

PLANET Hosts Successful Facility Tour

By Lauren Spiers Hunter



One Orlando-area company with some great business ideas to share is PROscape, which welcomed facility tour attendees Wednesday, Nov. 2. Founded in 1995, co-owner Keith O'Dell calls PROscape growth "zero to 10 in 10 years," that is, zero to \$10 million – strong growth from a company without a sales staff or marketing budget.

"PROscape started with a developer who took a chance on us, then passed our name onto another property manager, who passed our name onto another property manager, and so on," explains O'Dell, who co-owns the company with Larry O'Dell and Michele O'Dell. "Our company has never had a salesperson – we've built our sales by building relationships with our clients and trusting that they'll be so

impressed with our service that they'll let their colleagues know about PROscape." With mostly property managers and developers as clients, PROscape notes that 80 percent of its maintenance accounts come from homeowners associations. Making sure those clients look good helps the company grow its business.

In addition to maintenance, which makes up 53 percent of PROscape business, the company's service mix also includes 33 percent landscape enhancements, 10 percent irrigation and 4 percent fertilization and pest control. This year, in an effort to limit residential work without losing revenue, PROscape inaugurated a new company: LawnWorx. Operating as a lawn care and pest control company, LawnWorx adopted the residen-



Attendees to Wednesday's facility tours were welcomed into the PROscape office by Keith O'Dell, one of the company owners. Keith says he's proud that the company has gone from "zero to 10 in 10 years," growing into a \$10 million business since 1995. Photo: GIE Today

tial lawn care accounts that had been previously managed by PROscape. Additionally, PROscape subcontracts all of its new lawn care work to LawnWorx, which also has started receiving subcontracting proposals from other maintenance companies in the area.

With a number of services being offered, O'Dell says that about two years ago PROscape made an operational change to battle labor costs. "We've gone to a four-day workweek, which has saved us a lot of overtime and drive time," O'Dell says. "Working four 10-hour days has helped us save on labor costs and get more of our crewmembers' time dedicated to the jobsites. We've easily cut overtime by 80 percent in the maintenance division and 60 to 70 percent throughout the whole company."

Another cost-saving measure for PROscape comes from a recent operations adjustment in how mechanics and crews document their equipment usage. "We used to roll over equipment in one summer, but now we get one-and-a-half or two summers

out of each piece of handheld equipment," says Operations Manager Dave Kohler. The system is simple. Each crew is assigned a wheeled rack of equipment, such as edgers, blowers, etc., and each crew leader must sign out each item from one of PROscape's mechanics in the morning. The crew leader then rolls the entire rack to their truck for loading. Each piece is accounted for at the end of the day using a form signed by the foreman and initialed by the mechanic.

"If you know you have to return your equipment to the person who'll have to make any repairs, you're a lot less likely to beat-up the machines," Kohler says, noting that the hand-held accountability system has reduced wear on machines significantly over the last year. "Last summer, we had to buy six to seven pieces of equipment because it was misplaced or damaged, but we haven't bought any this year. It's easily saved us \$3,000 to \$4,000 and we can keep the older equipment as back-ups because it's still in good enough

condition to use in a pinch."

Once the trucks are loaded, Larry O'Dell says crews are given important lessons on safe driving. The three primary rules for drivers are: 1) don't back up, 2) don't back up, and 3) don't back up. Reversing, Larry says, is where landscape drivers end up having the most accidents, so it's banned (mostly) at PROscape. After unloading at the end of the day, crews pull their trucks into the company's landscape yard a specific way so all vehicles are facing forward and ready to pull out – not reverse – the next morning. In an instance where backing is necessary, drivers must use spotters for safety.

Also on the drivers' safety front, PROscape has developed a program that it calls its "Drive Safe Initiative." It reads:

- **D**ouble-check equipment
 - **R**espect traffic laws
 - **I**nitiate eye-contact
 - **V**isibility
 - **E**yes moving
-
- **S**afest way out
 - **A**im high in steering
 - **F**ollowing distance
 - **E**liminate distractions.

Larry shared a full write-up of the Drive Safe Initiative's nine-week program in which employees learn each of the above nine safety keys over the course of a couple of months. "In the last two-and-a-half years, this Drive Safe Initiative has helped keep our drivers safe on the busy roads that we have to travel every day," Larry says. "We also give monetary incentives and other rewards to our employees to encourage them to commit these rules to memory and be able to recite and explain each step."

These and other business ideas at PROscape are sure to continue propelling the company into further success. **GIE**



Since PROscape initiated their system of checking equipment in and out at the beginning and end of each day, the company has increased crew accountability and dramatically reduced the expense of replacing damaged or missing equipment. Photo: GIE Today