



LB'S LEADER OF THE MONTH
Every issue, Lynchburg Business plays a game of fill-in-the-blank with a local leader to get a glimpse into their work, life and what they love about our region.

MARK MASLOW

CO-OWNER AND PRESIDENT OF SOUTHERN LANDSCAPE GROUP, INC
Hometown: Lynchburg, VA ■ Age: 29

According to your Web site, you founded Southern Landscape in 2003. Last year, it was named Small Business of the Year by the Lynchburg Regional Chamber. How have you grown your business to this point?

Growing a company requires a lot of time and dedication. Add a family into that mix and it makes it even trickier. My business partner, David Moon, and I are 100 percent focused on our vision and mission and that is the best thing we have ever done. Yes, it takes a lot of work, but then again, tell me something in life that is great and does not require work.

As Southern Landscape Group has grown, so has our team of landscapers. I quickly learned through being in business that our clients appreciated a company that was professional, knowledgeable and employed great people; therefore, I began to develop a team that reflected those traits. We recruit the best of the best to work with us and our expectations are high. There is no doubt that our team members have been the single most important piece to our continued growth.

Yes, it takes other things too like being prompt, providing quality work, follow-through and, of course, passion. The nice thing about those traits is if you recruit the right people then they come naturally.

Probably the last, most important factor to our continued growth has been standing behind our work. No exceptions! That business principal is so simple, yet so many people do not get it. It actually surprises me how amazed a client is to see me when I go back to a job after several years to check our work and ensure it is performing like I told them it would. Certainly, I have made mistakes

in the past and I will probably make a few more before I retire, but no matter the mistake, Southern Landscape Group will stand behind what is right for our clients. At the end of the day, that is what builds loyalty with our clients, not a low price.

Tell us about your background and education. Why did you choose to go into landscape design?

Since I was a youngster, I have always had a passion for being outdoors, tinkering with the landscape and making money. I remember renting a push mower from my dad at age nine for \$2 so I could mow a lawn for \$9. Little did I know at the time that this was only the beginning of what would cultivate into a career and company that I absolutely love.

I only applied to one college while in high school and that was Virginia Tech. They have an excellent Horticulture and Landscape Design program, so I knew that was the next step to continuing my career. Four years later with a degree in Horticulture/Landscape Design and a minor in Small Business Management, I was well on my way to building a solid landscape company in Central Virginia.

Designing and creating landscapes that people can enjoy forever is truly a passion. Every landscape is designed specifically for that client and their tastes. Being able to create a space that will provide memories with kids, grandkids, family and friends is very rewarding. I am looking forward to many more years designing and building amazing landscapes for the people of Central Virginia!

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Southern Landscape Group seems to be putting a priority on being eco-friendly. How does your "green initiative" work?

Landscaping is pretty much where "green" began and it was long before the "green movement" waved over our country in the last five years. Being green is about more than using solar panels, recycling plastic and driving hybrid cars. Being green is planting trees and shrubs in your yard, it is creating compost from your annual pots each year, it is fertilizing responsibly, it is taking proper care of your landscape and handling drainage and erosion issues. What I want people to know about being "green" is that it does NOT require you to spend a lot of money. There are a lot of small things you can do to help the environment.

You are very active in getting the word out to the media about what your company is doing. Have you reaped the benefits of these efforts?

Yes. I am a believer in what our landscape teams design and create and I am proud of their accomplishments! We all work extremely hard to win national landscape awards. Our team members get certified in their respective fields and I enjoy making sure they are recognized for that.

Consistently being in the media has brought name recognition to Southern Landscape Group, starting back when I was in college. I want people to know that we are here, we will be here for a long time and we are doing great things in the community, from creating beautiful landscapes to our philanthropy.

How are you and your business plugged into the community at large?

I love Lynchburg and all that it has to offer! I love the fact that it is small enough to really get to know people, but large enough to be home to some great companies. Southern Landscape Group has had the opportunity to make our mark in the community by completing some showcase landscape projects like the Alan B. Pearson Cancer Center Healing Garden, Riverfront Park on Jefferson Street and very recently, the Center for Advanced Engineering and Research.

My business partner, David Moon, and I have given back financially as well as with time to different community organizations including the American Cancer Society, Interfaith Outreach Association, Centra Foundation, Brookville-Timberlake Volunteer Fire Department, Boonsboro Volunteer Fire Department, SPCA, SML Charity Home Tour, Junior League, Rush Homes, E.C. Glass Playbill, Children's Miracle Network and countless other nonprofits. We absolutely LOVE being able to give back! It our contribution for being a part of the community that has been so good to us!

What is life like outside of work for you?

Life outside of work is great, just not enough of it! My wife, Merideth, and I have an 8-month-old daughter, Meg. Many of our summer weekends are spent at Smith Mountain Lake with our friends, family and clients. I tell most of my clients that being in the landscape business, I was forced to learn how to snow ski because winter is the only time I can step away from work long enough to vacation. While there is some truth to that, I do enjoy time at the beach.

Other hobbies include playing tennis in a USTA league and flying. There is no better way for me to unwind than enjoying a nice scenic flight through the Blue Ridge Mountains or to the coast.

Fill in the Blank:

I LOVE LIVING IN CENTRAL VIRGINIA BECAUSE we get to experience all four seasons (sometimes in one day) and our sense of community is so strong.

MY FAVORITE ASPECT OF MY JOB IS meeting new people and learning something from them.

MY FUTURE CAREER GOALS INCLUDE continuing to expand Southern Landscape Group into a company that extends beyond me; a company that is comprised of well-trained professionals working with a passion to create beautiful landscapes. **LB**