green roofs and even a new LEED-certified landscaped HOA. This cluster of 50 new homes with highly sustainable irrigation and native planting requirements is the first of its kind in Nashville.

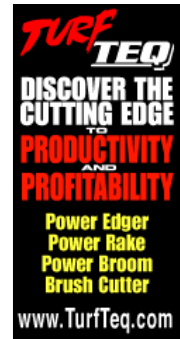
"Many clients don't have the capital during this slow economic period to make investments into LEED certification, however, all clients are interested in environmentally friendly methods and techniques to save money," Pat explains. "They generally all appreciate us giving them eco-friendly ideas, which may help them market their community or space."

There are a number of ways that LSI has become well-versed in the landscaping eco-movement. The company has been involved in its local chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) that administers LEED certification, and LSI employees have attended, and even sponsored, many USGBC seminars and educational forums, with several staff members attaining certifications in the process. Water management plays a major role in being green, and the company has utilized its irrigation suppliers as a resource for education.

LSI has been trying to utilize the latest technologies regarding eco-friendly herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers and similar products. It is testing new products to find those that are as effective as the traditional product lines. For many years, LSI has been providing a recycling program to its clients for their landscape debris, and all biodegradable debris generated from its sites are separated and taken to a nearby recycling center. The recycling program costs LSI more, but the company believes it is worthwhile due to its environmental consciousness.

Repositioning for recession-readiness

LSI moved its headquarters to its current location in the River Hills Industrial Park near downtown Nashville and opened a branch





LSI maintains a .5-acre green roof atop a world headquarter building just south of Nashville in addition to maintaining the grounds of this 60-acre site.

office 30 minutes south in Franklin, where many of the company's new customers are clustered. The branch office provides a place for employees to climb the corporate ladder, recruit workers from southern counties and respond timely to the growing number of south side properties.

Even though LSI experienced a one-two punch last year with landscape construction work drying up in the Nashville area due to clients spending less on enhancements and reduced budgets for base maintenance, the company's grounds management division grew at a normal rate.

Traditionally, LSI has focused on developing commercial grounds management accounts, however, over the last few years, the company has been actively pursuing high-end residential work to help offset the loss of the commercial construction revenues.



LSI's Nashville headquarters with the office staff and fleet.

"In most cases, we have tried to work within our clients' new budgets by showing them how to save money without changing the integrity of the property," says Pat. "This approach instilled confidence within our clients and lets them know we are their partner."

LSI expects to finish strong this year with continued slow and controlled growth both locally and regionally.

For the past 20 years, Tom Crain has been a regular contributor to B2B publications, including many in the green industry. He is also a marketing communications specialist for several companies in the travel, agriculture and nutrition industries.

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