

JMA MAKES CERTIFICATION PART OF ITS CULTURE

James Martin Associates (JMA) in Vernon Hills, Illinois, had its first employee certified in 1997. Company President Jim Martin became certified four years later. JMA now employs 125 people between its Chicago and Boulder, Colorado, offices and has upwards of 20 certified employees. In fact, NALP honored JMA at LANDSCAPES 2016 for having the most certified staff in its member class.

“We have tried to be consistent with certification, making it a part of our company culture,” Martin said. “When we hire people into supervisory or other management positions, we require that seeking certification be part of their condition of employment. For crew foremen, their compensation is based in part on becoming certified. Certification extends to crew members, as well, whose compensation is based equally among their growth, performance and safety record.

“In fact, as I think back, the impetus behind putting an emphasis on certification was our concern about safety. I don’t know of any industry that has as many risks as ours does. There are trucks and trailers in traffic daily, and the type of equipment we operate is certainly a risk if not operated properly. The certification exam places an emphasis on safety to the extent that if a candidate fails to follow safety protocol, he or she automatically fails that portion of the exam.”

Martin said that having a high percentage of employees either certified or studying for the certification exam elevates the company’s



safety culture. “We have an end-of-the-season dinner for employees where we recognize newly certified individuals and crews that go accident free for the year. Out of 30 crews between our two branches, 17 went without any type of hiccup at all, neither a broken window nor fender bender of any kind. In fact, we gave

away \$6,000 in safety bonuses this year.”

Martin credits certification for helping create the company’s safety culture. He also tips his hat to David Snodgrass, of Seven Dees Landscaping, Portland, Oregon. “In some circles, R&D stands for rob and duplicate,” he laughed. “After seeing David’s stretching program in Portland, I brought it back home, and we’ve been doing it ever since. Getting employees thinking about safety before they go into the field in the morning is very important.”

An industry veteran of 44 years, Martin noted other benefits of creating a certification culture. “We have won a few contracts that had certification as part of the RFP and just recently won another one,” he said. “No, certification is not a standard

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JMA President Jim Martin, Landscape Industry Certified

part of RFPs yet, but recognition of its place in the industry is growing, just as more landscape professionals are realizing its benefits.”

“Certification also creates a sense of pride among employees,” he said.

“Over the years, our company has encouraged a couple dozen employees who no longer work here to become certified. Many of these individuals have maintained their certification and are actively involved in the industry.”

Martin said the program naturally lost some of its momentum during the economic downturn in 2008 and 2009 as companies shifted focus and funds away from programs like certification and concentrated on survival. The industry is doing great now, he emphasized, and certification is bound to continue to grow with it. ▶