FUN IN THE SUN

Join us at The ARA Show® 2020

If you’re looking to learn about the latest trends and products in the rental business, there’s no better place than The ARA Show. Held annually, the event is the largest equipment and event rental convention and trade show in the world. This year, The ARA Show will be held at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida, from February 9–12. It’s a great chance to network with peers, learn from industry experts, and explore new technology and ideas that shape the future of rental.

You can also get a firsthand look at new products. The 2020 show will include over 700 exhibitors, including John Deere. We’ll be displaying models and sizes that are popular with independent rental companies (IRCs). A great benefit of attending the show is taking advantage of exclusive Show-Only Specials, including special pricing and financing on compact equipment. Please visit us at Booth #3462. John Deere is proud to be a longtime supporter of the ARA and the rental industry. We are a platinum sponsor of the ARA, having exhibited at The ARA Show every year since 1978.

We also encourage you to come see us at CONEXPO-CON/AGG® 2020, the largest construction trade show in North America. Held every three years, the show will take place March 10–14 at the Las Vegas Convention Center. At our 38,000-square-foot Construction & Forestry booth, we’ll be showcasing nearly 40 construction machines. The booth will also feature videos, educational sessions, simulators, our John Deere Store, and a fully restored Model 24 Skid Steer to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Deere skid steers. Visit JohnDeere.com/Vegas2020 for the latest information.

We hope you can attend at least one of these must-see trade shows!

Brian Wells
Manager, Rental Marketing
Worldwide Construction & Forestry
COVER STORY

MINNESOTA NICE

PAGE 4
Without social media and smartphones back in the 1980s, Scottie Zuzek kept busy playing soccer, singing in choir, and discovering a love for landscaping.

BRICK BY BRICK

PAGE 8
Matt Lovell learned the bricklaying trade from his father and grandfather before finding his calling building custom homes.

ROCKET MEN

PAGE 12
Huntsville, Alabama, aka “Rocket City,” has provided the perfect platform for launching a successful underground utility company.
op into your local eccentric scientist’s DeLorean. The 1980s are back. These days people can’t seem to get enough of the era of Wayfarer sunglasses, Rubik’s Cubes, video arcades, boomboxes, and legwarmers. Even mullets are making a comeback. Okay, thankfully not. But the ‘80s are the subject of many popular movies and television shows, and the music is again “totally tubular.”

BACK TO THE ‘80s

Scottie Zuzek, chief operating officer of Precision Landscaping and Construction, grew up in the 1980s and still considers himself “an ‘80s guy.” “I still listen to that music,” he says. “We didn’t have internet, smartphones, and social media back then, so I kept busy in Boy Scouts, the high school choir, and playing soccer.” And he probably still has a few mixtape cassettes in a drawer somewhere.

Zuzek joined Precision Landscaping in 1986, back when the few cell phones in use weighed several pounds and cost thousands of dollars. “I started out as a laborer,” he recalls. “It was more or less a summer job. I went to school to become a teacher, so it was a good opportunity to be outside while getting a workout and a tan. It wasn’t my intention to be doing this 30-odd years later.”

See how versatile John Deere compact machines can help your rental customers step up their games

LEARN MORE

NICE GUYS FINISH FIRST AT PRECISION LANDSCAPING AND CONSTRUCTION IN HASTINGS, MINNESOTA
But something happened along the way. He fell in love with the work. “I’m very passionate about it. I’m sure when I retire decades from now, I’ll be bugging the guys to let me run the equipment. It’s a fun business to be in.”

**EASY BUTTON**

In 1992, Precision Landscaping offered Zuzek a full-time position as landscape foreman. When owner John Fox passed away in 2011, Zuzek took over day-to-day operations and partnered with Fox’s son Josh and Josh’s friend, Joby Nolan. The team is greater than the sum of its parts. “We have our differences, but we really mesh and have become great friends,” says Zuzek. “I handle operations, Joby is the numbers guy, and Josh has the business and marketing savvy.”

Since 2011, the company has quadrupled in size. “We’ve grown far beyond what I imagined, but we all saw the potential. The three of us worked our tails off to make this company succeed. Today everyone in Hastings knows our name. That’s such a cool feeling. And we’re expanding into the Twin Cities [Minneapolis and St. Paul] metro area.”

When Zuzek joined the company in 1986, the company had six employees and a dump truck, sharing a skid steer loader with another company. Today the company has 12 full-time employees running five lawn-maintenance and five landscaping crews. During the height of summer or snow-removal season, they hire 30 or 40 more seasonal workers. The company now owns three John Deere 244L Compact Loaders, a 344L Compact Loader, four 325G Compact Track Loaders (CTLs), and a 50G Compact Excavator, along with numerous Deere lawn tractors and 22 plow trucks.

Growth has exploded in the last three years due to earning larger hardscape and snow-removal contracts. The company recently added the two 244Ls mainly to complete large snow-removal projects, including at a federal building in Bloomington.

“We bought our first John Deere 244 model after getting a large snow-removal contract in Hastings,” says Zuzek. “We were running skid loaders and plow trucks, and realized we needed a bigger machine. We ran it for two seasons, and it was great. The new 244Ls have allowed us to take on more county contracts and the federal contract. We also added the 344L, which is the perfect-size snow-removal machine. It’s small and maneuverable enough, but still has ample power to move big piles.”

When the snow isn’t flying, the loaders work in the yard, capably loading mulch, rock, and pallets of block onto trucks destined for landscaping jobs. “A nice thing about the 244Ls is the quick-coupler, which allows you to use all the same attachments as the skid loaders,” says Zuzek. “They have plenty of lift capability on jobsites, and when paired with the right pickup truck and trailer, the 244L is light enough to be transported without the need for a CDL [commercial driver’s license].”

The 325G CTLs are the multitasking tool of choice on landscaping jobs. “The Quik-Tatch™ is like an ‘easy button’ for rapidly changing attachments,” says Zuzek. “The 325G’s lift capacity is amazing. It can handle pallets of brick, block, and sod, no problem. And I love the EH [electrohydraulic] controls. I’m old school and grew up on hand and foot controls, but at the end of the day your feet hurt. With the EH controls, you still feel good at the end of your day. Plus the two-speed transmission is nice when you need to get from one end of the jobsite to the other.”

The 50G Compact Excavator also helps lighten the workload. “I remember digging all those retaining walls with a shovel when I was younger. It was a good workout, but the 50G is just an amazing machine that can work almost anywhere. It probably takes four or five guys to dig the base out for a patio or trenches for walls, so the 50G saves a lot of man-hours — and backs. We even brought it out to remove snow from a retention pond. Who knew? But that’s the thing about John Deere machines. They are so versatile and easy to run.”

**MAKING THE COMMUNITY BEAUTIFUL, ONE YARD AT A TIME**

The company’s local John Deere dealership, Frontier Ag & Turf, “backs us all the way,” according to Zuzek. “Our salesman and service manager have a wealth of knowledge, so they can get us
WE’VE GROWN FAR BEYOND WHAT I IMAGINED, BUT WE ALL SAW THE POTENTIAL.

— Scottie Zuzek, chief operating officer, Precision Landscaping and Construction

parts or in for service right away. They know if a piece of equipment isn’t moving, it isn’t making money. So they work hard to keep us up and running.”

That’s especially important on snow-removal jobs, where customers expect to see asphalt as soon as the snow stops falling. Zuzek recalls a couple of times where he’s called Frontier in the middle of the night to repair a blown tire. “In a matter of an hour or two, they put a new tire on the machine, and we were up and running. That’s amazing when it’s two or three in the morning in the middle of a snowstorm.”

Precision Landscaping has been growing at a clip of 45 percent a year, and Zuzek expects this year to set another record. “Last year we plowed nine million square feet of pavement — that’s a lot of pavement to clear in about 10 hours. As business grows, we’re hoping to add another John Deere loader and maybe a CTL or two for the landscaping business.”

Zuzek’s mantra is “making the Twin Cities beautiful, one property at a time.” “I love going into a yard full of weeds and coming out three days later on a nice patio. Or clearing snow from a parking lot — to me, even that is making something beautiful. I have a passion for making spaces appealing so people can enjoy them.”

Precision Landscaping and Construction is serviced by Frontier Ag & Turf, Hastings, Minnesota.

Check out the video at: JohnDeere.com/RentalDirt
Matt Lovell built a successful homebuilding business one brick at a time – continued
Many highly successful people claim their “overnight” success stories were actually years in the making. Matt Lovell’s story is like that. His successful homebuilding company, MCL Construction, seemed to blossom overnight. But not before he put in decades of hard work.

Came On
Lovell got his start in homebuilding seven years ago, finishing the last 17 houses in a subdivision for a banker. “Things just exploded from there. It’s been ‘game on’ ever since. There’s a new automobile plant and other industry in the area, so Athens, Alabama, is just booming. It’s not real expensive to live here, so it’s an attractive place to live. We can’t keep up with everyone who wants a home built. Business has been really good.”

During the 1980s and ‘90s, when Athens was experiencing another housing boom, Lovell worked for his grandfather and father, both bricklayers. During summers in high school and college, Lovell would lay brick from six or seven in the morning until five in the afternoon. “That really provided me with the foundation to work really hard.”

Life wasn’t all work and no play. “My grandfather had a 150-acre farm, which was fantastic for hunting, fishing, and all kinds of recreation. I loved growing up here. My childhood was great.”

Lovell started his own bricklaying business when he was 25, working for a contractor who did 40 to 60 houses a year. He developed such a good reputation that, even during the downturn of 2008, he stayed constantly busy.

As his bricklaying business took off, Lovell began acquiring compact machines to dig footings and do other underground work. He built a home for himself, then built and sold another, and a new business was born. “I’d been around homebuilders a lot and decided that’s what I wanted to do.”

Lifesaver
MCL Construction builds all custom homes, ranging from 1,200 to 4,200 square feet. Lovell buys lots from developers. All of the homes have buyers — the company doesn’t build spec homes. “I’m really proud of our ability to set and meet budgets. We do a really good job of that — a lot of homes come in under budget. That’s really helped ensure a steady flow of customers.”

John Deere compact equipment has helped keep costs down. The company runs a 35G Compact Excavator and a 325G Compact Track Loader (CTL). “John Deere machines have been absolute lifesavers. It’s hard to imagine not having the equipment on a jobsite. I can get things done without having to call someone else to do it. I can jump on these machines and get jobs done when I need them done. That has been very important to keeping everything on schedule and for the success of MCL Construction.”

The 35G is used to dig all footings and underground utilities, while the 325G CTL can handle a wide variety of tasks. “The 325G has tons of power, and with the tracks, it’s friendly on yards. We can haul out dirt, bring in gravel, dig trenches, cut grass, and remove brush — there are so many things you can do with this machine. It is extremely versatile.”

Lovell is still very much the hands-on guy. Even with chasing down and bidding new work or supervising his crew, he finds time to jump on a machine. And he’s a very capable operator. “Deere machines are easy and comfortable to run. And I don’t think we’ve ever had one in the shop. They start when you want them to, and they always perform. They get the job done, and that’s what we demand.”

Lovell got his first John Deere machine five years ago from his local Deere dealer, TriGreen Equipment. “I had a competitor’s machine at the time. I did about two jobs with that machine, and I knew immediately it just wouldn’t cut it. I needed a machine that could work in tight quarters around a house, and it didn’t respond like I needed it to. My dealer contact at TriGreen, Doug Swaim, really stepped up and got us a 325G CTL. It’s a fabulous machine. It performed exactly the way I wanted it to and saved the day for us.”

TriGreen has saved the day on more than one occasion, according to Lovell. “They’ve been fantastic. Whatever I need, I make one call and they get it done. I couldn’t ask for anything more than that. TriGreen has been really important to all of the contractors in the area that use John Deere equipment.”

Lovell can be proud of his “overnight” success. “We’ve built this company from the ground up, brick by brick. It takes a lot of work when you start at the bottom. But through hard work and being honest with the customer and dependable, I believed we could really achieve something. And there’s plenty of work yet to do. I feel lucky to live in such a great community.”

MCL Construction LLC is serviced by TriGreen Equipment, Huntsville, Alabama.

Check out the video at: JohnDeere.com/RentalDirt
John Deere compacts are “absolute lifesavers” to Matt Lovell of MCL Construction, who couldn’t imagine not having them on a jobsite.

Matt Lovell began a brick-laying business at age 25. Today MCL Construction builds custom homes from 1,200 to 4,200 sq. ft.
Sprawling around the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in North Alabama, Huntsville is nicknamed “The Rocket City” for its long history with the U.S. space program. The city is the home of NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center, which developed the Saturn boosters for the Apollo program as well as key systems for the International Space Station and the Space Shuttle program. Today Huntsville is the fourth largest and fastest growing city in Alabama, spurred by burgeoning defense, aerospace, and other tech-related industries.* In other words, it’s the perfect place for a company like Weaver Environmental Services Company (WESCO) to launch its business.

Owner Shaun Gonzales bought WESCO, an underground utility installation company, 18 years ago from his grandfather, James Weaver. “I worked for my grandfather ever since I can remember,” recalls Gonzales. “After high school I started bidding jobs for the company. My grandfather always preferred running equipment — he hated being cooped up in an office and bidding jobs. But I’ve always loved the competition of the bidding process.”

*Sources: huntsville.org, huntsvilleal.gov, and al.com.
Gonzales remembers Huntsville as a small town. “Growing up, I lived in the country,” he says. “It’s really grown in the last few decades — it’s crazy how much it’s grown.”

As tech-related companies flocked to Huntsville, subdivisions began sprouting up all over, along with grocery stores, restaurants, and other commercial businesses. Gonzales saw an opportunity.

Today Gonzales’ grandfather is 82 and still operates equipment and oversees a crew for WESCO. But 18 years ago he was ready to turn over the reins. “He wanted to stay small and do residential work, but I really felt we could grow. When I took over, we had eight employees and were working in subdivisions. Now we’ve got 37 employees and work on many big commercial jobs, as well as doing manhole rehabilitation for the city of Huntsville and offering material-hauling services.”

WESCO now has more work than Gonzales ever dreamed of, but finding workers is a challenge. “Back in the early days, finding employees was easy, but finding work was hard. Today we have plenty of work, but it’s hard to find people.”

Expanding into commercial work has also made it harder to be productive. Jobsites are much tighter and more congested than residential jobs. Gonzales needed to find ways to be more efficient and do more with less.

He struck pay dirt when he discovered John Deere compact machines. “It’s like we won the lottery when we started adding Deere mini excavators and compact track loaders (CTLs). They’re compact and versatile, which makes them very handy in close quarters.”

The company owns three Deere compact excavators, including a 35G, as well as a 331G CTL and a 333G CTL. The 35G has been the perfect fit for the type of work WESCO does. “It’s great for putting in septic systems, fixing water lines, and putting in small water systems — it just does a really good job. The zero-tail-swing design allows us to get into tight areas and rotate within the tracks without worrying about hitting something. And we really like the machine’s power and the long reach with the extended boom. Plus it has an angle blade for backfilling.”

— Shaun Gonzales, owner, Weaver Environmental Services Company
The CTLs excel at multitasking. “We can hook them up to augers, forks, buckets, four-in-one buckets, grapples, bush hogs, and trenchers. What can’t they do? You only need one machine to do so many jobs. They’re just so versatile.”

WESCO has its own in-house mechanic. “He always tells me everything is easy to get to and simple to service,” says Gonzales. “And if we need additional support, our local dealer, TriGreen Equipment, really takes care of us.

“We’ve just always had good luck with Deere machines. They are built really well, really tough. We put them through a lot, and they always hold up really well.”

— Shaun Gonzales, owner, Weaver Environmental Services Company
They get right on it, and we rarely have downtime. John Deere machines and TriGreen Equipment have been a real big part of our business and helped us succeed."

TRANQUILITY BASE

Gonzales finds all John Deere compact machines comfortable to run and easy to transport. “Despite being compact, there’s plenty of room inside the cab, and they’re really stable. And we can use a small trailer to haul them around, so we can pull up to a jobsite, unload quickly, and be on our way.

“We’ve just always had good luck with Deere machines,” he adds. “They are built really well, really tough. We put them through a lot, and they always hold up really well.”

WESCO has been holding up pretty well, too. “I’m proud that we’re a family business and we’ve been able to grow. My grandfather, father, and mother all work for the company. And I hope someday after he gets out of college, my son will take over the company.

He’s been learning the business by working on a pipe crew and has a mentor he really likes to work with.”

The younger Gonzales has a few other good mentors, too, including a great-grandfather who loves running equipment and a father who loves running the business. He’ll be in good hands as he launches his own career.

Weaver Environmental Services Company, Inc. (WESCO) is serviced by TriGreen Equipment, Huntsville, Alabama.

“WE CAN HOOK THEM UP TO AUGERS, FORKS, BUCKETS, FOUR-IN-ONE BUCKETS, GRAPPLES, BUSH HOGS, AND TRENCHERS. WHAT CAN’T THEY DO? YOU ONLY NEED ONE MACHINE TO DO SO MANY JOBS. THEY’RE JUST SO VERSATILE.”

— Shaun Gonzales, owner, Weaver Environmental Services Company

Check out the video at: JohnDeere.com/RentalDirt
Around the corner and at your service.

SUPPORT. So you can RUN [YOUR] WORLD.

Our well-equipped dealer network understands your equipment isn’t just inventory. So you get support and parts availability when you need it, delivering maximum rentability — and profits.

JohnDeere.com/RentalSales