

# Looking Nationally, Serving Locally



Source: [www.TurfMagazine.com](http://www.TurfMagazine.com)

TideWater Landscape Management's rebranding emphasizes the trust of a handshake

## **Tidewater Landscape Management**

**Founded:** 1984

**Headquarters:** Garden City, Ga.

**Founder:** Eddie DeLoach

**Markets:** Operations in Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, Kansas and New Mexico

**Services:** Turf management, plant management, tree care, mole cricket control, fire ant protection, shrub bed weed control, mowing and full grounds management, ornamental options, pine straw and mulch, landscape installation, irrigation, retaining walls, hydroseeding, brick and paver design, erosion control, aquatic services, parking lot services, trash services, porter services, property management and pressure washing

**Employees:** More than 250

**Website:** [www.tidewaterusa.com](http://www.tidewaterusa.com)

In 1983, Eddie DeLoach came across a magazine highlighting a landscaping company that had reached \$1 million in revenue. He read the article and thought, "I can do that." At that time, DeLoach was working as the district manager for Kaiser Chemical in North Carolina. He was climbing the corporate ladder and had a promising future. However, he could not shake the feeling of one day owning his own business. In the midst of all this, DeLoach survived an episode of spinal meningitis. When the doctors told him, "It was close, but you're going to make it," he knew that it was time to turn that dream into a reality. So, after a few months, he packed up his wife and two children and headed home to Garden City, Ga., to start TideWater Landscape Management in 1984.

DeLoach says, "My wife thought I was crazy. The only person who thought I was crazier than she did was my father." His dad told him, "You have a great job. Why would you leave this security to cut grass?" Nevertheless, DeLoach used the \$7,300 he had in retirement and a note co-signed with his dad and embarked on his dream.

### **30 years and counting**

Over the course of three decades, DeLoach has grown his business from a landscape company with a Toyota truck, Ditch Witch trailer and Gravely riding mower to a \$10 million nationwide grounds management company. He built the business the old-fashioned way: he relies on word-of-mouth for business development and a firm handshake to finalize contracts. This method of business remains at the core of TideWater. DeLoach believes in this grassroots approach. However, during the past five years he's seen the landscape industry change, and he knew he had to change with it.



Left to right: Account Manager Kevin Collins, Account Manager Matt Shelton, General Manager Darren Emerick, President Eddie DeLoach, General Manager Chris Mashburn, VP of Operations and Development Joe Janssen, Vice President Jimmy DeLoach, General Manager Lynn Tootle

### **Something new**

Fast forward to 2011, and DeLoach's daughter, Tara Rocker, sat across from him and listened to him talk about the future of TideWater. New sales were not keeping up with cancellations and he was unsure of the reason. He asked, "Why doesn't everyone, especially the people that I know here in my hometown of Savannah, use TideWater? We have a great product; we have great people. What are we missing?" As they discussed it further, Rocker, who also serves as TideWater's director of marketing, asked him, "Where is TideWater going? What is your dream?" He said, "Tara, I want this company to be a national company that competes on a national level while maintaining our local roots. I want to deliver personal service nationwide."



TideWater is convinced that integrity and intelligence are better indicators of a job candidate's chances for success in its growing company than experience. The company offers employees a matching 401K plan and health insurance.

PHOTOS COURTESY TIDEWATER LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT.

It was time to make sure TideWater was delivering this message to its constituents. She knew that if people heard this story and became familiar with the personality behind the quality service, it would mean more than just hiring "someone to cut the grass." First on the list, updating the website to provide continuity for the company's five divisions: grounds management, military installation grounds management, landscape design and installation, lawn treatments and fertilization, and, finally, parking lot maintenance. She thought, "How would people know who to call if we did not tell them?"

## **Where was TideWater?**

The next week, the father-daughter team sat down with two website designers and described what they were looking for in the redesign. The website had to tell customers that TideWater had been around for 30 years. They wanted the website to say, "We know what we are doing." When the final product was delivered two weeks later, the design was a complete miss.

Where was the TideWater they had described? The only image that stood out was the smiling faces of the owners, and that was a problem. Rocker knew that her father and her uncle, Jimmy DeLoach, vice president of TideWater, wanted the company to surpass their identities. She knew the company needed to make an investment in order to look like the national company it had become.

## **Who is TideWater?**

TideWater worked with Tytan Advertising, a national company located in the same town, for six months to answer the questions, "Who is TideWater? What does TideWater believe? Where is TideWater going? How will it get there?" The DeLoach brothers plunged into this process with the same enthusiasm DeLoach had when he started the company in 1984.

They decided TideWater should embrace all of its divisions as part of the whole. Today, the company identifies itself as a full grounds management company, offering all environment-enhancing services to customers ranging from the neighbor down the street to military installations across the United States. The importance of protecting the environment has become critical for the company and its clients. As water becomes an even scarcer resource, conservation is vital. Consequently, TideWater has started a water conservation campaign for all its markets. With educated irrigation auditors and advice from LEED-certified agents, TideWater shares its knowledge with clients.

## **Remember who you are**

Philosophically, the DeLoach brothers want to "stay close to their roots." With the words of their parents, "Remember who you are and where you came from," echoing in their ears, it's no wonder this thought is at the heart of the company. TideWater is a family organization, and as the company continues to expand, it does so without forsaking its history. DeLoach says that even as a 9-year-old, "I liked the look of a well-kept home. I loved seeing the straight lines running up and down a freshly mowed lawn, smelling the sweet grass and feeling the texture of it in my fingertips." He and his brother have devoted nearly 30 years to bringing that passion to TideWater's clients.

## **Moving ahead as a family**

There's no question that the brothers want the next generation to carry this vision and build on it. In doing so, TideWater, along with DeLoach's son, Adam, recently acquired Fryar's Landscaping in Oklahoma. Adam is manager and owner of this location. With this acquisition and other startups, TideWater differentiates itself from other national landscaping companies by retaining

its current employees or hiring locally when opening a new location. Additionally, the company supports local philanthropies and communities to benefit the people who work at TideWater as they live and raise families in these communities. Though three generations currently work at TideWater, all members of the company are part of the larger TideWater family. With matching 401K plans and health insurance benefits available to all employees, it's evident the DeLoaches believe in taking care of those who, in their words, "take care of them." Jimmy says, "TideWater is a company based on a foundation of personal conviction and walk of faith. We care about our people. We make our decisions each and every day as if we were making them for our family."

## **Coaching the team**

The DeLoaches believe that company growth begins with the employees. Jimmy, a former football player at The University of Georgia and football coach for Georgia Southern University, starts each week with an email to educate the members of his "team." These include anecdotes from his personal experiences and questions regarding management. No matter the topic, he signs each email, "Jimmy D, TideWater University."

The philosophy at the company is to promote from within before looking elsewhere. When asked why, DeLoach explains, "We try to first provide the opportunities to the people who have carried us. They understand our process, what we expect and who we are."

TideWater believes in hiring people that possess character, intelligence and integrity. Aside from making for a more reliable person within the organization, "A person with these credentials positively affects your bottom line," says Jimmy. "Someone like this will invariably take less time to train, decrease production time, have fewer accidents, and increase the overall perception of your business" – a win for all parties involved.

## **Question everything**

The rebranding process made the DeLoaches question more than just their image and philosophy. It required them to take a good hard look at the company's structure. Consequently, they saw the need for a management shakedown. With locations in 20 cities across the United States and 250 members strong, they knew TideWater was growing out of its management "shoes." They realized they could no longer drive the vision of the company to the level for which they aimed without the help of a top-notch management staff.

## **New management team**

In the fall of 2011, DeLoach introduced a new management structure. While keeping himself at the helm, his brother refocused his efforts to all aspects of government and military services, making him the source of business development and quality control for all clients involved with privatization in family housing maintenance, landscape installation and federal contracts. TideWater's chief financial officer, G. Thomas "Tommie" Head, is responsible for the fiscal strength and budgetary constraints for the entire TideWater

Group. With five companies under the TideWater umbrella, accounting control is paramount to success. Next, DeLoach introduced a new role in management with Joe Janssen as vice president of business development and operations.

Janssen was not new to Tidewater's operations, as he had previously provided financial and management consulting services a couple years earlier. At that time, he had already joined as the general manager of TideWater of Jacksonville. He has over 25 years of progressive, green industry experience, managing portfolios that included commercial, association management and resorts while growing revenues from \$2 million to more than \$16 million.

Since assuming his new role, Janssen has hired business developers in Jacksonville and Pensacola, Fla., and implemented a sales program for the commercial markets in those towns, as well as Savannah, Ga. With business developers in each market, TideWater is able to identify opportunities for continued growth in the coming years.

Safety in the workplace is the top priority. With a safety program and training in place, TideWater's safety manager takes ownership to ensure that "every day is a safe day" at TideWater. Account managers at each location support the company's general managers. Their role is to provide safety control, quality control and customer service to TideWater's clientele. Jimmy DeLoach Sr., who just turned 80, leads the customer service program in Savannah, meeting with each client, methodically inspecting their property and sharing ideas regarding their location. This is just one example of the personalized service that TideWater prides itself on.

## **Bring it all together**

The end of the discovery process with Tytan resulted in a new management structure and new brand image that portrayed a refined, yet refreshingly nostalgic, logo and motto to launch company into the next 30 years. The new logo places the word "TideWater" surrounding an updated palm tree. DeLoach's wife, Cynthia, drew the original TideWater palm at their kitchen table after he told her what he wanted to name the company. He chose the name "TideWater" because it embodied his vision at the time – a company that would grow from the low country of Georgia and South Carolina to the tidewater region of Virginia.

Twenty-eight years later, that palm remains as a key part of the TideWater image. The motto "Growth Through Integrity," was added to further emphasize the plan to grow and expand. After the new brand was established, it was applied to all company materials, including a new website, TideWa . This time the website designers, Sysconn, Inc., understood the company was about more than two brothers – it was about a dream founded by a family that has turned into a national vision that continues to grow. They hit the mark. This was first of many more to come.

Rick Cuddihe is president of Lafayette Consulting Co., a PLANET Trailblazer, and he works with landscape contractors to improve their businesses. Contact him at [rick@lafayetteconsulting.com](mailto:rick@lafayetteconsulting.com).