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A CLOSER LOOK

Why one plant care company promotes a “test-before-treatment” approach.

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TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

Testing before treatment

A look inside one company's thoughtful approach to turf and ornamental care.

BY SARAH WEBB

When Keith Weyrick patronized his local plant diagnostic clinic in 2012, samples in tow, he didn't realize one of the clinic's employees, Ian Maguire, would become his future business partner.

Almost six years later, the pair co-owns Plant Health Care Systems of South Florida, a Miami-based plant care company that's grown into a \$1.7-million organization since its founding in 2013.

"I would take samples to the clinic where Maguire worked, and we struck up a friendship," says Weyrick, who at the time was working for a large turf and ornamental care firm. "We would always talk about the industry."

Around that time, Weyrick and Maguire were both looking for an employment change. Deciding the timing was right, they partnered up.

"There weren't many knowledgeable people in the industry at that time,"



EDUCATE
Plant Health Care Systems' owners, Ian Maguire (left) and Keith Weyrick (right), work hard to educate both their clients and their technicians.

Weyrick says. "Most of the spray guys are really good with grass but not so much with the plants."

A BUDDING COMPANY

Weyrick and Maguire initially began their careers in separate worlds, as a second-generation nurseryman and a photographer, respectively.

Weyrick got his start working for his family's company, Quail Roost Nursery, and later owned a natural lawn care franchise. Maguire began his career as a digital photographer, working at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Tropical Research and Education Center.

"I started to learn about plants through the lens of a camera," Maguire says. "Through visual art, I gained the knowledge that allowed me to eventually create connections (in the plant world)."

He adds that his 15-year tenure as a photographer allowed him to work in

biological science programs and eventually led him to the job in a diagnostic clinic, where he first met Weyrick.

The pair's first client was Maguire's friend, a landscaper who performed work at an exclusive Key Largo community. He had been unhappy with his previous application company and decided to give Plant Health Care Systems a chance.

Plant Health Care Systems has since grown to 10 crew members serving more than 700 clients. It serves a 100 percent residential clientele. Complete lawn and plant care packages make up 90 percent of its services, while the remaining 10 percent is comprised of either plant care or lawn care packages. The company also offers add-on services, such as aeration.

THE APPROACH

Part of the team's success stems from

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NEWSFEED

SPRING TOUCH FRANCHISE

Spring Touch Lawn & Pest Control, based in St. Peter, Minn., is expanding its brand and is registered to

franchise in most of the U.S. The company serves more than 10,000 customers in a 60-mile radius in and around southern

Minnesota. The franchise offering features a business concept in the lawn care/landscape services industry with an "affordable entry threshold," said Spring Touch.

WEED MAN EXPANDS

Weed Man USA continues to expand across the U.S. with 29 new territories added in 2017 and a total of three new signed franchise agreements in the

first three months of 2018. It expects to add 37 new territories, totaling 561 territories by year's end and surpass \$100 million in annual sales revenue for the second straight year.

PHOTO: PLANT HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS

• THE PROS OF BEING A PRO •

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PROACTIVE
Plant Health Care
Systems offers
its services on
an ongoing
monthly basis.

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the company's scientific and preventive approach, which includes the inspection and diagnosis of a property prior to treatment.

"We believe it's important to do an inspection," Weyrick says. "A lot of other companies just pull up, drag out a hose, spray the yard and plants, and then they're on to the next one."

Before performing any application work, Maguire, Weyrick or a thoroughly trained technician takes a walk around the property, identifying plant issues on-site. If a technician is unsure about a problem, he snaps a picture and sends it to the owners.

If a clear diagnosis still can't be reached, the Plant Health Care Systems team takes a sample to a diagnostic clinic.

"We're not just business owners," Maguire says. "Part of our slogan is 'we know,' and we really do know our plants."

The company also promotes a proactive—rather than reactive—method, which involves services on an ongoing monthly basis.

"It's obviously much easier to prevent an issue than to correct it," Weyrick says.

Maguire says the company's other keys to success are constant client communication and collaboration with landscapers who may not offer plant health care services.

Collaborating with other companies has led to more referrals, allowing

Plant Health Care Systems to forgo additional marketing or advertising, according to Maguire.

THE CHALLENGES

Despite the company's open-communication style, Maguire says challenges arise when a customer's perception of the company's service differs from reality.

"We have a clientele who thinks if they throw money at a problem, it will be fixed, but the reality is that plants are like a human body," he says. "When something goes wrong, changes take time."

While the team works hard to educate clients, Maguire says a few clients are unwilling to understand the process is natural and ongoing. In rare instances, he might even suggest artificial turf.

Like many other companies in the industry, Plant Health Care Systems also struggles with finding a labor force.

"We've got a good handle on the landscape and lawn problems, and we can buy equipment all day long, but getting the right people is the biggest challenge," Weyrick says.

To combat this problem, Weyrick says he and Maguire seek out people who demonstrate an interest in the industry and also embody the "three c's": caring, curious and consistent.

"We've been able to attract another level of employee to our company," Maguire says. "Workers might've come to us from other companies because

they'd become complacent or bored and wanted a new challenge."

New employees undergo a rigorous training process, spending up to six months riding along with an experienced spray technician.

To retain the good employees, both owners say they promote ongoing education, such as encouraging employees to go back to school to earn a high school diploma or complete a spray certification exam.

"This is not just a job for (our employees). It's a vocation," Weyrick says. "And they like the fact that they can go to a property, see the improvements and have a positive impact on the client."

Weyrick advises other company owners to always be on the lookout for their next employee.

LOOKING AHEAD

While Plant Health Care Systems has experienced extreme growth periods of up to 300 to 400 percent, Weyrick and Maguire realize such a growth rate isn't sustainable.

They hope to grow to \$2 million by the end of this year and to \$5 million within the next three to five years.

"It starts with setting expectations with your clients, not overpromising and then delivering what you promise," Weyrick says. "If you do those three things, you can build a good business, grow the business and retain your clients long term." 