

A Wonderfully Wild And Crazy Business



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Remember George and Yortuk Festrunk? The names aren't familiar to you? Here's a hint. Unbuttoned polyester shirts and tight checked pants. Need another? Steve Martin (George) and Dan Akroyd (Yortuk), two Czech brothers trolling for "crazy American chicks." Wow, I've made this way too easy.

✖ Wild and crazy is the term that popped into my head as I looked back at the industry, as I do every year about this time. This past June 1 marked the start of my 31st year in the industry. I don't attach any particular significance to the number. Who gets excited about 31 of anything, right?

Even so, I think back to those first weeks on the job in 1984 as a junior editor on distinctively named Weeds, Trees & Turf, the first trade publication covering the grounds and contractor segments of the green industry. The fine young men and women I worked with were patient and sharing, as well as good teachers, and we became good friends. We had such great fun together. Sometimes we got wild and crazy together.

I also recall the excitement of reporting on my first trade show that autumn in Tampa, Florida. The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) was just seven or eight years old at the time, and everybody at the show was buzzing because the lawn application industry was going full blast. Three decades later, the lawn care business is essentially the same business and still going strong.

But in many other respects, the last 30 years have seen the industry embark on a wild and crazy ride, experiencing at least three major recessions, the last one a whopper. Then, of course, there are the inevitable challenges—regulations, employee issues, product use, the weather, you name it.

But the crazy thing about all of this is that the industry, in spite of everything, keeps growing and growing and growing.

In a sense, many of the people in the industry are wild and crazy. After all, who in their right mind would think, as some folks do, that they can parlay a pickup truck and a push mower into a \$1 million business?

Damned if it doesn't happen over and over again.

Or, how about the marvelous zanies on the other end of the spectrum who think they can successfully run four or five businesses at the same time? As an example, I give you [Barnes Nursery](#), a business near and dear to my heart and to my home. Located near the tiny city of Huron on Lake Erie in north central Ohio, Barnes Nursery is much more than a plant nursery. In fact, it is many different businesses rolled into one.

Yes, Barnes Nursery does have a nursery, but it also offers the Full Monty when it comes to landscape services (design/build, maintenance, lawn care, etc.) and operates a busy 5-acre composting/soil manufacturing facility as well as running two retail locations.

How does the Barnes family, now transitioning the company's management to the third generation, manage to keep so many seemingly dissimilar revenue centers going and growing at the same time? Hard work? Good people? Obviously.

As challenging as that business model must be, the Barnes family is not particularly unique. Many other family-run green industry companies juggle many different services simultaneously. That's wild and that's what makes it so exciting to be a part of this industry. There are so many things going on that it would take a dullard not to be a part of and to enjoy this show.

That's been the fun part of green industry for me these past 30 years—getting to know and share the experiences of people who don't recognize boundaries in terms of succeeding by serving others.

While the Festrunk brothers now inhabit only the digital world of YouTube and Hulu and none of us (hopefully) wear polyester shirts and gold chains, the entrepreneurial spirit that ignited this industry so many years ago is still, in a very real sense, wild and crazy, I am so happy to report.