

## PEER GROUPS

# Growth prompts interest in PLANET peer groups

American Pride Lawn and Landscaping, Inc., is celebrating 25 years in business; yet, it wasn't until three years ago that it joined PLANET. Just last year, the Dayton, Ohio, company also became a member of a PLANET peer group. It will field 10 to 11 crews this spring, and its approximately 35 employees will provide landscape management services, with the exception of irrigation installation and fertilization, to primarily commercial accounts.

After becoming a PLANET member, American Pride President, Kevin Harker, met several other contractors and participated in the *Traiblazer* program. Taking advice from his mentor, Five Seasons Landscape Management President, Bill Leidecker, Landscape Industry Certified, he later joined the PLANET "Pioneer" peer group

**Q. Why did you feel a peer group would be a good fit for your company?**

A. Like most landscape contractors, I started out by maintaining small residential accounts. For many years, I ran a mom-and-pop enterprise. Over the last few years, however, the company has experienced healthy growth in large part because we've



switched from maintaining residential accounts to commercial accounts. In fact, over the last two years, we've eliminated almost all our residential properties.

When I started to grow, I realized I needed advice from people who previously had been in my position. That's why I joined PLANET and why I joined a peer group. I would rather learn from other people's mistakes. PLANET and its peer group also allow me to share ideas openly with landscape contractors who are not my competitors.

**Q. Did you have any specific expectations when you joined the peer group?**

A. Not really, but I knew that my company had outgrown many of its systems. Our employee handbook, for example, needs updating and quite possibly some peer group members will be able to share either their handbooks with me or ideas on how I can update ours.

**Q. Where does your company's strength lie and where do you think you can lend support to other peer group members?**

A. Every company has its strengths. I believe American Pride has been successful because we're more than landscape contractors, and we let our customers know that. We're in the service business and strive to deliver a personalized service. Hence, our growth has been organic, the result of good referrals from satisfied customers.

**Q. How has your company benefited from joining the peer group?**

A. To date, we've only met in person a couple of times and participated in a few conference calls, so it's hard to pinpoint precisely where the group has helped me. But, a couple of things immediately come to mind. First, being a member and participating in discussions have given me a new way to look at my business. Sharing experiences with other members naturally encourages everyone to look beyond their individual businesses and challenges, and see the big picture. That's important. To benchmark costs and financial ratios with the group, I was also forced to become more organized. Among other benefits, I now have several friends from whom I can get advice literally anytime just by placing a phone call or sending an email. ☺



Join us for

**Renewal & REMEMBRANCE**

July 28, 2014

and

**Legislative Day on the Hill**

July 27-29, 2014

**LandcareNetwork.org/renewal**

Platinum Sponsors

**CATERPILLAR**

**NEW HOLLAND**

BUILT AROUND YOU

Gold

**JOHN DEERE**

Silver

**SNAPPER PRO**

**STIHL**