

Satisfied Customers Spread the Word

California Waterscapes focuses on customer service while coping with the current economic climate.

March 19, 2009

From left: Chadd, Terry and Trent Morrill

Click to EnlargePotential pond owners searching for one-stop shopping need look no further than California Waterscapes in La Crescenta, Calif., and its sister companies: Pacific Pavingstone, Pacific Outdoor Living Pro, Morrill Landscape Group and Jack's Turf. The company's design center and retail store, Pacific Outdoor Living Design Center, offers glimpses of completed water features to jumpstart customers' brainstorming processes, while the design staff takes customers' visions and turns them into reality.

Since 2001, Terry Morrill and his sons, Trent and Chad, have strived to create aesthetic, natural-looking ponds for a range of customers. "We honestly put the customer first and want to deliver the customer a product that is better than they expect," said Terry Morrill, general manager.

That devotion to customer satisfaction hallmarked the Morrills' business plans since Terry and Trent began installing paving-stone driveways and patios in 1999 under the name Pacific Pavingstone. The men followed three basic business tenets: 1. Deliver a great product; 2. Never spend more than they make; and 3. Reinvest profits into the company. Chad joined the team in 2001 to help his father and brother start California Waterscapes, the pond-construction arm of the family business.

Customer satisfaction proves key for California Waterscapes' continued success.

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Natural-looking ponds hallmark California Waterscapes' designs.

Click to EnlargeToday, the family of businesses includes Morrill Landscape Group, a residential landscape design company; Jack's Turf, an artificial grass company; Pacific Outdoor Living Pro, a distributor of Aquascapes pond products; and Pacific Outdoor Living Design Center, the retail store and design center that also houses the company's headquarters. The store/design center offers pond supplies, koi, aquatic plants, fountains and other items to decorate the yard. The outdoor showcase area features sample outdoor habitats, such as ponds, streams, waterfalls, disappearing fountains, outdoor fireplaces and paving stone patios.

While the design center often attracts walk-in pond customers, the company's construction arm, California Waterscapes, experienced growth through word-of-mouth. Currently, the team of 10 full-time technicians builds ponds, waterfalls and streams for homeowners and businesses in Southern California, installing about 12 to 15 water gardens each month.

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Much of California Waterscapes' business comes from word-of-mouth referrals.

Click to EnlargeTerry attributes much of the company's growth to its high standard of business ethics, which ensures customer satisfaction. "We are extremely ethical contractors," he said. "If we do make an error, we go over and above to correct it and make sure the customer is totally happy."

Along with attention to client satisfaction, the Morrills focus on successful business practices modeled on the principles of Hubbard management technology. "One of our objectives is to have the organization – from the marketing to sales to delivery to customer service – completely in place and operating without a glitch," Terry said. "This year, the economy has been a glitch for us. We are looking at this as an opportunity to get better organized and become more efficient."

Committed to Community Participation

To the Morrills, customer satisfaction includes community participation. The family looks for ways to give back to the community, most notably through Pasadena Showcase House of Design, a house and garden tour. The 45th showcase House tour will take place April 19 to May 17.

Since 1965, this annual event has raised funds to provide gifts and grants to a variety of music programs, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Walt Disney Concert Hall and local symphonic, cultural and educational programs. More than 50 designers transform the interior and grounds of an estate selected by the Pasadena Showcase House for the Arts.

California Waterscapes has contributed to this cause since 2000, designing and constructing a water garden at each estate. Sister companies Pacific Pavingstone and Morrill Landscape Group also contribute to the showcase house's exterior by creating paved pathways and driveways, among other features.

"We pull out all the stops when we do our design area at these houses," said Terry Morrill, general manager of La Crescenta-based California Waterscapes. "We get a tremendous reaction and generate quite a bit of work. We also create goodwill by contributing to a worthy cause." The company's successful business model helped it gain recognition in the small business community. California Waterscapes earned the honor of being named to the Inc. 500 list in 2004 and 2005 as well as the Inc. 5000 list in 2006 and 2007. This distinction is awarded to independent, U.S.-based, privately held companies that show steady revenue growth over a four-year period.

The company also was recognized as one of Los Angeles Business Journal's 100 Fastest Growing Private Companies. "Basically the process for this and the Inc. 500/Inc. 5000 involved us submitting our notarized financial records, which are verified on their end," said Deanna Noll, Pacific Outdoor Living's vice president of marketing. "When those are verified, they recognize the growth, and we get the award."

Noll noted the company's recent honor of receiving the 2008 All-Star Award from the Great Game of Business. "Our staff was surveyed and asked questions about various categories of our business," she said. "The award recognizes that [the employees] have the understanding of how the business runs and that they're all a part of it."

California Waterscapes credits its employees with helping the company evolve and grow, Terry said, adding that the company reinvests time and energy into the people it employs. "We have evolved training-wise into being able to train new crew members with our crew apprentice program, covering all the steps of building natural ponds," he said.

Employee training centers around job fundamentals. "We have a dedicated training center where new employees study the basics of their jobs," Terry said.

The company's 135 employees — many of whom were recruited through recommendations from existing crew members — receive on-the-job instruction supplemented by weekly education sessions to keep them up-to-date on trends and technology. "We strive to have everyone in the organization be true professionals at what they do," Terry said.

Keeping up with trends helps employees install ponds that require less maintenance, but the company still offers pond upkeep services as well as landscape project consultations. "We offer a complete experience, starting with the option of a complete landscape design," Terry said, adding that customers can get ideas by viewing the retail store's live pond displays. "We also have our own fish expert on staff to help people with questions."

The maintenance business currently accounts for about 6 percent of California Waterscapes business, with technicians working with customers to keep their ponds in top shape. The Morrills hope to expand this arm of the business in 2009 to stay competitive in the current economic environment. Other plans include focusing on smaller construction projects including pondless waterfalls and fountains.

The Morrills continue to look toward the future and make plans for continued growth. "We are always setting new goals to achieve," Terry said. "Right now, we are interested in pursuing and opening up a large-scale commercial projects division to enhance our residential business."

*Photos are Courtesy of California Waterscapes

California Waterscapes at a Glance

Business name: California Waterscapes

Contact information: 2729 Foothill Blvd., La Crescenta, CA 91214; 818-252-5655; info@californiawaterscapes.com; www.californiawaterscapes.com

Years in Business: 7

Staff: Terry Morrill, general manager; Trent Morrill, operations manager; Chad Morrill, waterscape operations manager; Wendy Noll, deputy general manager; Barry Fine, vice president of marketing and sales; Matt Shepherd, controller; 10 full-time technicians *The umbrella company, Pacific Outdoor Living, employs 135 people. Sister companies include Pacific Outdoor Living Pro, Morrill Landscape Group, Pacific Pavingstone and Jack's Turf.

2008 Revenue: \$2,300,000

Awards: Inc. 500, 2004 and 2005; Inc. 5000, 2006 and 2007; The Inner City 100; Los Angeles Business Journal's 100 Fastest-Growing Private Companies; 2008 All Star (The Great Game of Business Inc.); Hubbard Management Model of Administrative Excellence Award (8 years running)

Retail Store: Pacific Outdoor Living Design Center, 818-247-9595

Store Hours: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday to Friday; 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday and Sunday