

Issue #8 • Volume 26 • August 2023



# OC Vision

Official Publication of the Orange County Chapter of California Landscape Contractors Association • [www.clca-orangecounty.org](http://www.clca-orangecounty.org)



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C/O CLCA - Orange County Chapter  
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*For information about what we're doing in 2023, contact Dave.*



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California Landscape Contractors Association - Orange County Chapter



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## There's No "I" in Team

Even though it's not the end of my term, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my board who work to ensure our chapter and its events are successful. The success of our chapter is a group effort, spearheaded by people who tirelessly give of their spare time for the betterment of our association; time that is *in addition to* performing their job duties and family time. Without these types of people, who somehow find time to volunteer, there would be no community or professional boards, fundraisers, or volunteer coaches. It just goes to show that if you want to make a difference, "you will make it happen."

To give a little insight into the processes that take place as a volunteer on the board or a committee, here is a breakdown of how it typically works. Planning of the year's events begins at the annual planning meeting held in October of the prior year. This is when future board members and interested "difference makers" get together and throw out ideas for the upcoming year. All voices are heard and opinions listened to.

In January, at the first official board meeting, part of the agenda is to discuss who will chair the various events throughout the year. These committee chairs will then

form their own sub-committee, establish a budget, and start the coordination of the event. The year progresses from there with everyone doing their part, while also supporting their fellow volunteers when necessary. Each and every volunteer is integral to the success of the whole.



**Dave Horton**  
So Cal Concepts  
Chapter President

These volunteers also deserve a big thanks for their tireless support of each other. Not only do they manage their own volunteer responsibilities, but they are always ready and willing to help out a team member when needed and are present at events to show their support. What a great team!

As you can see, the success of the chapter is dependent on the time and effort invested by many individuals; no four or five people can do it alone. I hope you'll consider joining our team in 2024. We have our planning meeting coming up this October and we would love to have you there. Call me, or any board member on page 2 of our magazine, for more information. Join us and learn what we're all about.

~Sincerely, Dave



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<b>2023 CLCA-OC Calendar</b> <i>Mark Your Calendars &amp; Save the Dates Now!</i>	
Sept. 20-21	<b>The Landscape Expo, Anaheim.</b> More information at <a href="http://www.thelandscapeexpo.com">www.thelandscapeexpo.com</a> .
Sept. 23	<b>Annual Beautification Awards, Yorba Linda.</b> Black Gold Golf Club: 1 Black Gold Drive. Register online at <a href="http://www.clca-orangecounty.org">www.clca-orangecounty.org</a>
Oct. TBD	<b>CLCA OC Lunch &amp; Learn. Details TBD.</b> Topic: Drip Irrigation. More info coming soon!
Oct. 26	<b>2024 Chapter Planning Meeting &amp; Board Elections.</b> Interested in serving on the 2024 OC Chapter Board of Directors? Call Chapter President Dave Horton at (949) 653-1101 to submit your nomination.
Nov. 8-11	<b>CLCA Annual Convention, Monterey, CA.</b> More information at <a href="http://www.clca.org/convention">www.clca.org/convention</a>

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**Don't Miss Our Biggest Event of the Year!**  
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**Looking to sponsor and get in front of the largest crowd of contractors at any of our events?** Register to be a sponsor! There are a variety of opportunities available.

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This is THE EVENT to attend! Rub elbows with other top-notch contractors, make new friends, and reconnect with old ones. Don't miss it!

Tickets to the event are just \$100 each. Reserve your seat online at [www.clca-orangecounty.org](http://www.clca-orangecounty.org). Call (949) 466-1222 with questions or for more information.

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# How to Leverage Artificial Intelligence in Your Green Business



Artificial intelligence may seem like a tool that landscape professionals can't take advantage of, but this technology provides multiple opportunities to business owners.

"There are a ton of tools that can help you with marketing, that can help you with daily tasks, being able to automate those so that you can give more time to different things," says Chelsea Hartshorn, co-founder of Threadleaf Landscape Design. "Within

automation itself, there's a huge slew of things that you can do."

### AI Potential Uses

Hartshorn says there are numerous AI tools coming out daily that can help with everything from tracking manhours and improving routing to client engagement and communication.

"If you're just sitting there waiting and you get random questions from clients all day long, that's hours and hours of your day that's just being lost to little

questions here and there," Hartshorn says. "So being able to have a chat bot that can answer basic inquiries from customers and be able to show them the right way to go is huge. It'll boost your client engagement, which boosts your sales."

Another example of a time-saving AI tool that Hartshorn uses is one that generates a response to emails she's receiving based on that current thread.

"It has my voice and knows how I want to respond," Hartshorn says. "I can tell it to respond a little bit more professionally or a little bit more relaxed. It takes just a second to click on that button and set that up as opposed to me having to go through every single thing. I can just look at it in my email and click that little button. It will show me that response, and then I'll click it off."

AI can also be used to generate imagery or mood boards to portray a specific design element you're trying to convey to a customer.

*Continued on Next Page...*



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# How to Leverage Artificial Intelligence in Your Green Business

...Continued from previous page

“I use ChatGPT and Leonardo. I’ll put it in the ChatGPT and tell it to create a descriptive prompt for Leonardo,” Hartshorn says. “If you don’t have those two together, a lot of the time Leonardo will give you something very basic.”

While landscape design isn’t being taken over by AI, Hartshorn says it can easily serve as an assistant as there are AI tools that can take notes automatically during a call and send them to the appropriate person after a meeting.

Both large and small to mid-sized landscape companies can benefit from utilizing AI tools. Hartshorn says while smaller businesses can use AI to complete tasks that big competitors pay teams of people to do, larger operations can take advantage of the data analysis these tools provide.

“Every branch has their specific data, and if it’s implemented in the company on a large scale, this AI tool can make sure that you’re optimizing your routes within your scheduling for construction and for maintenance,” she says.

## AI Misconceptions and Integration

One of the main fears regarding AI is the belief that it will replace people.

“AI really serves as a tool to enhance and augment human experience, in my opinion, and not replace it,” Hartshorn says. “Really, it’s not going to replace people. It’s going to replace people that don’t use it.”

Another concern is that AI is too expensive for smaller companies to take advantage of it. Hartshorn argues that the tools are becoming more affordable daily. She says the main way to become more comfortable with AI is to try to use it daily, even if it’s just ChatGPT for everyday tasks.

“A lot of the time, what will end up happening is the more and more you use it, the more you realize, ‘Oh hey, I could

ask this’ or ‘I can go to this AI tool and they should be able to do this and this for me,’” she says.

*“Taking the time to integrate AI tools into your day-to-day can help you stay ahead of the curve, improve efficiency, and explore opportunities for growth.”*

She suggests brainstorming with your team about what pain points and tasks could be automated by AI when trying to find which tools to use. Hartshorn says the other key to successfully integrating AI into your operations is to start at a small scale and get used to that tool before rolling out something significant.

“Starting very small, I think it’s definitely the way to go,” Hartshorn says. “Little things can change so much of your day. Having Otter.ai be a part of your meetings every single time and then sending you action items and

sending you that summary for each meeting is huge.”

Hartshorn says taking the time to integrate AI tools into your day-to-day can help landscape companies stay ahead of the curve, improve their efficiency and explore opportunities for growth.

*This article by Jill Odom was excerpted from the National Association of Landscape Professional’s blog at <https://blog.landscapeprofessionals.org/>*

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# You Get What You Pay For

By Steven Cesare, Ph.D., The Harvest Group

A business owner from Virginia called me the other day to talk about various issues including his company culture, employee productivity, and compensation plans. As readers of this column already know, those three issues must be optimally aligned, intertwined by the company's business goals. It all starts with the goals. It always starts with the goals, supported by key initiatives and best practice behaviors designed to achieve those goals, reinforced by accountability systems to ensure employees attain those goals.

In case you forgot: It all starts with the goals.

Without the destination, no map is useful.

The owner acknowledged his company culture has made advances in defining, rolling out, and holding staff accountable for the goals, though further refinement is required. An honest assessment; a work in progress.

As our conversation continued, he expressed concern that his field employees were not at his desired caliber regarding work ethic, professional polish, and team cohesion. Notwithstanding the goal ambiguity mentioned above, as a capitalist, I asked him to review the placement of his employees' current hourly pay rates within their respective wage and salary scales (e.g., Maintenance Foreman, Construction Specialist, Irrigation Technician) to determine if any linear relationship existed between pay and productivity.

Not really.

In fact, his analysis revealed that most employees were paid at or near the low end of their wage and salary scale. Wal-Mart say hello to Nieman-Marcus; Budweiser meet Cristal; Prius let me introduce you to Rolls Royce. This same pattern applies to employees; all employees, field, management, office, sales, etc.

You get what you pay for.

I know the economy is tough. I know labor costs are out of control. I know there are cost pressures. We all know those things. That is why we must design an integrated system based on departmental revenue goals, production rates, gross margin goals, and employee compensation. If any aspect of that relationship is imprecise, imbalance, inefficiency, and ineptitude are inevitable.

It is my view that the field organization (e.g., Operations Manager, Maintenance Manager, Construction Manager) owns these processes. Maybe I'm visiting from a different planet, but aren't they infinitely closer to the employees, jobs, and customers than the owner? Accordingly, managers should be paid and bonused meritoriously on their individual ability to define, convey, and achieve their respective departmental goals (e.g., revenue per employee, gross margin, employee staffing levels, job quality).

By the same token, are the department managers underpaid relative to the local labor market? Conversely, are they overpaid relative to their ability to achieve their departmental goals? Similarly, is their weekly salary disproportionately inflated compared to their success-based bonus potential, which substantively evinces true merit pay? Are the managers routinely held accountable for staffing their own departments, tracking each employee's hourly average wage, and coaching them to achieve performance standards? The owner should not have to hold the managers accountable; the managers should hold themselves accountable based on their departmental-goal-to-forecast variance each month, all the while anticipating the trend line culminating with the end of the fiscal year results and adjoining performance review.

Thus, whether we expect too much from field employees who are systemically underpaid, or are overpaying for underperforming managers who do not reach their goals, we have to remain capitalistic in that we should get what we pay for. If we underpay for field employees, we are going get underperformance; however, if we overpay for management staff shouldn't we receive overperformance?

Getting what you pay for, works both ways.

If you don't believe me, try using that Wal-Mart coupon at Neiman-Marcus.

*This article was excerpted from the Harvest Group blog, Tuesdays with Steve Cesare.*



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## Guide to Best Management Practices for Turf Grass

**K**eeping turfgrass healthy and flourishing requires more than just watering. There's many different tools, practices, and management strategies to consider with turf health. Follow this guide for some best management practices for turf and lawns.

**Mowing:** Improperly cut grass will see a decline in overall turf quality. Make sure to follow the "1/3 Rule" by never removing more than 1/3 of the grass blade height during a single mowing. Mowing more than that will stress out grass and cause shock and a decrease in root growth. If you find turf has grown particularly tall, it is best practice to raise your mowing height for the initial cut and then come back a few days later and reduce the height again until you get it back to your regular mowing height. Make sure you have sharp mower blades too, which will reduce the risk of stress and disease to the grass.

**Cultivation:** Aeration and dethatching are both great tools that can assist you in achieving great turf health. Aeration will open up the soil surface and improve the air exchange between your soil and the atmosphere, which allows the rootzone to breathe. It will also reduce water runoff and improve fertilizer use, resulting in a thicker and healthier lawn. Aeration is best done when the grass is actively growing, which would be mid-spring for warm season turf and spring or fall for cool season turf. Aerating in early fall will give your turf plenty of time to recover.

Dethatching involves removing the debris from decaying plant material. A thin layer of thatch approximately a half inch is adequate, and actually helps to maintain soil moisture

and temperature. When thatch is thicker than a half inch, it can be difficult for water to penetrate through that thick layer of debris. Grass clippings are mostly water and decompose quickly, returning nutrients to the soil, so they do not count as thatch.

**Pest Management:** Environmental conditions such as time of year and rainfall can clue you in to what kind of pests to watch out for. Pests use different means of feeding on plant tissue; they can be described as chewing vs. piercing/sucking. This can help to diagnose what pest you might be dealing with based on how and what part of the plant tissue the pest is attacking. Popular culprits you may see are: Grubs/Beetles, Caterpillars (Armyworms, Cutworms, Sod webworms), and Cinch Bugs.

Healthy turf is generally more pest resistant. Make sure your turf is in as good of shape as possible, and scout for different common problem insects before determining if a mitigation strategy is needed.

**Fertilization:** A soil test is recommended to determine your soil pH and the nutrient availability. This will provide you with guidance on how much nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium, and micronutrients you will need to deliver to your turf. For warm season grasses, fertilizer applications will typically take place April through September, and for cool season, ideal times are early spring, summer, and fall.

**Irrigation:** The amount of irrigation needed takes into consideration soil type and evaporation rates, which are affected by temperature, humidity, and wind. Different soil types dry down at different rates (sandy soils will require more water than soil with higher clay content). It is recommended that you perform an audit on your irrigation system to determine how much water you are delivering and the uniformity of the system. This can be done by getting several shallow containers, such as for cat food or tuna fish, and placing them a measured distance apart from each other and running your irrigation system. Based on your audit results you can then make adjustments on runtime and the distribution of water.

Watering deeply is a crucial step in the development of a deep root system because a deep root system will make for a more resilient and durable turf. This turf will be able to tolerate environmental stress factors much better than shallow-rooted turf. If you find that you can't quite get that irrigation system dialed in, or if you want better uptake on the fertilizer you applied, or if you just want to reduce your watering requirements, Hydretain can help. Apply in either liquid or granular form; both will get you the desired results.

These five areas of turf management are not separate, but interrelated. Mowing turf to the appropriate height will result in healthier grass with higher tolerance to pest, and managing thatch levels will result in better nutrition and moisture for the soil. Keep all of these factors in mind as you look to creating a healthier environment for turfgrass.

*This article was excerpted from Arborjet's blog at [www.arborjet.com/blog/](http://www.arborjet.com/blog/).*

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# OC Members & Friends Enjoy a Fun Day at the Ballpark on August 5!



OC Chapter Angels' fans and friends braved the heat and gathered at the Angels Stadium in Anaheim on August 5 to enjoy the chapter baseball event that proved to be a great time for all. The fun began with a tailgate in the parking lot of the Big A where attendees enjoyed sandwiches, cold drinks, and cornhole. SPJ Lighting

brought their mobile showroom, which showcased their quality lighting products and also gave hot attendees refuge in its air conditioned enclosure. Following the parking lot party, ticket holders went into the stadium to watch the Angels play the Mariners. While they didn't bring home a win (score was 2-3), it was still a super fun event. Go Halos!

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