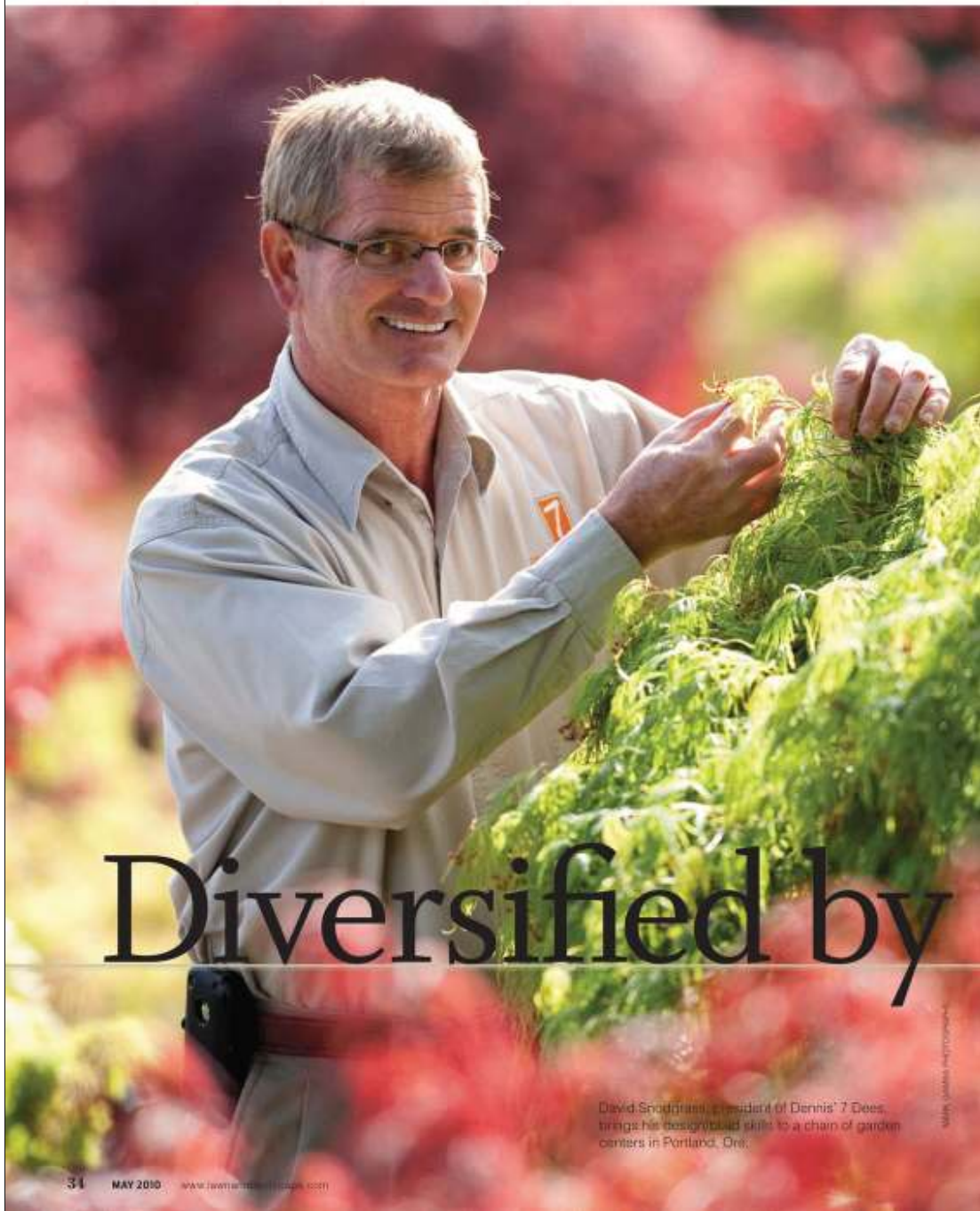


2010 BREAKTHROUGH



Diversified by

David Snodgrass, president of Dennis' 7 Dees, brings his design-build skills to a chain of garden centers in Portland, Ore.

MARIE JOHNSON PHOTOGRAPHY

A move back into the garden center business helps Dennis' 7 Dees stay stable in an uncertain world.

After a four-year hiatus, David Snodgrass decided it was time to get back into retail.

To diversify his company, Snodgrass, president of Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping & Garden Centers in Portland, Ore., and two of his brothers returned to the foundation their grandparents built more than 80 years ago and bought back a group of garden centers his brother Dennis had sold off. And by adding a hybrid DIY design service for homeowners, they've been able to leverage those storefronts into a lead-generating machine for his landscape division.

GETTING BACK IN THE GAME. Snodgrass, who's president-elect of PLANET, and his siblings moved back into garden centers due to their love of plants and their history. Their maternal grandparents started the business in the 1920s – Bernard Esch running a lawn maintenance operation and his wife, Florence, growing rhododendrons in Portland. David's dad, Robert, took over and expanded into retail in the 1950s, naming the new company after his seven children: Daryle Linn, Dennis, Drake, Dan, David, Drew and Dean.

"I, and I think my brothers share this, love every aspect of the green industry. One more piece of that industry is a good thing," Snodgrass says.

And the company's five garden centers are a boost for business. Besides better discounts for bulk purchases from suppliers and savings on administrative overhead, they act as a great source of leads – and sales – for its landscaping division.

KEEPING CUSTOMERS. When homeowners will order a big installation, the company's landscaping division can handle it. But those clients aren't ordering a new project every other month – maybe every few years, if the economy's good to them, or if they buy a new house. During the in-between times, Snodgrass' retail arm can maintain contact with them – flats of annuals for the front beds or tomato plants for their vegetable garden – instead of losing them to another garden center.

"We lost them, I guess, and allowed them to go to competing garden cen-



Mulyssa Melco, Planners program manager at Dennis' 7 Dees, runs the company's hybrid DIY design service.

ters, and sometimes those competing garden centers offer landscaping services," Snodgrass says. "This way, we're able to service our customer regardless of where they are in their buying cycle. We're able to keep their attention and keep them as an ongoing customer throughout that process."

And the sales process works in the opposite direction, too. The landscaping division has a presence at each of the five garden centers, and all the sales associates are trained to guide customers to the right level of project – from DIY to do-it-for-me.

"A lot of times we can turn that customer into either a bigger landscape sale and still have them do the work themselves, or give them a proposal do to the work. It's been a real good source of leads," Snodgrass says.

ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE. And, the garden center purchases helped stabilize the 200-plus employee company's balance sheet: 24 percent of its \$18.5 million in revenue last year came from residential design/build; 28 percent from commercial bid/build; 18 from landscape main-

design

By Chuck Bowen

2010 BREAKTHROUGH

2010 Breakthrough is an ongoing series of success stories from the green industry. Each month, *Lawn & Landscape* and its sister horticulture publications – *Nursery Management* and *Production*, *Greenhouse Management and Production* and *Garden Center* – will profile businesses that have found success by working across the industry.

To see more Breakthrough stories from the rest of the green industry, visit www.lawndesignlandscape.com/2010breakthrough. How are you working across the green industry to succeed in 2010? Send your stories to Managing Editor Chuck Bowen at cbowen@lga.net or call 330-523-5330 and you could be featured in an upcoming issue of *Lawn & Landscape*.

tenance and 29 percent from retail. "It bucks the economy trend," Snodgrass says of his retail division's performance this year – up when other areas are even or down. "That goes back to the diversification – the green industry is never hitting on all cylinders in all areas. Sometimes there are pockets of strength and pockets of weakness. Being diversified allows us to leverage the pockets of strength into the pockets of weakness."

Snodgrass stresses that, for now, retail is a pocket of strength. But it can change with the weather. For example, Snodgrass' five garden centers pulled in \$35,000 total during a recent rainy weekend. That same weekend last year, in nice weather, they made \$113,000.

"You just have to suck it up, and sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. This year, sales for the garden centers are up 60 percent (overall). We had an early spring, maybe there's some pent-up demand showing. There's a huge interest in vegetable gardening. There are just a lot of things that bode well for being in the garden center business this year."

PLANSCAPER PROFITS. One of those things is Snodgrass' Planscaper program. Homeowners interested in installing plants themselves, but who want a professional design to work from, can sit down with one of Snodgrass' designers and get a professional plan. (See "How Planscaper Works," at right.)

The idea is that the company understands things like creating outdoor spaces, privacy screens, complimenting structures, sight lines and overall curb appeal, so homeowners won't have to.

"We're trained landscape designers and contractors. That's our grounding," he says. "We have brought that into the retail garden center arena, so we have a level of professional design that's not going to be part of a garden center that expands into landscaping or a garden center that's going to offer some type of DIY service." 

The author is managing editor of *Lawn & Landscape*.

TIMOTHY DANISH PHOTOGRAPHY



HOW PLANSCAPER WORKS

Dennis' 7 Dees' Planscaper program targets DIY homeowners – the people who want a big installation, but want to do the heavy lifting themselves – and turns these leads into a revenue stream that a strict design/build division might ignore.

The company has a professional designer on staff at each of its five garden centers, and creates plans for homeowners who want "the power of a professional plan" without hiring a contractor to do all the work. The fee? Clients can participate for as little as \$500. The design fee goes toward plant costs.

They bring photographs of their home and meet in-store with the designer – no home visits required – who puts their ideas on paper.

The program has its own manager, who oversees the designers, and all garden center staff members are trained on how to talk to customers about the program. The company's revenue goal for Planscaper is \$300,000 this year.

"The most important thing customers can have is the plan. It doesn't matter if you're going to do the work yourself or have it done for you," Snodgrass says. "The plan is the means to the end that ensures every step of the way you're going to have a great product. It's totally invaluable."

More on Planscaper

Download samples of Dennis' 7 Dees' Planscaper program marketing materials at www.lawncandlandscape.com/2010breakthrough.



www.lawncandlandscape.com MAY 2010 37

BETTER RESULTS



4-Speed™ XT Saves Contracts

APPLICATION RATE:

1.3 oz./1,000 sq ft of 4-Speed XT plus spreader-sticker (1 oz./gallon finished spray)

APPLICATION EQUIPMENT:

LT Rich Z-Sprayer, 1/3 gal spray tips

TIMING:

July 13, 2009

SUMMARY:

"This was not ideal herbicide application timing for ground ivy control, but we still had great results on it and all the other weeds on the 4-Speed XT label. As a result, we saved several contracts. We'll be using a lot more 4-Speed XT and other Nufarm products in the future."

4-SPEED™ XT

Better Choices.
Better Business.



www.nufarm.com/us

Nufarm Turf & Ornamentals: 800-345-3330
© 2009 Nufarm, Inc. Always read and follow label instructions. 4-Speed™ is a trademark of Nufarm.

www.lawncandlandscape.com/readerservice #28

Z-SPRAY VS. the COMPETITION

Z-SPRAY	Competitor A	Competitor B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> True Zero Turn Maneuverability By-Pass Agitation All Stainless Steel Chassis 220 LB Hopper Capacity Optional Auxiliary Tank 50' Hose Reel for Spot Spraying G.P.S. Speedometer 8 m.p.h. Transport Speed 3 Section Independent Boom Hydraulic Drive Hopper 3 to 20' Variable Spread Width 4.0 GPM Pump Standard 18 Gallon Spray Capacity Up to 1 Gallon per 1000 capacity Air Injection Low Drift Nozzles 16" Front Tires 20" Rear Tires 15 HP Electric Start Engine Locking Caster System 5 Gallon Gas Tank 	<p>Z-Max & Intermediate</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>

L.T. Rich Products
Call us at: (877) 482-0040
or visit us at: www.zspray.com

Why choose anything else?

www.lawncarelandscape.com/readerservice - #29

AUTOMATE YOUR SUCCESS

with **GroundsKeeper Pro** business software

Organize your business better with GroundsKeeper Pro business software. It's specially designed for the lawn care and landscaping industry, easy to use and affordable...

FEATURES INCLUDE:

- Time & Materials
- Estimating
- Scheduling
- Optional credit card processing
- Income & Expense Reporting
- Contracts
- Routing
- Billing

JUST \$399

SAVE THOUSANDS OVER SIMILAR PROGRAMS

FREE TRIAL

ADKAD TECHNOLOGIES / 1.800.586.4683 / WWW.ADKAD.COM/FREEDEMO.HTM

www.lawncarelandscape.com/readerservice - #30



WANT TO GET INTO GARDEN CENTERS?

Nearly a third of Dennis' 7 Dees' \$18.5 million in revenue comes from its five garden centers. Here, president David Snodgrass shares his tips for landscape companies entering the retail sector. — as told to Chuck Bowen

A garden center is a whole different animal. You need specialists who know retail garden centers as managers. There's an education in retail plant quality versus a landscape. The customer is going to pick up every single plant and look at it 360 degrees before they buy it. You can't just think of it as more of the same.

If you don't have some proven manager who knows the retail side of things, and you're trying to open a garden center with your skill set and mindset of a landscaper, you're in for a rude awakening.

It's a big, huge challenge to get people to your doorstep. That's all we want to do — we want to bring customers to our doorstep. Once they're there, the rest of the program and what they see is going to keep them there and bring them back.

In the spring on good-weather Saturdays, every garden center is busy. If the weather is bad, it just adds up to a great season or a poor season. If you have a wet spring, it's going to make it impossible to have a great season.

I would not buy a company that was not already successful. To think you're going to turn it around is a pipe dream.

The trend is for multiple locations in order to average down your costs. It takes a lot of marketing to get customers to come to your door. If you have to cover that with sales from one location, that's difficult to do. The trend is roll ups, and there is still a place for mom-and-pop independents, but that's really hands on.

You have to love plants to be in retail. If you really are an enthusiast about the industry, and have passion and energy, it can be a lot of fun for the right person. For the wrong person, it can be just the opposite.

It's really seasonal; you've got to weather the cold. You've got to make sure you can keep your staff around — that creates a good foundation to build on.

If you could open your doors for four months and close them, you'd be highly profitable. Spring and fall are profitable. Summer and winter can be long. Those are tough months. You've still got to pay the bills.

www.lawncarelandscape.com