

# Morrison Lawn & Landscape

*Serving Gastonia & Bessemer City*

www.morrisonlawn.com

(704)813-2545



Photography by Jenny Paquette

## The Grass is ris'...Need your lawn mowed?

### *Entrepreneur Goes from Corporate World to Backyard Business*

Joe Morrison founded his lawn and landscape service company in January of 2001 after twenty years with the environmental engineering and safety division of FMC Lithium Corporation where he worked directly with the landscape maintenance contractors to coordinate landscape needs around the chemical plant facility. When Joe was offered the opportunity for early retirement, he decided to take advantage of the opportunity to start his own business by applying the skills he learned in landscape maintenance to residential lawn care. "I'd been thinking about starting my own business for a long time, and after discussing it with my wife, I knew the time was right. "

From the outset, Joe was determined to keep his business focused on residential yard maintenance. "I wanted to do the work with my own hands, not manage a crew of workers. I wanted to know my

customers on a first name basis, and to give each one personal attention, treating the needs of their yard one-on-one, not as part of a cookie-cutter system." He has kept to that plan with the exception of having his wife join the business in 2009, and hiring seasonal help for fall aeration.

One way Joe meets the individual needs of his customers is by giving customers the freedom to choose which services they want, and billing accordingly. While one customer may want all yard work done, including cutting, fertilizing, pruning, annual plantings, mulching and leaf blowing, another may want only one service. Joe manages each account to the suitability of the customer. Customers' service plans can also vary by month or season.

Weather plays a key role in lawn care because it impacts the timing of all

## *Services Offered*

### Lawn care service:

Mowing, edging, and blowing down hard surfaces.

### Horticultural maintenance:

Tree, shrub, and ornamental care (Pruning, feeding, and disease control)  
Design and installation of seasonal annuals  
Weed control in ornamental beds  
Air blown mulch  
Long leaf pine needles

### Customized turf programs

#### February

Round one pre-emergent herbicide and spring fertilizer

#### April

Round two pre-emergent and spring fertilizer with the addition of broad-leaf weed herbicide

#### June

Fungicide treatment for brown patch with the addition of chelated iron

#### September

Core aeration, fescue overseed, starter fertilizer, and fast-acting pelletized limestone

#### Leaf Removal

Debris removal, blow out ornamental beds, and leaf vacuum of lawn

**Herbicide treatments** as needed for broad-leaf weeds, grassy weeds, and nutsedge suppression

**Insecticide treatments** as needed for grub worms and fire ant control

services. Since Joe doesn't have to worry about keeping a crew constantly employed, he works when it's most beneficial to the yard. For example, he doesn't work in a yard drenched by rain or dry from drought because either extreme can damage the landscape. This attention to weather forecasts also applies during



fertilizing and fungicide treatment seasons so that the chemicals are used to their best potential. Changes in weather and seasons create and magnify plant diseases. Therefore plotting the weather



forecasts is an integral part of his job.

Joe isn't one to mince words when it comes to saving the customer time and money. "The first thing I settle with customers is for them to determine their budget. A landscape budget helps me to guide the customer to what

materials and services best fit their needs. Of course, the decision is ultimately up to the customer to determine what they want done, but there's no need to waste my time or theirs discussing projects that are outside of the want/need/afford reality." In addition to mowing, customers may choose to have pruning and planting done, and/or pine needles applied to flower



beds, but if they have extensive needs, he will help them adjust their ideas into a plan that works within their budget.

Hardscapes (patios, walkways, decks, retaining walls and water features) aren't part of his regular business because such jobs require extensive time and would leave his other customers without their regular weekly services, but if a customer wants special landscape projects done, Joe will oversee the work by sub-contracting the job, thereby saving the homeowner the hassle of dealing with more than one firm.

## Business Tips

Joe Morrison didn't immediately jump into mowing lawns. First he developed a business plan. He knew from the outset that he wouldn't have instant financial gain because he had to invest in capital costs of equipment: a truck, trailer, mower, leaf blowers, trimmers and chain saw. In addition to the equipment, he also had to consider the cost of consumable products such as fuel, herbicides, and fungicides. He took a loss the first year. The second year, he broke even, but by the sixth year, he was holding steady and making a decent living.

Now, twelve years later, Joe keeps his business profitable with an ever vigilant eye on his business plan. "Equipment repair and replacement is a constant

issue because continual use quickly deteriorates parts, especially mower blades, which I have to replace on a regular basis." He restricts the cost by doing all maintenance and most repair work himself, but he must factor in a set number of hours per week strictly for such maintenance work, as well as figure in the cost of the parts when planning his budget.

Another aspect of a running a profitable business is keeping a keen eye on national business projections that forecast the cost of fuel and other chemicals. Fluctuating fuel costs can play havoc on profit margins. Therefore, Joe subscribes to multiple business journals that help him budget accordingly. He applies this dependency on fuel to determining job

costs by taking note of yard size and slope, and calculating the cost of running equipment for the job. He then adds in equipment maintenance figures, as well as the cost of fertilizers and herbicides if the customer wants those included in their maintenance plan.

Avoiding surprise expenses is imperative in a small business. "I spend a lot of time on maintaining my equipment and keeping up with business and weather forecasts, but that's what's made my business self-sustaining."

Keeping a small business in the black requires a lot of time and energy, but Joe has no regrets. "I love what I do and I make a decent living," he says. And that's what small business is all about.

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