



Turning Leaves

Fall 2009

This Issue



Early Years Timeline
Page 2



Photos of Signature
Landscape Today
Page 2



Fall Landscape Tips
Page 4

SIGNATURE LANDSCAPE CELEBRATES 20 YEARS 1989-2009



It was 1989, and Bill Gordon knew the time was right to strike out on his own. His wife had a good job; they hadn't yet had children; and Bill was armed with the knowledge gained from a K-State horticulture degree and seven years working for another company in the landscape business.

And so, Signature Landscape was born out of Bill's own home with one used lawnmower (that Bill refurbished himself), one truck, and one business-savvy wife acting as part-time bookkeeper. The story of the company's success is one of people, smart growth, focus, and innovation.

Looking at the numbers 20 years later, it would be an understatement to say that Signature Landscape has grown. It's multiplied! Now, the company owns and operates two locations (one in south Johnson County; one in the Northland), deploys up to 75 crews each day at the height of the season (including dozens of mowing crews, flower bed crews, and even sprinkler maintenance

crews), and has all the "cutting edge" and high tech tools necessary to help those employees do their best work.

But, back to the beginning. . .

A few years after starting the business, Bill and his wife, Dana, started their family. In an industry that can demand 70-hour work weeks spring through fall, Bill wanted to nurture a culture in his own company that honored the importance of time with family, both for him and for his employees.

"I want to emphasize that this company is really a group of people and equipment. But the most important asset is people. We strive to have the best of the best here, and then provide them with the tools to succeed. And that includes a culture that allows them to work, but also to see their families," explains Bill. "I try not to have them work crazy hours so they can see their families. That was an early philosophy about this company."

In fact, Bill credits finding, developing, and rewarding good people as the key to his company's success over the years. And purposeful growth of the company truly is, when it comes down to it, part of his strategy for keeping those employees.

Continued on page 2.





1989-1990 Bill Gordon's House, the first Signature Landscape headquarters



1990-1992 Signature Landscape's second location on Santa Fe Trail Drive in Lenexa



1993 Bill Gordon and daughter Heather



The Signature Landscape team.

"Growth is critical or you can't keep good people," says Bill. "Why? Because they need a place to grow, to advance, and yes, get pay raises." If those opportunities weren't offered at Signature, Bill knows his best people could look somewhere else.

His strategy must be working. Mike Mitchell, Chief Operations Officer, has been with the company for 19 years. Senior Account Manager, Eric Robinson, just celebrated his 20th anniversary with the 20-year-old company. In all, **Signature boasts five employees who have been with the company for more than 15 years**, 10 who are at least 10-year veterans, and 30 who have been there at least five years. Most of Signature's seasonal workers return year-after-year.

But in the beginning, Bill approached growth very cautiously. He knew that people who enjoy working outdoors are often attracted to the landscape industry, though too often without the benefit of much business experience. "I think that was one of the keys," Bill

they can't do that anymore. That's one of the things I think is different about this company. Bill understands he doesn't have to be like that. He hires good people to do a job and then he lets them go do it."

Despite the myriad talents he's attracted to his company, Bill has maintained a strict focus on one core service: commercial landscape maintenance.

"I think it's important to have a narrow focus in an industry that can be so broad," says Bill. "Our focus has always been working with clients that we take care of year round."

Signature has grown to offer property improvement services, irrigation and landscape design-build. And there are now staff mechanics that focus on equipment maintenance, so the crews can focus on the landscapes. But, says Bill, diversification has always been strategically calculated to improve

delivery of the best commercial landscape maintenance possible.

And that focus extends to each client under Signature's care. In the case of the company's first client at 95 Metcalf (still with them), that means almost 20 years-worth of familiarity with the property.

"I mowed that place every week when I first started. Being able to go back 19 years later, I am really familiar with all the nuances of it. It's neat to have it," says Mike.

That level of commitment to each property posed a capacity challenge to the small, young company. Bill and Mike remember making the tough decision to turn away work when they felt they didn't have the capacity to deliver on their quality standards.

"That's one of the things that has changed

The Signature Landscape south location's truck fleet.



over the years," says Bill. "Early on, acquiring work was relatively easy as compared to getting the job done. Now our larger scale has allowed us to deliver consistent service



1993-1998 Signature Landscape's third location at 123rd Street in Olathe



1998-present Current South location



2006-present Current Northland location

more easily, the challenge has become consistent growth percentages at this larger scale.”



The Signature Landscape super barn.

Technology has smoothed the transitions, though. “No matter what size your business is, you have to run it appropriately for its size,” says Bill. “As you get bigger, the systems and processes have to grow with you. I used to hand-write the invoices.”

Not only was Signature’s invoicing long ago computerized, now both locations are **completely networked, customer service personnel all have Blackberries, and computer software handles the daily scheduling, routing and work assignments for up to 75 crews.**

All of this communications technology also means the company can respond quickly to customer needs. “It’s interesting how expectation levels for response time have changed over 20 years. We strive to keep up with those changes and meet those

expectations”, says Mike. Among industry peers, Signature Landscape has been an early adopter of new technology.

They were the first in the Kansas City market to use the stand-on type of lawn mower. “At first, the guys didn’t want to use them, but after a week, they wouldn’t get off again,” recalls Bill, who was attracted to the new mowers’ superior safety features. “So it was good to see, after a couple of years, everyone in town had started using them.”

Credit also goes to Signature for introducing a natural-looking brown-dyed mulch that holds its color, and for popularizing among area landscaping companies a new kind of work truck that eliminated the need for each crew to pull a trailer.

As a mature company that has achieved much success, will Signature rest on its laurels? No – Bill is still leading the way as an innovator. His latest “first” is a clean-burning yard waste incinerator, acquired just this year. This technology cleanly burns yard waste, thereby reducing the amount sent to landfills.

“We are the first in the state of Kansas to have one and everyone is looking at it,” Bill explains. This includes the Kansas Department of Health & Environment and the EPA. “I think the state was really impressed that we are reducing all of this waste. The EPA came out and they liked it, too.”

But despite all of his accomplishments, Bill’s greatest source of pride remains what he’s been able to do for people.

“The main thing I’ve been able to contribute through the years is the company culture. We have good people who like it here and our clients are well cared for,” he says.



The Signature Landscape equipment fleet.

And what better proof of Bill’s success could be found than when his long-time employee Mike adds, “I can’t imagine working for anyone better in this town and this industry than this man here. The way he treats his employees and conducts business is something I don’t think you find that often.”



FALL TIPS



If you want your pansies to have the best chance of surviving a typical Kansas City winter, get the plants well established before the harsh weather arrives.



Mid September is ideal planting time, even though you will often be pulling out annuals that still look great. The deep, well-established root system typically keeps the plants alive while the foliage takes a beating.



If you want to spice things up, add color-coordinated tulip bulbs to the planting in November. Simply plant a bulb through the pansies every two feet or so to give your beds a spring surprise at very little additional cost.

Thank you to all of our customers for making our first 20 years a success and a joy. We look forward to serving you for another 20!


Signature
LANDSCAPE



Turning Leaves is a seasonal publication of Signature Landscape. We welcome your questions, comments and suggestions. Please contact:

Bill Gordon
Signature Landscape
15705 Pflumm Road
Olathe, Kansas 66062

913.829.8181
Fax: 913.829.8197
www.signaturekc.com


Signature
LANDSCAPE

15705 Pflumm Road
Olathe, Kansas 66062