

FOCUS ON PROPERTY MAINTENANCE/MANAGEMENT

5 QUESTIONS WITH ...

Laura S.D. Greloch, Landscape Architect, The Outdoor Room LLC, Walnutport

Why is property maintenance important?

Property maintenance is more than often an afterthought when considering new landscape projects or renovations. It is very important to review expected maintenance requirements with the client, whether they intend to focus on upkeep themselves or hire out for these services and designing a project to meet those needs.

We typically move right into property maintenance services after the installation of a new project, providing services on a customizable basis which may be as little as spring and fall cleanups to monthly visits which include weeding, pruning, flower care and seasonal display. We continue to put maintenance services in the forefront as an important component of a client's investment and shaping the landscape as it was planned.

Heading into the winter, what is most crucial in terms of property maintenance?

Winter is another excellent aspect of our seasonal landscapes here in the Northeast. A well-designed landscape takes on a whole new dimension with the addition of seasonal color, berries and many other textures – the addition of frost and snow equally add to the aesthetic of a garden that has been well-planned. There are many advantages to preparing for winter to get the most out of your landscape.

Fall cleanups, removing leafy debris, timely cutbacks of herbaceous plantings, fall fertilization, mulching in, snow-load protection and windbreaks for tender plantings as

well as the installation of temporary fencing for areas of the landscape that may be damaged by deer browse. Winterization of irrigation systems and water features is crucial.

Attracting birds to the winter landscape has been one of our favorite things to encourage clients to consider. Setting up additional feeders in both visible and protected spots and providing a diverse seed

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and suet selection will provide a wealth of feathered friends to the landscape.

How do you connect with the community and the business community?

We connect with the community and local businesses through networking, attending and giving educational venues, participating in discussion groups and sharing our knowledge in many ways.

Working with a great team of reputable subcontractors has given us the experience and confidence to manage many large and complex projects.

What advice would you give to someone who runs a small business?

Running a small business has many rewards and challenges. Wearing many hats initially is essential, and maintaining a work-life balance is important.

Diversification in the creative and service industries is key; offering a well-rounded balance of services is what has helped us through lean times. Make time for continuing education, staying fresh with technology and creating opportunity to meet face-to-face with people.

What is the best piece of business advice that you have ever received?

There is no one magical answer to being successful in business, but every now and again I get a tremendous spirit to push forward, which is usually inspired through engaging with mentors in the industry.

Developing your broader business, refining your talents and expertise and defining your niche is recent advice that we have taken to heart. Sharing your thoughts, giving back to the community and connecting with parallel professions have kept us on our toes and moving forward.

Editor's note: Appearing periodically, 5 Questions With spotlights a business professional's take on the economy and other industry issues. If you have a suggestion for a subject for this feature, please email Bill Kline at billk@lvb.com.

CLEANING

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"If I can follow in the footsteps of Matt Tolan, I'm definitely learning the right way."

FILLING A NICHE

Dale Wagner is vice president of distribution at Tri-Dim Filter, a filter manufacturing company. City Wide provides all of the janitorial services at Tri-Dim's 65,000-square-foot warehouse in Upper Macungie Township and recently started providing maintenance such as painting services and toilet replacement.

Wagner said that today's landlords are cutting costs by getting out of the tenant-service business, so City Wide does a good job filling that gap.

"They'll bring in their own supplies if you need something special done, like extra dusting, cleaning or vacuuming," Wagner said.

"They'll quote everything out and give you a fair price, and get it done in a very timely manner. It's kind of like having your own employee but pay as you go."



'I know a lot more. I know how to get from Point A to Point B a lot quicker.'

— Matt Tolan, on the evolution of his stewardship of City Wide Maintenance of Lehigh Valley

RISE OF TECHNOLOGY

In City Wide's future, Tolan said he sees technology becoming more prevalent in the commercial maintenance industry. He cited the example of being able to go into a building with an iPad, write quality checkups and take

inventory of bathroom supplies, whereas a lot of the work had always been manual, involving driving from one place to another to see what people need.

Although Tolan said he envisions fewer human resources needed to service the customer, good business will always come down to people.

"The better our service providers, the better we're going to be," he said.

The decision to outsource or go in-house requires a detailed evaluation.

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MAINTENANCE

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phone call to an off-site vendor. The company must balance the needs of the site against the decision to outsource this work.

The company must negotiate an acceptable response time, such as 24 or 72 hours. A longer response time can equate to more downtime and lost production.



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