



Maintenance in the mix

The team at Juniper made it a priority to focus on growing its maintenance side and the move has paid off with 40 percent growth.

BY: BRIAN HORN



Brandon Duke and Dan deMont focused more on maintenance work in 2016 and grew the company by 40 percent.
Photo courtesy of Juniper Landscaping

A commitment to growing its maintenance division without losing focus on the construction side has catapulted Juniper Landscaping in Fort Meyers, Florida, from number 42 in last year's ranking to 29 this year.

Owner Brandon Duke says his father, Mike, who started the company more than three decades ago and is now chairman, intended to have a 50/50 mix between maintenance and construction, but the construction industry was so busy, it was hard to keep up on the maintenance side. The company's 2008 revenue was \$3 million compared to \$49 million in 2016.

"We were growing so fast that to sit back and say we are growing disproportionately, we need to grow this other aspect of our business when you are doubling in size is not something you can really do," Duke says, "Once we realized how disproportionate our revenue had gotten, we stood back and looked at some ways to even things out."

That meant hiring someone whose only focus was to obtain maintenance work, and having everyone in the company commit to selling a maintenance package after an installation job.

But changing the mindset of employees wasn't done overnight and took constant communication of the message.

JUNIPER LANDSCAPING

2017 Ranking: 30

2016 Revenue: \$49 million

Location: Fort Myers, Fla.

"In all of our meetings, when we set goals for the company, when we have public conversations with staff, we continued to reiterate what our goals were and what we wanted to be as a company," Duke says. "And we wanted to be a stable and balanced company that is built to last and that can weather the storms of ups and downs in the economy."

Before the maintenance push, the company was at 85/15 mix but now have it closer to a 70/30 mix. Vice President Dan deMont says the company has succeeded in converting about 70 percent of their installs on a maintenance package. To avoid a slowdown on the construction side, the company has dipped its toe in acquisitions by buying Turner Tree & Landscape in December, and now have private equity backing, though Duke and his father and still maintain majority ownership.

"It's a piece of our growth strategy going forward," Duke says. "Some of it is simple math of wanting to get to 50/50 and you don't want to stop growth in install so you may need to buy some maintenance focused companies."

One major benefit to acquisitions is expanding into new geographical markets quickly, deMont says. "If we were to buy a midsize maintenance company it gives us the opportunity to grow that maintenance only branch into a maintenance and installation branch," he says.

Mike Cox was hired as COO recently and the company now has employees whose job is not to only sell jobs, but manage it from start to finish and continue a relationship with the client.

"They aren't just selling the job and moving on," deMont says. "That's something we've never had."