



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATUREWORKS LANDSCAPE SERVICES.

From left, Eric Banks, Meghan McPhee, Matt Gramer, Jennifer Guerin, Jenny Sherman and Mary Sullivan make up part of the team at NatureWorks Landscape Services that maintains a company culture encouraging employees to be involved with effecting positive change.

Lean in Beantown

NatureWorks seeks continuous improvement in serving an exclusive clientele

by Tom Crain

Matt Gramer never stops reaching out to his colleagues for advice via hyper-networking, exploring out-of-the box solutions to ongoing challenges, empowering his employees to determine best practices, and fine-tuning his customer service program.



This residential property features a freshly painted container display for the springtime, a massing of Azalea blooms and a manicured lawn.

These are some of the reasons why his company, Walpole-based NatureWorks, marketing to the South Bostonian estate owner, has been averaging 15 percent growth annually. It has also outmaneuvered the recession with barely a nick (2009 was the only “dip” year at 18 percent) and holds one of the most successful formulas of any East Coast residential landscape company in retaining and growing its client base.

“We’ve made decisions over the years to embrace lean tools, bring certain services in-house and sharpen our customer service practices for high-end customers,” says Gramer.

About six years ago, Gramer was introduced to the idea of adapting the “Lean Tools” process through networking with green industry consultants who brought him onsite visits to companies who were successfully using “lean” elements.

The term “lean” was coined to describe Toyota’s business during the late 1980s by a research team headed by Jim Womack, Ph.D., at MIT’s International Motor Vehicle Program. It has been accepted as an effective strategy that seeks to produce a high level of throughput with a minimum of inventory for manufacturing.

NatureWorks Landscape Services, Inc.

Owner: Matt Gramer

Founded: 1995

Headquarters: Walpole, Mass.

Markets: South Boston

Services: Residential lawn and tree care, gardening services, seasonal displays, irrigation management, construction services, and snow and ice management

Employees: 40 to 50 (depending on seasonal conditions)

Website: www.natureworkslandscape.com

The lean process of management is a relatively new concept and is still considered a bit experimental for the service industry, particularly for landscaping.

“Most believe that the lean system is suited only to the manufacturing industry,” says Gramer. “This is not true. Lean applies to every business and every process. It’s not a tactic or a cost reduction program, but a way of thinking and acting for an entire organization.”

Continued on page B2