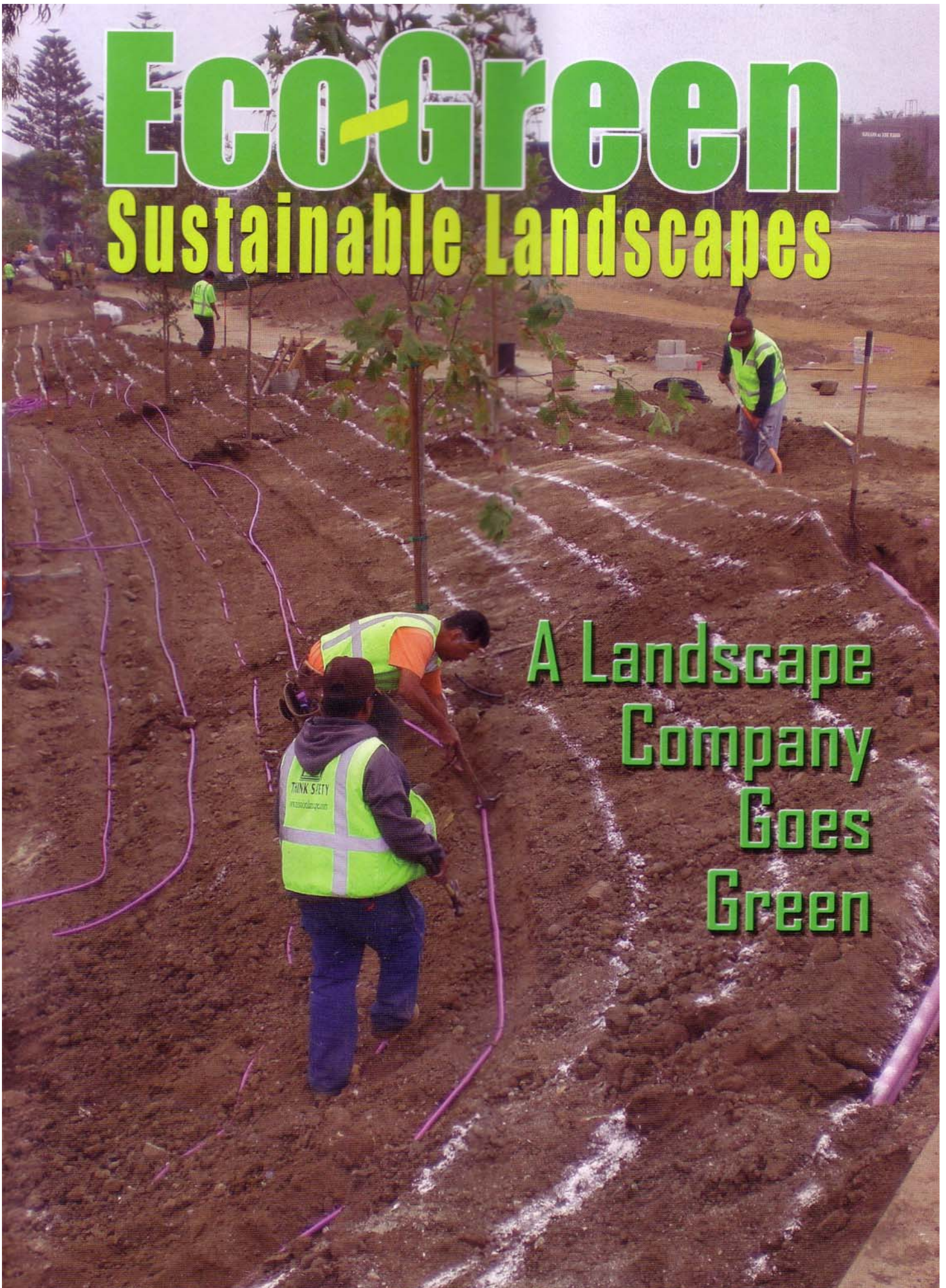


EcoGreen

Sustainable Landscapes

A Landscape
Company
Goes
Green





A Landscape Company Goes Green



About 10 years ago, David DuBois, president and CEO of Mission Landscape Companies, Inc., Irvine, California, saw the handwriting on the wall. Little did he realize that this was the beginning of taking his company from a traditional landscape maintenance company to a 'green' company. The year was 2000 and the green movement was barely recognized by mainstream America.

Landscape companies back then did business in the conventional way. 'Going green' was not in their vocabulary; they were content to do business as usual. In 2000, DuBois' company wasn't any different. He felt there must be a way to save landfill fees and generate additional income, and he could also envision his company's contribution to being eco-friendly.

DuBois' father, Wayne, started Mission Landscape Companies, Inc., in 1970. During those halcyon days, there was a lot of growth, especially in the Southern California area. New office buildings and office parks were going up all over the place, and Wayne recognized that there was a need for another landscape maintenance company. .

In the early '80s, after graduating from high school, David DuBois went to work at Mission Landscape. For the next 10 years or so,



he worked during the day learning the trade, and going to college at night—taking courses that would help round out his background. During this time, DuBois was not only learning the business, he was being groomed to take over the reins of the company when his father decided to retire.

Landscape companies—especially landscape maintenance companies—generate a lot of green waste, which they haul away to a landfill. Of course, there are fees to pay as well as the labor costs to haul it to the site. Then there's the additional wear and tear on the vehicle. In some cases, smaller companies would have a trash bin onsite to dump their waste.

DuBois began to plan for growing the company. He wrote a three-, five-, and ten-year plan and, as part of the plans, DuBois added tree trimming services, landscape construction, and landscape architec-

ture, through a recently acquired landscape architectural firm.

One of the items that kept popping up on these plans was the high cost of the fees to the landfill. This was a figure that would continually increase, not only because of the company's additional volume but because the landfill operations were always increasing their fees.

There had to be a better way to get rid of the green waste. If

he could eliminate those costs, it would definitely reflect on the bottom line.

DuBois seriously began to research ways to get rid of this 'green waste.' He knew that people were making compost from green waste. During his search, he found that the State of California had mandated that cities and municipalities reduce their waste. Landfills were filling up quicker than many had projected. There was great concern that in some parts of this country, we would run out of landfills.

California was one state that took the initiative. They would help finance facilities that would take material out of the waste stream. DuBois applied to the California Integrated Waste Management Board (now known as Cal

Recycle) for some funds; it was the beginning of Mission Landscape Companies going green. That was 11 years ago.

The company acquired a few acres of land, purchased some equipment, set up a separate division, and they were on the move. "We felt we could recycle the green waste into mulch and sell it back to

More importantly, getting involved with green waste ten years ago has given Mission Landscape a window of opportunity. DuBois says that he can definitely see his company being a totally green company in a short period of time.



some of our customers who wanted mulch," said DuBois. "It was always our intention that this division would be profitable, and it is."

"Some nearby arborists bring their wood chips to us," said DuBois. "It saves them the dump fees and we use these in our compost pile."

It may sound like an easy solution to a problem, but then again nothing is that easy. The process of taking green waste and composting it to turn it into mulch is a tedious one. However, before you even get to that place, the red tape and restrictions placed on an operation such as this is mind boggling.

One of the requirements by both the California Integrated Waste

Management Board as well as city planning was that the processing facility be located in a Recycled Material Development Zone. In addition, each month samples are taken and sent to a lab for testing. Another sample is sent to still another lab for testing for pathogens, heavy metals or physical contaminants.

The process of composting is not difficult, once you pile the green waste and mix it with wood chips that you chipped from tree branches; water just needs to be added to begin the process. Heat will break down the material. When the pile

for mulch increases. Water treatment plants that have contaminated soil will put down 4,000 or 5,000 yards of mulch. On the other hand, material that does not meet the strict standards is sold in bulk for use in commercial agriculture. Some of this material is sold to energy plants that burn it to produce energy and then sell it to electrical companies.

"Recycling green waste closes the loop of being green and sustainable," explained DuBois. "It is also a profit center for us. More importantly, getting involved with green waste ten years ago has given Mis-

sion Landscape a window of opportunity." DuBois says that he can definitely see his company being a totally green company in a short period of time.

"We work for some great clients

love it. It gives them something to show their residents that they are becoming more environmentally compliant. The people who use the parks feel more comfortable knowing organic material is being used."

Another component to being green is water management. "This is something we've been doing since the '90s," DuBois said. "We just recently retrofitted five acres from conventional irrigation to drip." Using smart controllers and low-precipitation sprinkler heads have allowed Mission Landscape to offer their clients a solid water conservation program. "Good water management is another key to being a green company."

Mission Landscape is now looking to replace their lawn mowers with propane and other fuel-alternative mowers. They have approximately 150 mowers.

In 2004, Wayne DuBois was ready to leave the company to retire and pursue other interests. Arrangements were made for David to purchase the company, and part of the company was sold in an Employee Stock Ownership Program (ESOP) to their employees.

These 530 employee owners keep the morale high; some of these owners have been around for 35 years. This could be one reason why Mission Landscape has grown so large. In the past 41 years, they have seen their volume balloon to \$26 million annually.

Mission Landscape recently received three outstanding awards for excellence by its industry peer group, the California Landscape Contractors Association. Because they are eco-friendly, maintain a low carbon footprint, and stay environmentally compliant, Mission Landscape will grow even more as the demand for sustainable landscapes and being green continues to grow. 🌱



Mulch is the end product of composting.

gets to be 110 to 120 degrees, it has to be turned. Allow three weeks to cure, and when this dries out, you have mulch.

Once the product has been tested, it is separated by quality. If it meets the requirements, Mission Landscape can then sell their output to their clients and others, including some of their competitors.

Because of the way mulch is applied, Mission purchased a blower truck to apply the mulch. "Two guys can put down 60 yards of mulch in about three hours," said DuBois. "We now offer this added service to our competitors."

This portion of their business continues to grow as the demand

as well as a few cities," said DuBois. "We're helping these clients become more eco-friendly. Each month, cities have to report to the state how much tonnage they've withheld from the landfills. The cities that Mission Landscape works with show substantial amounts withheld from the waste stream. Private clients also like the idea of doing something positive for the environment. They use our recycling of green waste as part of being good corporate citizens."

With the green movement picking up speed, Mission Landscape is on the right path, taking green to the next level. "We're beginning to use organic fertilizers in some parks," says DuBois. "Our cities