

Strong out of the gate

Newer companies are making the most of their short time in the industry

By Shannon Miller

A common theme runs throughout many of the companies that have been in the snow and ice management industry for five years or less: They love their jobs. Daniel Gilliland, CSP, of Belton, MO-based **SnowFighters US, LLC**, says, "I've had so much fun doing what I do!"

Their work ethic, determination and simple love for the industry have led to quick success.

Paul Fraynd of **Omaha**

Friendly Services in

Nebraska says he started his business doing what other college kids do when they need cash: washing cars, doing odd jobs and shoveling driveways. About four years ago, he started plowing snow as a serious part of his grounds maintenance business, and things grew from there.

Spread the word

Omaha Friendly Services gets its name from Paul's name, Fraynd, which is pronounced "friend." But he said it's become a cornerstone for his business approach.

"I try to be approachable and friendly. Building relationships is important, not only for gaining customers, but also for working with suppliers. If a supplier is short on salt, for example, but you have a good relationship with them, chances are good they will hold salt back for you."

When asked how his business has grown so quickly, he credits old-fashioned word of mouth, a strong work ethic and diligent communication for much of the success. His company now

has a small fleet of five trucks, 70 snow accounts, three subcontractors and four in-house employees. "Word of mouth is very powerful," he says, and can help your business grow tremendously.

Deliver the goods

Fraynd, who graduated from Creighton University, studied marketing in college. He says it's not only important to get your message out there, but also to deliver on it.

"Gaining clients starts with being reliable and professional," Fraynd said. Good communication helps, too, not only with accounts, but also with finding good help.

Communication with the property managers about their expectations is essential, and Fraynd admits he is "very particular about meeting their expectations." The company also sends out a monthly newsletter to clients to keep them aware of changes and plans for the upcoming season.

Tackling weather and subs

A recurring challenge for those companies we spoke with is unpredictable weather patterns.

Gilliland says: "We're in a volatile market because of [changing weather patterns]. This has presented huge obstacles."

Especially for those companies located in areas where there are only 5 to 15 snow events in a season, making the most of those few events is key. For many, that means hiring good subcontractors to lighten the load.

"One reason we've been able to get

YOUNG COMPANY SUPERSTARS

- Advanced Snow & Ice Solutions
- Omaha Friendly Services
- Smart Scapes Landscaping
- SnowFighters US, LLC

to where we are is because we use 100 percent subcontractors," says Gilliland. "I can't think of too many disadvantages to using subcontractors. We run a \$3 million snow company. My contractors are just as important as my customers in some ways. I have tight relationships with my contractors, and they have a vested interest in doing a good job."

Fraynd agrees: "Finding people who will wake up in the middle of the night to go plow and do as good of a job as I will is a challenge. But our main thing is constant improvement. If I communicate with my subcontractors about my expectations and they're open to it, it works well."

Summer is no vacation

For companies who solely focus on snow and ice management, making the most of the off-season is important.

Brian Morse, managing director of

Advanced Snow and Ice Solutions, in Hammonton, NJ, says, "We work very hard year-round to be prepared and educated on weather trends, the ice control industry, the most effective snow removal equipment,

the latest technology and the needs facing property managers, owners and tenants. We focus on snow year-round."

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Paul Fraynd



Brian Morse

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Staying competitive

Another challenge is the rising cost of fuel and materials. Under these conditions, it's been difficult for many companies to know how to properly bid on jobs because of the uncertainty of supply costs.

Morse says, "It's challenging to keep rates competitive. Right now, there's a lot of speculation about the skyrocketing price of salt, and it's tough to know exactly where the supplies and prices will be in the middle of this winter."

SIMA pays off

A final common thread that ties these young, up-and-coming companies is SIMA. Many give credit to SIMA as a valuable resource for helping them network and discuss strategies with others in the snow business.

"Probably more than any other resource, the SIMA Snow & Ice Symposium has helped me the most. It is a primary way to benefit companies through developing relationships with contractors around the country. It has helped me to become more knowledgeable about systems and management," Gilliland says.

Morse agrees: "Developing mutually beneficial relationships with other snow and ice management professionals, including fellow SIMA members, is key; most people in this industry are friendly and helpful, and this kind of teamwork between different companies creates more win-win relationships."

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"Our ability to see the organization not as it is, but what it can become will make us a great player in the market."

Robert Smart, CSP, President
Smart Scapes Landscaping (OH)