

# GreenSheet



**RUPPERT**  
LANDSCAPE

*Employee Newsletter*

2nd Quarter 2011

## The Economy Challenges

*By Craig Ruppert*



I thought I'd take a minute to talk about the economy and how it's affecting Ruppert Landscape. We are slowly recovering from a recession that began officially four years ago and is likely the longest since World War II, and by some measures

could be the worst since the Great Depression. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth remains slow, unemployment high, the housing market has not yet recovered and our national debt is at an all time high. On the positive side, inflation and interest rates remain low, and we are fortunate to have many of our branches located in one of the best geographic markets in the country. So how does this affect us at Ruppert?

As in most industries, the economy continues to make our business more challenging. And while we consider ourselves fortunate and we are growing, we are doing so at a slower pace. The landscape construction division is seeing an abundant amount of competition for work and pricing that is very competitive. This is decreasing our gross profit and making it challenging to expand. We have managed to overcome these dynamics by expanding our geographic areas served and expanding our service offering. Because of these two moves, we have been able to protect jobs and keep our talented people who, in turn, allow us to continue to service our customers. In our landscape management division we are growing, but we are seeing more competitive pricing and customer expectations about quality and service continuing to rise. As a result of these tighter times, we are becoming better at identifying and presenting cost saving ideas to our customers. We expect new landscape construction to be slow for the rest of 2011 and 2012 and maybe into 2013. There does seem to be an increase in the number of new projects in the early stages of design,

which makes us more optimistic about 2013 and beyond.

For our customers, the interest in going green remains strong. In general, we all continue to expand our knowledge of green practices, learning about what is possible and what is practical. We now have four employees who hold the credentials of LEED Accredited Professionals. In the landscape division, it's rare to see a new project without some green features. In maintenance, we are increasingly focused on green/sustainable efforts that make sense for our customers.

Internally, we remain focused on the Ruppert team. With unemployment high, the pressure to recruit qualified people has eased, as there are many industry professionals available that bring many years of experience to the table. But our primary focus remains keeping our team challenged, motivated and feeling appreciated as they work hard to support our customers.

Thank you to our customers for entrusting us with your business and ultimately for making this newsletter possible. Thank you to our employees for working hard, having faith in our company and for lending us your expertise for the benefit of our customers. Whichever category you fall into, our goal is the same: develop a long-term relationship. Having a customer who values our relationship and chooses to renew their contract or uses us again for another job, and having employees who we hire for life are among our biggest accomplishments. We appreciate that you have chosen to associate with the Ruppert team and are always striving to meet your expectations.

Thank you,

## Ruppert's Virginia Landscape Construction Branch receives ABC Virginia's Paragon Award

Ruppert's Virginia Landscape Construction Branch was honored with a Paragon Award in a ceremony on June 7th. The Paragon Award was established by Safety Committee of the Virginia Chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors to honor members statewide who have a proven commitment to safety. Judging is performed by insurance professionals and safety consultants, with criteria primarily being taken from OSHA incident rates. Ruppert was recognized as one of the Paragon Award winners in the miscellaneous trades category for having worked 100,000 man hours without lost time for injury.

The Virginia Landscape Branch had also been honored by Ruppert as the company's "Safest Branch of 2010" award. Branches were measured on policy and compliance, crew inspections and incident rates, with an emphasis on safety practices, reduced injuries and more efficient operations. Congratulations to VAL and keep up the good work!





# Marine Corps Barracks & Ruppert: A Partnership Built on Learning and Respect

*One of the benefits of our profession is working on exciting projects with our customers. We learn and grow from our association and we think that by profiling some of these projects, it will be beneficial to both our customers and our employees.*

**B**uilt in 1801 and located just a few blocks from the nation's Capitol, the Marine Corps Barracks Washington is the oldest active post in the Marine Corps. The Barracks is rich with history, including its connection to John Philip Sousa who served as the leader of the Marine Corps Band and wrote many of his well known marches while there, and its reputation as the oldest public building in continuous use in the nation's capital. But during parade season, which occurs on Friday nights in the summer months, the Barracks plays host to about 75,000 guests who come to experience the United States Marine Band, the U.S. Marine Drum and Bugle Corps, Color Guard, Silent Drill Platoon and Ceremonial Marchers. It's an institution that is proud of its history and deeply connected to a tradition of service.



*The Marine Corps Barracks is closely scrutinized by military personnel and visitors alike, necessitating crisp lines, neat hedges, clean beds and perfectly manicured turf.*

Ruppert's association with the Barracks began in spring of 2006 with a cold call from Ruppert's Forestville Maintenance branch. Jack Jones, a Ruppert branch manager and former Parris Island Drill Instructor, reached out to the Barracks with an offer to assist with the maintenance, which at the time had services such as flowers, irrigation, turf maintenance, all being done by different vendors.

There wasn't an immediate response to his proposal. But out of the blue one morning, Jack received a call asking if Ruppert would be able to install several thousand annuals for an event at the commandant's house by 4 p.m. that afternoon. Ruppert was able to source, deliver and install those annuals and accommodate that request, and the relationship was off and running.

One of the first projects Ruppert worked on was the renovation of a half-acre parade deck. Recently installed by another vendor, the



*The Marine Corps commandant, whose residence is attached to this site, does a lot of entertaining of Washington's elite, necessitating quick turnaround on last minute requests.*

turf was not living up to the Marine Corps standards and Ruppert was asked to remove the existing turf and replace it with a solution that allowed for better draining. Ruppert personnel were able to value-engineer the project and provide a much more cost-effective solution by changing the biodiversity of the soil. This proactive alternative fortified the relationship and underscored Ruppert's long-term commitment to the customer.

As the relationship continued to evolve, so did the level of communication. Ruppert became more attuned to the Marine Corps' standards and expectations for the facility and the Barracks staff became more educated about the landscape and its nuances. The knowledge gained from those conversations became the cornerstone for the facility's five year plan.

The initial turf renovation paved the way for myriad other improvements, which has totaled close to twenty times the volume of the yearly contract. When the Barracks expressed an interest in renovating the Marine Corps Family Garden, Ruppert was able to tap into our enhancement design services to create and install this project. When diseased trees ranging in size from 6-30" caliper needed to be removed and replaced along the parade deck, our Ruppert Landscape Construction division was able to source large caliper replacements and install them using a 40,000 lb forklift. This tree installation also enabled us to redesign an irrigation system with quick couplers that would make the watering, which is done by Marine Corps staff, quicker and easier. When the commandant's residence underwent a complete renovation in early 2011, Ruppert was recommended to the general contractor as the Barrack's preferred vendor. Ruppert's Landscape Construction Division removed and reinstalled 4,200 sq/ft of concrete and a 6,000 sq/ft slate walkway in and around the memorial garden and cleaned and resealed the Marine Corps emblem that is embedded within the hardscape. When possible, existing plant material was salvaged, stored by Ruppert and reinstalled.



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Colors and varieties of flower rotations are chosen six months to a year ahead of installation. Because parade season starts a month earlier than a typical spring installation, Ruppert elicited the help of Greenstreet Growers, to custom grow annuals to ensure viability and availability for installation at the start of parade season in late April. We also worked with Ruppert Nurseries to hand-select and tag a number of evergreens in our nursery to compliment existing evergreens on site.



Crews used string lines and hand-pruning techniques to bring these boxwoods and spirea back to their intended height and straightness and combat the dieback that was occurring.

The relationship began with fulfilling one need and has steadily evolved into a long-term relationship that has tapped into Ruppert's many services and areas of expertise. Jack Jones credits mutual respect, high expectations and both parties speaking the same language as some of the reasons for the success of this long-term relationship. Jones went on to describe how that learning has been a two-way street and that initially there were some administrative challenges that could have easily caused either party to throw in the towel. But with strong lines of communication and a willingness to work through the issues, the Barracks was able to educate Ruppert and guide us through their accounts receivable process to ensure we'd receive payment for the work we'd performed and would perform in the future. "On our end, we've helped educate their personnel and brought in several of our vendors who specialize in annuals, trees, turf, irrigation and lighting to take part in the discussions and be a part of the solutions." Throughout the process, Barracks personnel and the Ruppert team have worked together to develop an even more critical approach to every task that's performed in the landscape.

Ultimately, our relationship with the Marine Corps Barracks serves as a model for what all good customer relationships should include: strong lines of communication, listening and education on both sides, being held to a high standard and using every tool we have available in our arsenal to provide proactive and cost-effective solutions. In the end, we take the lessons we've learned onto all the other jobs we're associated with and feel very fortunate to have bonded with a customer that has such high standards.

# Movin' OnUp

**John McIntyre (VAM)** has been promoted to the position of Area Manager in our Lorton, Virginia satellite office. John interned with Ruppert in the summer of 2009 before graduating from West Virginia University with a degree in Landscape Contracting. He joined our company on a full time basis as a Field Manager in January of 2010.

**Kevin Jones (NCM)** has been promoted from field manager to the dual roles of Enhancement and Area Manager. He has been with Ruppert for four years following graduation from Coastal Carolina University, and

has worked as a Field Manager in both enhancements and maintenance operations.

**Humberto Sarabia (PAM)** and **Benjamin Ramos (PAM)** have been promoted from Assistant Field Manager, to Field Manager positions. Both employees have been with Ruppert since the fall of 2010.

**Ray England (NCM)** was promoted to Field Manager in March. Ray joined Ruppert in July 2010 after earning his degree in Communications at Coastal Carolina University.

*Each employee should know that we are committed to his or her growth and development."*

*~ Ruppert Values, p. 2*

## Career Opportunities

Looking to move up the ladder or know someone in the industry seeking a position? Ruppert Landscape has the following positions immediately available:

### Landscape Construction

- Crewman (1) VAL
- Driver (1) VAL
- Field Manager (1) VAL

### Landscape Management

- Area Manager (1) MDM
- Branch Administrator (1) NCM
- Irrigation Tech (1) GAM
- Field Manager (1) FOM, GAM
- Water Truck Driver (1) FOM, FRM

*For more information or to apply, please contact the department noted.*



John McIntyre



Kevin Jones



Ben Ramos



Humberto Sarabia



Ray England

# Community Service

*“A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle.”*  
~ Benjamin Franklin

**T**wo years ago, when the **Baltimore** (then Frederick) **Maintenance Branch (BAM)** won the maintenance contract for the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) campus, they also started voluntarily maintaining the Ronald McDonald House (RMH) that is located on the UMB campus. The Ronald McDonald House is a nonprofit organization that relies on the community for 100% of its funding. They welcome families who have a critically sick or injured child who is receiving treatment at an area hospital. For families who have found themselves in very difficult circumstances, the RMH provides a host of services that are important and difficult to maintain during hospitalization including housing, meals, laundry and recreation for more than 1,000 families a year at this location.

This year, the Baltimore Maintenance Branch has been able to expand their relationship with the RMH and have spearheaded some much-needed landscape renovations. Designer **Jenn**

**Rodriguez**, a cancer survivor herself, has coordinated efforts between Ruppert and the RMH and branch personnel have pitched in to remove failing trees, install soil, purchase and plant new trees, shrubs and perennials in the back yard and front streetscape of the house. “Circumstances that bring our families here are unfortunate, challenging and often times tragic,” said **Sandy Pagnotti**, Executive Director for Ronald McDonald House Charities of Baltimore, Inc. “Amidst these uncertainties, Ruppert has helped us to create a respite of beauty and happiness for them to enjoy.” She went on to describe the gardens as providing a sense of normalcy for families who are staying there and that their guests are helping to take care of the watering duties nightly. “Every Ruppert team member who stepped foot on our soil, not only planted trees and flowers, but planted their hearts here with us. You’ve created a legacy of love and compassion that will bloom for many years to come.”



**N**orth Carolina Landscape (NCL) donated materials to the South Mecklenburg High School ACE Mentorship Program for their community service project. Three raised bed vegetable gardens were built at an area elementary school to assist teachers with educating pupils about healthy eating choices and to help supplement science learning. The ACE Mentorship program brings the fields of architecture, construction and engineering (ACE) to high school students through after school clubs and works to provide college scholarships. Students, aided by mentors from the professional community, develop site plans and construction budgets for a site in the community in need of an economic uplift and put together a presentation of their ideas for city officials at a final awards banquet at the end of the year. The presentations are judged and one high school is declared the ACE Champion for the year and presented with a trophy. This year the South Mecklenburg High School team, which **Andy Pedonti (NCL)** helped mentor, won the championship.

## Virginia Landscape

Continuing their work with Jubilee Housing, **Virginia Landscape (VAL)** offered a spring time yard clean-up to the organization’s annual gala, which was won by Claude Thomas. The branch also donated plant material, mulch, steel edging and debris removal to two other projects that are associated with Jubilee including the Jubilee Jumpstart Daycare Center and the Saturday for Rebuilding Alexandria project.

## North Carolina Maintenance

The **North Carolina Maintenance (NCM)** branch donated time and materials to perform an enhancement project at The Community Charter School—a project based K-5 program with an emphasis on the arts. The school is located in Charlotte’s historic Cherry Hill neighborhood.

# Major Milestones

A HEARTY  
CONGRATULATIONS  
AND BEST WISHES:

## JUST MARRIED

**Jack Jones (FOM)** and Allie Rill were married on May 28, 2011

**Benjamin Ramos (PAM)** and Marlenis Ledesma wed on March 12, 2011.



Allie and Jack Jones



Lowery and Jonathan Walker

**Jonathan Walker (GAM)** was married to Lowery Oaks on May 28, 2011.



Stacey and Zac Czapko

**Zac Czapko (GAL)** and his wife, Stacey were married on April 16, 2011.



Connor Daniel Kilmore

## PROUD PARENTS

**Jason Kilmore (FRM)** and his wife, Molly, welcomed their first child, Connor Daniel, on April 8, 2011

**Erin Cooney (VAM)** and her husband, Paul, welcomed their son, Alexander Thomas, on June 2, 2011

**Will Saxby (GAL)** and his wife, Holly, welcomed their third child, Olivia, on April 20, 2011. She as an older brother and sister, William and Juliet.



Alexander Thomas Cooney



Olivia Saxby

## OVERACHIEVERS

**Maryland Landscape Construction (MDL)** received the Award of Excellence from ABC Baltimore for their work on the T. Rowe Price Owings Mills Financial Center. **Darrin Middleton (MDL)**, one of the project's foreman for the \$900,000 two week fast-track project performed with HITT contracting in September of 2009, was on hand at the April banquet where he accepted the award.



Darrin Middleton, Foreman (MDL) and Steve Kelly, Associate Principle at Mahan Rykiel



Over 80 Ruppert employees were mobilized from the Maryland, Virginia and Georgia branches to produce four months worth of work in just two weeks time at the T. Rowe Price Owings Mills Financial Center.

# Major Milestones

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## Brad Rowland Receives ABC Metro Washington's J.P. Blase Cooke Leadership Achievement Award

Congratulations to **Brad Rowland (VAL)** for completing the ABC Metro Washington's 2010-2011 Leadership Development Program. Brad not only graduated from the program at the highest level (platinum), but he was also awarded the prestigious J.P. Blase Cooke Leadership Achievement Award.

ABC's Leadership Development Program was first offered in 2008 for ABC members who were looking to further their leadership skills and professional development, learn more about and become more involved with ABC and demonstrate their desire and ability to serve as future industry leaders. Students undergo a rigorous application and interview process to be accepted into the 15 month program and from there are expected to participate in monthly class sessions, as well as elective activities through the chapter to earn credits towards graduation.

Class meetings cover topics such as leadership styles, team building, negotiation skills, legislative issues, public speaking and research presentation. And while learning



*Pictured left to right: Brett Harton Foulger-Pratt Contracting, LLC and 2010 recipient of Blase Cook Award; Barbara Smith, Membership Director for ABC of Metro Washington; Brad Rowland, Business Development Manager, (VAL)*

about those topics, students are also expected to participate in elective activities such as attending the chapter's monthly meetings, joining committees and assisting with the chapter's legislative activities. Students earn credits to graduate at three different

levels: silver, gold and platinum. Platinum level graduates are awarded a tuition scholarship to attend Grinnell Leadership's "Leadership Jumpstart®" Program in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Jim Tuzzolino (VAL), Operations Manager, and Shane Carmadella (MDL), Business Development Manager and LEEP AP®, graduated from the program in 2009.

From each graduating class, one stand out graduate is awarded the J.P. Blase Cooke Leadership Achievement Award. The award is presented in memory of Blase Cooke, the President of Harkins Builders and former Chairman of the Board for ABC Metro Washington (1984), who passed away in 2007. Blase was not only known for his legacy of community involvement, charitable giving and caring for the people around him, but for his own tremendous leadership abilities and his passion for helping those around him develop the leader within themselves.

"Graduation from this program, at any level, is an impressive feat," said Debra A. Schoonmaker, CAE, President of ABC Metro Washington. "It's difficult to choose one Blase Cooke Award winner out of so many impressive candidates. Brad worked tirelessly and consistently throughout the past 15 months to learn as much as he could from the program, and got involved in nearly every aspect of our association, especially our legislative activities which were particularly intense over the past two years. Brad really impressed everybody—the LDP Advisory Council, the Mentor Group, and his fellow student—with his energy and tremendous contributions to our chapter."

## New Faces

WE WELCOME THE FOLLOWING NEW LEADERS TO RUPPERT'S GROWING RANKS:



**Joshua Cobb**  
(FOM)  
Field Manager



**Kevin Dubik**  
(MDM)  
Field Manager



**Cindy Guillen**  
(GAL/GAM)  
Receptionist



**Marcus Holmes**  
(VAM)  
Field Manager



**Michele Lewis**  
(VAL)  
Estimator



**Brian Lotterer**  
(BAM) Enhancement  
Field Manager



**Huitt Newton**  
(NCM)  
Asst. Field Manager



**Samuel Ortiz-Medina**  
(FOM) Enhancement  
Field Manager



**Neil Rout**  
(VAM)  
Asst. Field Manager



**Michael Sampson**  
(NCL)  
Field Manager



**Vic Smith**  
(VAL)  
Estimator



**Chris Southworth**  
(NCL)  
Estimator



**Nicholas Street**  
(FOM) Enhancement  
Field Manager

A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW CREWPERSONS AND OUR SUMMER INTERNS