

# CREW Chief

SUCCESS GUIDE Volume 7



## 3 Ways To Become a More Valuable Crew Chief

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## Procedures & Profitability



Dear Crew Chiefs,

As I looked at the topics for this issue of *Crew Chief Success Guide*, I thought about how important equipment maintenance is to a company's profitability. After all, if the equipment isn't starting or working properly, it impacts productivity and your crew's ability to get the job done.

Ensuring products start the right way at the right time often comes down to procedure. Was the equipment stored properly after its last use? Was the fuel mixed properly? Many times, it can be as simple as a missed step in the starting procedure, for example, the choke wasn't properly engaged. Developing checklists for startup and other procedures and reviewing it with your workers before getting to the jobsite may help avoid most problems.

Another equipment challenge can be fuel additives. While we can't necessarily avoid fuel issues all together, there are steps we can take to help reduce the problems and damage bad fuel can cause. Visit [STIHLusa.com/information](http://STIHLusa.com/information) for articles with tips on dealing with fuel issues, storing your equipment and more.

You are tasked with job completion, and getting your crew started and staying on the job is critical to company profitability. Your local servicing dealer can help you avoid downtime and keep your equipment up and running. I encourage you to also use resources such as the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) website, [www.landcarenetwork.org](http://www.landcarenetwork.org) for more information to help you manage your crew.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Keeler". The signature is fluid and cursive.

John Keeler  
National Training Manager  
STIHL Inc.

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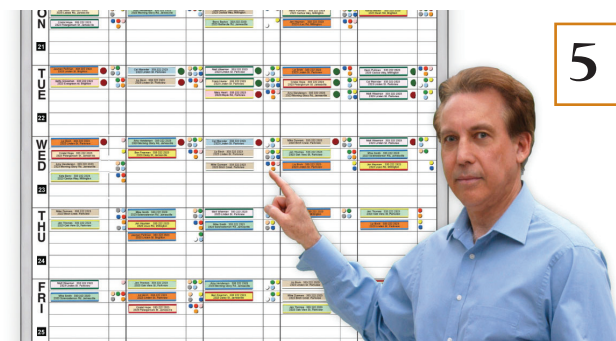
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landscape industry  
**certified**

### A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Nine times out of 10, a professional landscape contractor became a professional landscape contractor because he loves—you guessed it—landscape contracting. Some end up building large operations and have to become more *businesspeople* than *landscapers*. When that happens, crew leaders such as yourself become essential to their cause.

Most landscape companies grow through word of mouth. That requires great work, which requires great crews, which require great crew leaders.

In this issue of *Crew Chief Success Guide*, we talk about what makes good crew leaders great. We talk about how important you are to retaining customers, generating new referrals, and to helping the company achieve its financial objectives. When it comes down to it, it's the "guys in the field" who are going to make or break a landscape company's success.

So take a lot of pride in what you do, because you do a lot more for your employer—and the Green Industry in general—than you might think. Thank you for what you do!



**Gregg Wartgow, editor in chief**  
[gregg.wartgow@greenindustrypros.com](mailto:gregg.wartgow@greenindustrypros.com)

## FREE ONLINE RESOURCES

Careful Equipment Operation a Part of  
Preventive Maintenance  
[greenindustrypros.com/10635339](http://greenindustrypros.com/10635339)

Maintenance Crew Safety Starts with Foreman  
[greenindustrypros.com/10257953](http://greenindustrypros.com/10257953)

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their crew leaders, and crew leaders are delivering.  
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# 3 Ways To Become a More Valuable Crew Chief

**Y**ou're a good crew chief. You've been with the company a couple of seasons now. You show up on time, all the time. You and your guys never have accidents, you're a good driver, customers never complain about the work you do, and your boss never gives you a hard time about going over budget on jobs. Sleep well tonight—you are indeed a good crew chief.

Communication skills become vital at this point. That means you learn how to listen, respond and follow through.

But how do you become a *great* crew chief that your employer would hate to lose? According to renowned Green Industry trainer Jim Paluch, there are three main things you can do.

## TAKE INITIATIVE

The ability to take initiative is a trait most company owners wish their crew leaders had. But not all have it—even the hardest-working ones—because taking initiative and working hard are two different things. Taking initiative means you activate yourself to do something even if you haven't been asked to do it. Thus, there's a certain amount of confidence that's necessary.

In order to have the confidence to take initiative, you must understand what the company's goals are, and how they fit with your personal goals and actions. If the company's mission is to "create beautiful landscapes" or "help people live healthier" or "provide outstanding customer service," that's great. But you

have to understand what that mission is and how it fits with your personal goals. When you do that, you can find the inspiration to take initiative.

Additionally, when you understand the company's mission and goals, you can spread excitement to other members of your crew so they can find their own inspiration. That's how you begin the process of growing your replacement.

## GROW YOUR REPLACEMENT

Are you serious? Train someone so well that they are capable of replacing me?! Your heart may have just skipped a beat, but ask yourself this question: Do I want to remain where I am right now for the rest of my life?

If you want to move up even further in the company, you have to focus on bringing out the best in your crewmembers. That's the best way to ensure that your employer will be comfortable in granting you more responsibility as the company takes on more work.

Communication skills become vital at this point. You start out by taking an interest in your crewmembers, asking them what they need in order to do a great job and grow their own careers. You then learn how to respond in a positive way, which could include asking additional questions to learn more about their needs or concerns. This is how you build purpose in your crewmembers. They know what they are striving toward

and what is expected of them—and they know that you are behind them in helping them reach their goals.

Finally, you must be willing to recognize wins as a team on a consistent basis. Positive reinforcement is very important.

## GROW SALES

If you want to move up in the company, you not only want to help grow your replacement, you want to help grow sales. It's very simple: When a company grows, its people can grow.

I know what you're thinking: I'm not even a salesperson, so how can I possibly help to grow sales? Well first of all, you must break down the imaginary wall that can sometimes form between operations (crews) and sales (managers). Do everything possible to support the people in your company who are bringing in business. That will lead to more customer retention, more referrals and new leads.

What we're mostly talking about here is producing great work. So, as you see, becoming a great crew chief ties back to what makes you a good crew chief in the first place (see first paragraph). Becoming great means doing what you've always done, and just a little bit more. ◀

**For over 20 years, Jim Paluch and the JP Horizons Team have been helping landscape companies Work Smarter and create A Better Way. Learn how they do it by emailing jim@jphorizons.com, or simply visit jphorizons.com.**



# Do Crew Chiefs Really Hold the Keys to Profitability?

Highly respected management consultant and financial expert Frank Ross was recently asked: "In a successful organization, who has the greatest influence on profitability? Is it the sales staff, top-level management, or the accounting manager?"

"No, no and no," Frank exclaims. "It is the crew leader."

At many landscape companies, Frank relates, the crew leader is the guy who's given a couple of employees, a truck and trailer full of equipment, a route sheet, and the expectation that he must perform miracles on his properties. Frank says "miracles" because, in many instances, a job is sold for whatever it takes to land that job. But the crew performing the work is still held to some pre-defined standard of, for example, \$30 per man-hour. When the contractor sold the job for \$24 per man-hour, though, it's no wonder that the crew couldn't meet budget.

"Landscape companies need to recognize that their crews are good, and I mean really good," Frank says. "If managers are smart enough to give their crews the tools they need to succeed, crews can perform well above expectation."

## ONE OF THE BEST TOOLS AROUND: THE WHITE BOARD

Tool number one is the hours needed to adequately perform the work. Then, Frank says, one of the best systems he has ever seen is the over-sized white board.

Written on the white board are the job schedules for each crew. "The board is lined off in a honeycomb fashion with 'days of the week' across the top and the crews listed individually down the left-hand side, or vice versa," Frank explains.

Each of the squares sequentially lists

AUG		RUGER BROTHERS LAWN SERVICE				
		CREW 1	CREW 2	CREW 3	CREW 4	CREW 5
MON	21	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]
TUE	22	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]
WED	23	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]
THU	24	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]
FRI	25	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]
SAT	26	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]
SUN	27	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]	[Notes]



yard time in the morning, each job to be serviced, yard time in the evening, and the hours budgeted to perform each. "This system transfers ownership of an entire day's worth of crew time to the crew leader," Frank points out. "The board clearly states how much time should be spent on each activity.

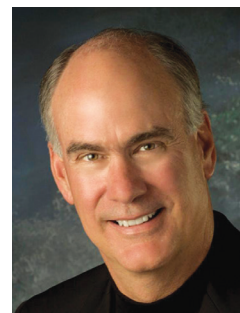
"At the end of the day," Frank goes on to say, "the crew leader will post the hours he is submitting for payroll next to the daily hours budget. If he is posting fewer hours, he uses a black marker. If he is posting more hours, he uses a red marker."

It's amazing, Frank says, that this one simple system creates ownership among crew leaders—ownership when it comes to not only quality work, but also efficiency and profitability. That's a great sense of

*The white board is one of the best tools for a landscape maintenance company. Here's an example: a magnetic board from a company called Magnatag. Visit [greenindustrypros.com/10231982](http://greenindustrypros.com/10231982) to learn more.*

ownership to create because the crew leader holds the real keys to profitability in a landscape company. ◀

*Frank Ross is a highly regarded management consultant who has spent the past four decades working hands-on with hundreds of the most successful companies in the Green Industry. Send an email to [frank.ross@rosspayne.com](mailto:frank.ross@rosspayne.com) for more.*



# Finding Business Success through Sustainability

Pacific Landscape Management's passion for service and technical expertise ensures their customers are presented with the most thoughtful and cost-effective solutions for their landscape needs. They work with clients to capture their core principles and increase the environmental sustainability of landscapes while reducing expenses.



## Maximizing Commercial Success with Sustainability

Pacific Landscape Management attends a variety of trade shows and landscape industry events in the Portland area, where conservation and ecological issues are discussed and interactions with local eco-minded organizations give them insight into community needs.

"Although we consider ourselves ecologically focused, it became a business focus when customers began to ask about it," said Bob Grover, president of Pacific Landscape Management and award recipient of the 2013 *Lawn & Landscape Leadership Award*. In 2007, they conducted a comprehensive evaluation of all of their landscaping procedures to determine where they could reduce their impact on the environment while maintaining the quality and service to customers.

Ultimately, this led Pacific Landscape Management to become a leader in sustainable solutions, helping customers evaluate their sites for ecological enhancement; using STIHL equipment with reduced exhaust emissions, nature safe fertilizers, and reduced

herbicides; recycling organic waste; and reducing water usage. They also replaced managers' vehicles with more fuel-efficient, low-exhaust-emission vehicles, installed a bioswale to filter parking lot runoff, a rain garden to process roof drains, as well as solar panels to produce their own electricity.

Pacific Landscape Management was recognized as one of Portland's greenest companies by *Oregon Business Magazine* and also won the PLANET environmental improvement award for commercial maintenance and renovation.

## Contributing to the Value of the Landscape

Pacific Landscape Management helps maximize the return on investment, making properties more visible, more valuable and more appropriate for their customers' needs.

"Landscapes are living environments and need thoughtful maintenance and appropriate renovation or that investment can decline in value and hinder the property's image," said Grover.

Pacific Landscape Management makes recommendations such as irrigation system maintenance/solutions as well as landscape



Pacific Landscape Management has more than 100 employees on staff with 35 individual crews.

enhancements and plant replacement to help reduce maintenance and resource use of their clients' landscapes. They evaluate and recommend system upgrades to adapt existing, dated sprinkler systems for improved irrigation efficiency. These modifications reduce irrigation water use and have good return on investment.

The company realized that some existing plants are struggling due to common insect or disease problems. Grover proposed replacing plants instead of constantly spraying to protect. When evaluated over time, plant replacement can have good ROI vs. spraying year after year.

They also offer several lines of ecology seed mixes that can enhance a site's sustainability and long-term maintenance costs. Although not necessarily for everyone, these mixes can be an alternative to traditional lawns because of their self-fertilizing properties, dwarfed growth, and drought tolerances.

### Cutting Costs without Cutting Corners

In researching how to reduce their environmental footprint, Pacific Landscape Management learned that the emission levels of different models of outdoor power equipment vary widely. After extensive research, "STIHL clearly was the market leader in low emissions," according to Grover. In 2008, the company replaced its entire small engine fleet with STIHL equipment that produces low exhaust emissions.

"We had to develop our stance as to how we were supporting sustainability and providing our service in a sustainable way for our customers," said Grover.

The result was an overall reduction of the company's annual emissions by more than 18,000 pounds of hydrocarbons annually – the equivalent of taking 630 cars off the road. In addition, because the newer equipment burns fuel more efficiently, the fuel savings

paid for the conversion in just two years.

Grover's company uses low-exhaust-emission handheld equipment from STIHL exclusively, with a cost-savings of \$100 per unit per year in fuel and totaling savings of more than \$20,000 per year with the 200 STIHL units in inventory, which include blowers, trimmers, hedge trimmers and edgers. "STIHL products benefit us in two ways," said Grover. "First, they have some of the lowest emission output of any brand, which meets our goal to minimize our operations impact on the environment.

Second, they are more fuel efficient (than previous models), which reduces our operational costs."

By streamlining their handheld product line, Pacific Landscape Management was also able to reduce maintenance and parts costs through standardization, in addition to reducing environmental impact and reducing fuel costs.

"STIHL has been the most reliable and longest lasting brand of handheld equipment we have used. It is great when the strongest, longest lasting equipment is also the lowest in emissions," says Grover.



By streamlining their handheld product line, Pacific Landscape Management was also able to reduce maintenance and parts costs.

Pacific Landscape Management continues to implement a vision for a more sustainable future through its constant pursuit of innovation and best practices, by reducing its environmental footprint while also maintaining its reputation for providing outstanding services in the Portland area.

For more information visit [www.pacscape.com](http://www.pacscape.com) or to view details about the low-exhaust-emission equipment from STIHL visit [www.stihlusa.com](http://www.stihlusa.com).

**STIHL**®

# It's All in the Preparation

## TIPS ON WHAT A GREAT CREW LEADER DOES BEFORE HE AND HIS CREW HIT THE ROAD EACH MORNING.

**M**any of a lawn maintenance crew chief's responsibilities need to be addressed prior to leaving the shop in the morning. A great crew chief arrives to work early—and/or stays later—in order to ensure that his crew is ready each day. It's simple: Being *proactive* will reduce your need to be *reactive* down the road.

### BEFORE YOUR CREW ARRIVES

"Make sure you have knowledge of client expectation for each job as well as the time allotted for completion," says Dave Hessong, an organizational health consultant at Pro-Motion Consulting.

Where does that knowledge of client expectation come from? "We've developed a client expectations form," Hessong relates. "It starts with the salesperson who sells the job. The form forces him to get every important question answered so nothing is left out. Then, this written document can be passed along to the crew leader. Verbal instructions leave too much room for error."

Great crew chiefs also accept responsibility for making sure that their crews have all of the necessary equipment for that day's work. Again, written checklists are an invaluable tool.

And speaking of equipment, great crew chiefs take the time to start everything up and perform inspections each morning. They also ensure that basic parts like spark plugs and fuel filters are on board before heading to a job. Additionally, great crew chiefs seek out information and training so they are capable of handling minor repairs in the field.

Great crew chiefs keep their eyes on the weather. That's pretty easy to do with

today's technology, so there's really no excuse for not doing it. If you haven't already, download a local weather app to your smartphone (if you have one), or at least ask to review the local weather forecast on a computer at the shop first thing in the morning. "You have to look at the radar," Hessong points out. "A weather forecast is fine, but a 30% chance of rain doesn't tell you much. The radar will tell you if a bout of rain is 10 miles away, heading for your jobsite."

### WHEN YOUR CREW ARRIVES

Remember that your attitude affects your crew, so start the day on a positive note. Greet each of your crewmembers with something nice to say. Ask them to help load up the truck, but be careful not to *boss* them. While giving orders may become necessary at times, it's not a good way to start the day. "Motivate, don't dominate," Hessong says.

Crew safety is one of your biggest responsibilities. Be sure that each crewmember has his personal safety equipment that will be required for all jobs that day, i.e. safety glasses, gloves, high-visibility vest, ear protection, etc.

You also need to make sure that each crewmember is trained in the proper use of equipment they may operate. Observe and take the necessary steps to correct their improper behavior—which might include additional training offered by you personally. Just be sure to communicate what is happening to your supervisor.

### JOB BY JOB

As pointed out earlier, you as the crew chief are responsible for meeting a client's expectations. At the same time, you are not to exceed the time allotted

for the job. If you find that this is overly difficult to accomplish, then the job may have been undersold. Discuss this with your supervisors.

Finally, you want to evaluate your crew's progress on site and have informal, end-of-day or end-of-job meetings. Take this opportunity to thank them for a job well-done. You can also offer positive criticism to promote continuous improvement.

Never put down your company or its people, especially its salespeople and/or management team. If your crewmembers have a complaint or question, just tell them that you hear them and appreciate their concern, and will communicate it to the necessary people back at the office. ◀

### CHECK OUT OUR ONLINE VIDEO WEB BRIEFINGS

Preparing Your Crew Chiefs to Lead  
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Why Crew Leaders Fail and How to Prevent It  
[greenindustrypros.com/10890595](http://greenindustrypros.com/10890595)

**They're informative, convenient, and totally free!**

*Dave Hessong started his own excavating and snow removal company in 1999. His reputation in the snow removal industry led to opportunities to work at two Winter Olympic Games. Dave is now an organizational health consultant at Pro-Motion Consulting. Visit [mypmcteam.com](http://mypmcteam.com) for more information or email [dave@mypmcteam.com](mailto:dave@mypmcteam.com).*





# 7 Things Great Crew Leaders Do Every Property Visit

## #1. RECOGNIZE IT IS THEIR BABY

"We have our company-wide orientation training right before spring," says Randy Sharpe, maintenance manager at Reinhart Grounds Maintenance in Bloomington, IL. "We tell our maintenance crew leaders that they are our first line of defense."

Great crew leaders are eager to accept this responsibility—and they own it.

That is definitely the case at The Yard Barbours in Elizabethtown, IN. Co-owner Matt Barbour says install crews are given spreadsheets detailing what is to be done on each project. Crew leaders know how many hours they have to complete a project, but also know that they are not to leave a property until everything on that spreadsheet is checked off.

"Regardless of whether you're on a maintenance or landscape crew, you leave the site looking better than it was when you showed up," Barbour relates. "Also, if you see any other problems, let the office know. We do not want the customer telling us about a problem they discovered; we should be telling them."

## #2. MESSES

Reinhart maintenance crew leaders are trained to always perform a complete walk-around before leaving a property. They do this while the rest of the crew is loading up the equipment. They're looking to make sure everything is trimmed up nicely, and that beds and hard surfaces are blown off completely.

There's a fine line when it comes to good trimming. "We train our guys to always trim vertically when they come up to beds, curbs, sidewalks, brick edging or other hard surfaces," Sharpe points out. "This way you don't get that 6- to 8-inch burn-up on the turf. You might not notice

it right away, but it takes its toll."

When trimming around things like trees, fire hydrants or light polls, crews are trained to trim at a 45° angle.

The crew leaders are also looking for grass clumping. If it's really bad, they might have the mower operator pass through for a second cutting. Other times, they'll simply walk through with backpack blowers.

## #3. TURF DAMAGE

Reinhart crew leaders are also trained to look for turf damage. They look for tire ruts, which is then remedied through additional training for that mower operator. They also look for pet spots, signs of grub damage, etc., that may require a lawn care technician to attend to.

## #4. WEED PRESSURE

Reinhart crews are trained to check for weed pressure in turf and beds. If it's getting pretty heavy, they'll make a note in their daily log that it's advisable to get a lawn care crew over to the property as soon as possible. It's a judgment call the crew leader is empowered to make as to whether a certain property should be moved up on the priority list.

## #5. MOISTURE DEFICIENCY

The drought of 2012 was a great example of how important maintenance crews become when things start drying up. "Even on our irrigated properties, our crew leaders would tell us that a given property should be watering five days a week and not just three like they were," Sharpe says. "We'd take that information and share it with the client."



*Randy Sharpe, maintenance manager at Reinhart Grounds Maintenance.*

## #6. DAMAGED SPRINKLER HEADS

Also on the topic of irrigation, Barbour says his maintenance crews are always on the lookout for damaged sprinkler heads. If they find one, they document it and let the office know so an irrigation crew can be scheduled to take care of it.

## #7. COMMUNICATE UP THE CHAIN

Reinhart Grounds Maintenance has started testing the use of mobile devices by some of its crew leaders. The web-based business management software they use, called Boss LM, is accessed by these mobile devices. Thus, crews can refer to and enter new notes directly into this software while still on the property.

Some crews continue to utilize printed checklists/note sheets, which also prove very reliable. Additionally, "Nothing is beyond a text message in this day and age," Sharpe points out. For example: "Hey, we're over on property X and see that the weeds are starting to pop a lot earlier than normal. Might need to get a lawn care crew over here soon to put down some post-emergent." ◀

# Watch your personal stock soar through certification

**E**ver wonder how you could become a more valuable employee, advance your career and maybe make more money? One way is to become certified through the national association known as PLANET.

Becoming Landscape Industry Certified would put you in the top 1% of landscaping professionals across the country. That's right: Of the roughly half a million people employed in the landscaping services industry, fewer than 5,000 have earned Landscape Industry Certified status; roughly 3,600 to be exact.

## Pick your specialty.

The most popular certification is the Landscape Industry Certified Technician - Exterior. But there are several others available, as well.

You can specialize in interior, irrigation, lawn care, horticulture, softscape installation, hardscape installation, turf maintenance or ornamental maintenance. There's even a Landscape Industry Certified Manager program for those who want to solidify their business management and customer service skills.

You should simply choose the certification(s) that best fits what you do, or are looking to do, in the landscaping industry.

**Getting ready to take the test.** If you want to become certified, you have to pass a test. With all tests comes a bit of studying. Most recommended study materials can be found in PLANET's online book store.

David Hupman, a production specialist with The Brickman Group, is both a Landscape Industry Certified Manager

and Technician. He offers the following insight: "Typically one of our crew leaders will get a copy of the study manuals and prepare on their own. When we get close to test time, we'll set up a day with other employees who are already certified to review the skill set required for the exam. Prior to the test, applicants will receive a test book to further help them prepare.

"The important thing we teach," Hupman continues, "is that they need to do it how (the International Certification Council) is asking for it to be done, which may be different than how they would normally do it."



**Taking the test and maintaining certification.** Several of the exams can be completed right on the computer at a PSI computer-based testing center near you (visit [psiexams.com](http://psiexams.com) to locate one). Those exams are: Landscape Industry Certified Manager, Interior Technician, Horticultural Technician, and Lawn Care Technician.

Additionally, tests are often administered at various industry events put on by state and regional associations, such as the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association on June 14. On that note, the Technician Exterior certification requires a hands-on test which obviously must be taken in person. You can visit PLANET's website, [landcarenetwork.org](http://landcarenetwork.org), to keep up with testing dates and locations.

Also with respect to the Technician

## CREW LEADERS PLAY INCREASING ROLE IN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

There are many ways for a landscape company to grow sales. One of the most appealing is to simply sell more products and services to existing clients. Crew leaders are playing an essential role in making this happen.

Companies that are finding success in enlisting crew leaders in the upsell process start off by having clear job descriptions for their crew leaders. Tim Twomey of Ground Hog Landscape Management in Mandeville, LA, is a great example. Here's what he expects of his crew leaders:

- The Landscape Forman is the "face" of the company, and ensures that each and every customer is provided professional, courteous, superb customer service.
- The Landscape Forman is directly responsible for retaining each and every customer through the quality and professionalism of each and every crew member, on each and every visit.
- The Landscape Foreman provides service to residential or commercial customers by making timely lawn/landscape applications, diagnosing and correcting lawn/landscaping problems through service calls and other customer communications, and selling/upselling services to new and/or existing customers, resulting in growth of the customer base.

Exterior test, the written portion is translated into Spanish. The same can be said about the Lawn Care Manager exam offered through the University of Georgia.

Once you've worked so hard to earn your certification, it's important to take the necessary steps to hang onto it. You must recertify every two years by reporting 24 continuing education credits (CEUs) to PLANET. Details can be found on their website. ◀



Shane Oaks and Drew Stampley  
360 Hardware  
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Mark Barbour  
Project Supervisor  
Dennis' 7 Dees  
Portland, Oregon

## Building a green space in Portland's airspace.

Incoming passengers to Portland International Airport are now greeted by a "green" roof, thanks in part to *Dennis' 7 Dees*, a longtime Portland landscaping and garden center. The eco roof project was huge, at 10,000 sq. ft. They installed a modular tray system and a LEED-certified irrigation system. The work was challenging and Mark Barbour says "we couldn't have done it without the reliability and power of our STIHL products, especially our

STIHL Cutquik® cut-off machines." Their environmental commitment is another reason why Barbour and his team swear by low emission STIHL products in this eco-centric northwest city. For their green projects, they stand by STIHL orange.

**To find a dealer, or learn about the full line of STIHL low-emission products: [STIHLusa.com/green](http://STIHLusa.com/green)**

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