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A final message from President Chris Geryak

Greetings,

As I write my final president's letter, I want to take a moment to acknowledge and thank those who have led this organization before me. The ILA, founded in 1942, was created to foster fellowship, promote ethics among local nursery and landscaping businesses, and uphold high standards of knowledge and professionalism. Since then, it has grown into a cornerstone of Indiana's green industry.

I joined the board in July 2013, invited by one of my greatest friends and mentors, Roy Western. Over the years, I had the privilege of serving alongside seven outstanding presidents: Warren Maccaroni, Jeff Belhmer, Ken Barthuly, Jim Calvin, Brian Franco, Joshua Brown, and Wesley Addington. Each of them demonstrated exceptional leadership and contributed to my growth, as well as the success of the association.

Our board is composed entirely of volunteers who dedicate their time, wisdom, and passion to uphold the mission outlined in our By-Laws. Their dedication deserves immense respect, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to all who have served before me, with me, and to those who will serve in the future.

People often ask, "Why should I join the ILA?" The answer for me is simple: growth. Serving on this board has taught me many valuable lessons; one of those is leadership. It helped me understand that leadership is not about creating followers; it's about developing leaders. That lesson has been invaluable.

The ILA continues to thrive because of members like you. Whether through education, networking, or advocacy, your participation strengthens our industry and ensures its growth. If you haven't already, I encourage you to get involved—your voice and leadership matter. The strength of any association lies in its members. Every idea shared, every hour volunteered, and every connection made helps shape the future of our industry and you. Together, we can continue building a community that inspires growth and excellence.

I'm humbled by the friendships and connections I've made over the past 12 years. My best wishes go to Ryan Coyle as he steps into the role of president, and to the dedicated board he will lead.

Respectfully yours,
Chris Geryak – Greendell and Musselman Landscape



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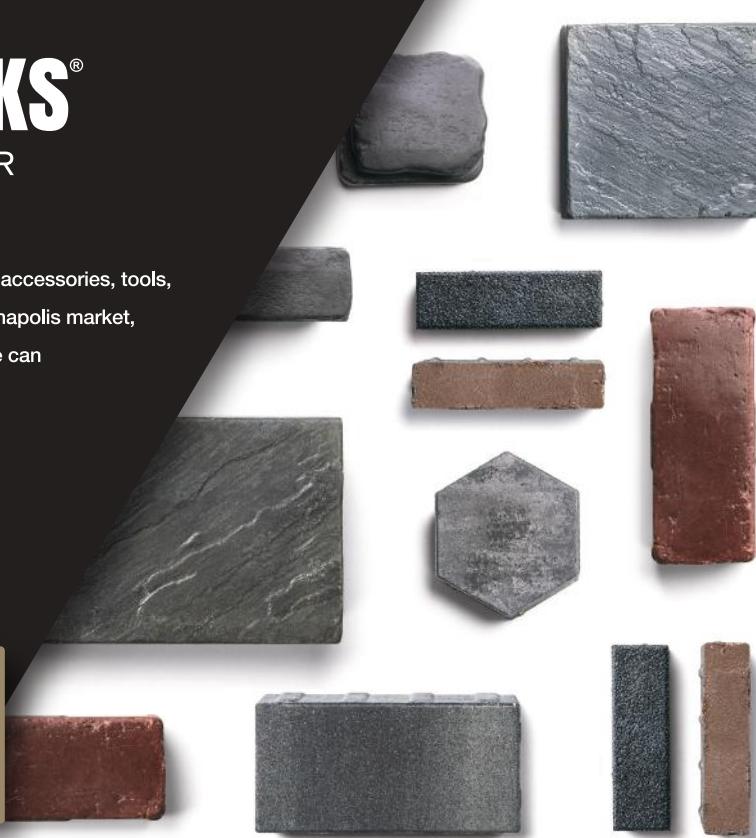
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Building a Strong Brand (and Why It Matters More Than Ever)

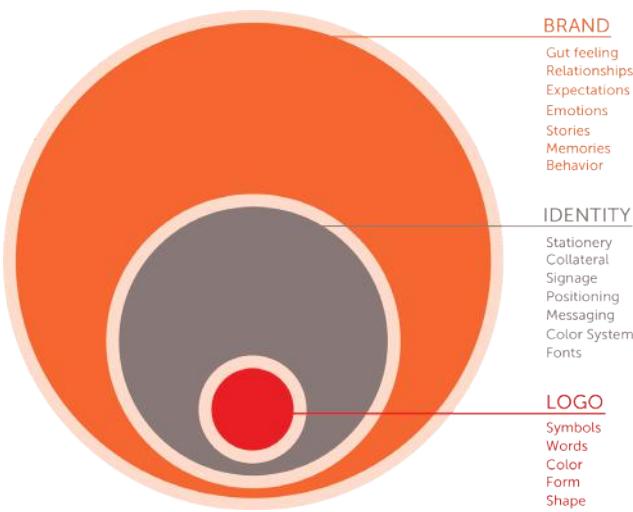
By: Five Stones Marketing



If you've been in the landscape industry for any length of time, you already know this: doing great work is essential — but it's no longer enough on its own. Today's customers are researching you online, comparing companies visually, and forming opinions long before they ever make a phone call. That's where branding and marketing come into play.

A strong brand isn't about being flashy or trendy. It's about clearly telling your story, attracting the right customers, and building trust before you ever step foot on a property. When branding is done well, it makes every part of your marketing work harder and more effectively.

Logo vs. Brand: They're Not the Same Thing



One of the biggest misunderstandings we see is the idea that a logo is a brand. It isn't.

A logo is simply a visual mark — the end result of a much bigger process. Your brand is the overall identity and reputation of your company. It's shaped by how you look, what you say, how you communicate, and how customers experience working with you.

Branding is the intentional process of defining who you are, who you serve, and how you want to be perceived. Every interaction — your website, your trucks, your proposals, your social media, even how your crew presents themselves — reinforces that brand, whether you realize it or not.



Why a Professional Logo Is Worth the Investment

Your logo is often the first impression someone has of your company. A professionally designed logo immediately communicates credibility and professionalism. On the flip side, a poorly designed or outdated logo can unintentionally make a solid company look less established or trustworthy.

A strong logo isn't just about looking good. It's built on strategy. That includes understanding your mission, your target audience, and how you fit within the landscape industry. It should be simple, easy to recognize, and flexible enough to work everywhere — on trucks, shirts, websites, yard signs, proposals, and social media.

Typography and color matter more than people realize. Fonts need to be readable and memorable, while color choices influence how your brand feels to customers. A great logo works in full color, black and white, digital, print, and embroidery — and it's always created as original, custom artwork that helps you stand out from competitors.

Once You Have a Brand, Marketing Brings It to Life

Branding sets the foundation, but marketing is what puts that brand to work.

Your website is often the centerpiece of your marketing efforts. At a minimum, it should clearly explain what you do, show examples of your work, and make it easy for customers to contact you. Never assume visitors already know your services — clarity builds confidence.



Professional photography and video take your brand to the next level. High-quality images show craftsmanship, scale, and attention to detail far better than words ever can. Drone photography and video add another layer of impact by showing projects from angles customers don't usually get to see (just remember that commercial drone work requires FAA Part 107 certification).

360-degree photos and video are becoming more popular as well, giving potential clients an immersive look at completed projects and helping them better visualize your work.

Reviews, Social Media, and Consistency



Positive reviews and customer testimonials play a huge role in building trust. They reinforce what you say about your company with real-world experiences from past clients.

Social media is another must-have — even if it sometimes feels overwhelming. There are endless strategies and platforms, but the most important factor is consistency. Showing up regularly with content that reflects your brand and your work helps build recognition over time.

Organic Growth vs. Paid Growth

Digital marketing generally falls into two buckets: organic and paid growth. Organic growth is cost-effective but takes time and effort — whether that's sweat equity or paid labor. Paid growth delivers faster results with more precise targeting, but it requires a budget. Most successful companies find the right balance between the two.

Don't Forget the Offline Touchpoints

Branding doesn't stop online. Signage, print advertising, and professionally designed proposals all reinforce your brand in the real world. Every touchpoint is a chance to look polished, consistent, and professional.

The Big Picture

Building a strong brand and using marketing strategically isn't about chasing trends or spending money for the sake of it. It's about positioning your company for long-term success. When your branding is clear and professional — and your marketing supports it — you attract better-fit clients, stand out from competitors, and grow with confidence.

At the end of the day, your brand is the story you're telling the world. Make sure it reflects the quality of work you deliver every day.

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Is your employee turnover too high? Here's why.

Discover why your team has turned into a revolving door and uncover four causes of high employee turnover in contracting businesses.



And another one bites the dust. As you watch yet one more employee saunter into the sunset, it's tough not to wonder... what is going on?

Employee turnover is painful and pricey, especially for the trades. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, from March to June in 2025, average turnover was almost 27% higher in the construction industry than across the general workforce.

It's tough to find good people, sure. But it's even worse to lose them. The knock-on effects can be detrimental for your business, resulting in safety risks, project delays and morale meltdowns. Not to mention a major loss of employee experience.

In the United States, it's estimated that these costs of chaos can run upwards of \$700 billion a year.

A high turnover rate is definitely worth getting a handle on and if yours feels out of control, this article will help open your eyes to what's going wrong in your contracting business.

What is a high employee turnover rate for trades businesses?

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, from April to June 2025, the average turnover rate for construction was a little over 4%. That stat includes both voluntary and involuntary turnover

(or "separations" as the Bureau officially calls them).

What's the difference?

- **Voluntary turnover** is when someone leaves of their own accord. Maybe they've found a more exciting opportunity elsewhere, or retired, or just got fed up and quit. Whatever their reason, it was their own decision.

- **Involuntary turnover** is when you basically show someone the door. They're terminated. Fired. Sayonara.

Now 4% may not seem like much, but to put it into perspective, if you have a staff of 15 and you lost two people in that same time period, your turnover rate would be about 14%.

In other words... too darn high.

How to calculate employee turnover

Employee turnover measures how well your company is retaining staff and gives an indication of your team's satisfaction level. People tend to stay where they're happy, so it's an important metric to keep tabs on.

Here's how to calculate employee turnover:

Step 1. Pick a time frame

Turnover is a relative metric, so first decide which time period you want to look at. Quarterly is a good one to use.

Step 2. Calculate your average # of employees

If you're interested in your turnover during a particular quarter, add the number of employees at the start of the quarter and at the end of the quarter, then divide by two.

For example:

On April 1st, you had 12 team members. On June 30th, you had 9. Your average number of employees for that time period would be: $(12+9) / 2 = 10.5$

Don't worry that it's a decimal. No one will think you only had half a person, it's just a statistical thing. Keep going.

Step 3. Calculate your turnover rate

Divide the number of people who left by the average number of employees and divide by 100 to turn it into a percentage.

Carrying on with the above example: You went from 12 to 9 team members, so lost 3 that quarter, and your average number of employees (calculated in Step 2) was 10.5. So your turnover rate would be: $(3/10.5) \times 100 = 28.6\%$

Step 4. Cry a little...

... And then keep reading to figure out what's going wrong.

How to reduce high employee turnover

Before you throw up your hands and conclude crews are just flaky...

We have good news: There are things you can do to improve your retention.

It starts with taking a careful look at your business and recognizing the conditions or practices that could be negatively impacting your retention rate.

Here's a list of the most common turnover causes we see:



#1: Bad hiring decisions



Making bad hires sets your turnover rates up to fail right from the get-go and there are a number of reasons why they tend to happen.

- Belief that it's futile – Hiring can be exhausting, especially when you feel stuck on repeat. At a certain point it's easy to become disenchanted with the whole hiring exercise since "they're just gonna quit anyway."
- Desperation – Whether or not you become mired in a sense of futility, that doesn't take away from the fact that sooner or later, you will need to hire some crew. If you haven't planned effectively, it can leave you in a crunch, feeling like any set of hands will do.
- Messy hiring process (or none at all) – There's no defined structure leading candidates through the hiring funnel. Potential candidates aren't vetted in conversion calls, and interviews are rushed and unfocused.

- Fear of "Thanks, but no thanks" – You think you've found someone, even though they don't really align with your company's values. But you welcome them aboard anyway... and set yourself up to do it all again.

#2: Insufficient training

As Brian Gottlieb, author of *Beyond the Hammer*, grew his remodelling business, he noticed that at a certain point, he was no longer just building structures, he was building a training organization, a place that offered people a path to grow and develop their expertise.

Employee churn in this industry can cost between

50 and 200% of a worker's salary, so training is an expense that adds up quickly if you're constantly redoing it. But when training is handled effectively, it becomes a mutual investment benefiting your company and your employee, in terms of their career path.

Training involves both onboarding

when a new employee starts, and subsequent training as part of future career development. We'll explore the impact of each of these.

- **Haphazard onboarding** – Inadequate onboarding is one of the top reasons employees leave. They get frustrated with not fully understanding how things are done, don't have the resources they need or they aren't clear on what their role entails.
- **No career advancement** – This can really hinder retaining top talent. If high performers can't see the next step in their career ladder, they'll go elsewhere for advancement opportunities.

#3: Toxic team culture

The trades can be fertile ground for crew drama thanks to the trifecta of long hours, grueling conditions and unforeseen challenges.

A toxic culture can have devastating impacts on employee engagement. Here are some key signs to look out for in your team:

- **Slack about safety** – When people feel caught in an unpleasant work environment, they can become lazy about following safety protocols, cutting corners just to get the job done and get out of there.
- **Total distrust** – This often stems from poor communication, with teams feeling like leadership isn't being transparent or is making unrealistic demands on their work life balance.
- **Bullying from above** – This is a huge red flag of bad leadership and can play out as managers playing favorites or verbally attacking inexperienced team members. It's even worse if victims feel there's no one serving as a human resource person to assist.
- **Playing the blame game** – When things go wrong, there's a complete lack of accountability, and instead of finding solutions, the team wastes time finger pointing.



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These behaviors are worth quashing as soon as possible because once negativity takes hold it can reverberate through an entire team. Toxicity travels.

These scenarios can be tricky, but there are systems to help navigate them.

#4: Unmotivating compensation

Compensation is obviously a hot topic because people's livelihoods support their families and lifestyles. There are a few aspects of compensation packages worth considering in relation to your turnover rate.

- **Wages** – It's possible that some ground crew are living paycheck to paycheck, which means any competitor willing to pay an extra couple bucks an hour is well positioned to lure them away.
- **Hours** – If your labor force isn't well-aligned with your work load, people won't be steadily busy, which makes them more likely to jump ship if they're able to get more consistent hours elsewhere.
- **Benefits** – These days, skimping on benefits like

vacation pay, sick leave and extended healthcare can function as invitations for people to exit.

- **Incentives** – Do you offer performance pay? Do you even know how it works? Clear productivity goals can serve as powerful tools to reduce employee turnover.

Bringing it all together

High employee turnover isn't just a hiring problem—it's a business health issue. From rushed hiring decisions and weak training programs to toxic culture and uncompetitive compensation, the root causes are often within your control. The good news is that even small, intentional changes can make a meaningful difference. By slowing down your hiring process, investing in onboarding and career development, fostering a respectful team culture, and ensuring your compensation aligns with today's workforce expectations, you can turn the revolving door into a stable, motivated crew. Retention doesn't happen by accident—but when you get it right, the payoff shows up in safer jobsites, stronger morale, and a healthier bottom line.

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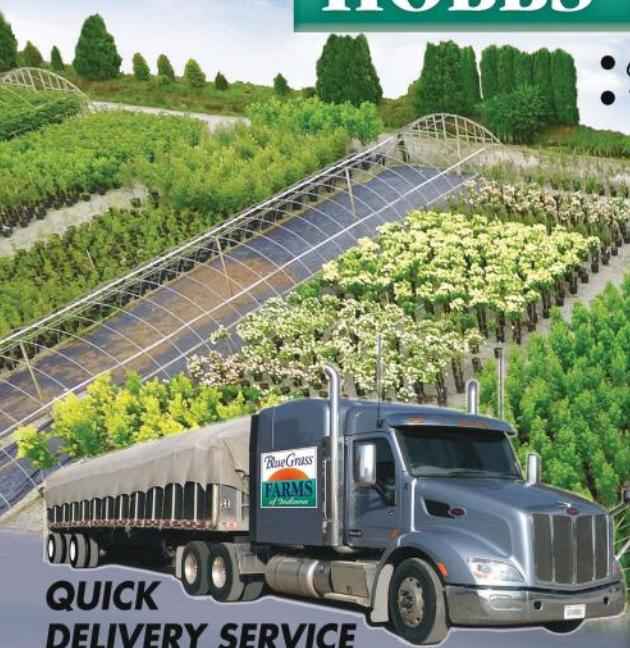
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Meet Your Newest ILA Board Members

Dan Wasson

Wasson Nursery



Dan grew up in the family business, learning early what it means to work with the land, care for plants, and build spaces that last. From long days alongside his father to hands-on work in the field, Dan developed a deep appreciation for horticulture, landscape design,

and the operational side of running a business. That foundation later led him to Ball State University, where he earned a business degree, giving him the tools to pair practical experience with thoughtful leadership.

One essential key thing Dan and the Wasson team focus on is how Wasson and their work are experienced and shared. Dan believes great outdoor spaces deserve to be documented with care, which is why high-end photography, video, and aerial drone media play a critical role in telling the Wasson story. At the core of everything Dan does is a commitment to thoughtful growth, emerging technology, and designing outdoor environments that feel natural, intentional, and that blend art and nature.

Today, Dan serves as CEO of Wasson, guiding the company's strategic direction while continuing to push creative and technological boundaries. Dan's passion for innovation genuinely improves the way Wasson works and the experiences they deliver, from moving their design-build team into 3D

visualization platforms to investing in equipment that prioritizes safety, efficiency, and team well-being. Dan also had the opportunity to help position Wasson as an early leader in residential landscape lighting, with his work recognized and featured by industry partners around the world.

When Dan isn't in the office or on a job site, he enjoys being outdoors and spending time with his family. He also enjoys taking photos, creating images using his drone, and sharing them on his personal social media outlets.

Jonathon Richards

Salsbery Brothers Landscaping



Jonathon Richards is a co-owner of Salsbery Brothers Landscaping in Carmel, Indiana. He attended Vincennes University, where he studied Horticulture, and began working at Salsbery Brothers Landscaping in 2007, starting in the field and learning the business from the ground up.

Jonathon's passion for the outdoors and agriculture started early. He was a 10-year member of 4-H, where he showed cattle, pigs, goats, and poultry, developing a strong work ethic, responsibility, and leadership skills that continue to shape how he leads today.

Today, Jonathon helps lead a team of nearly 80 employees, focusing on operations, employee development, and long-term growth while honoring the legacy of the Salsbery family. He believes strong companies are built through clear expectations, accountability, and investing in people.

Jonathon has been married for 18 years to his bride, whom he met on the first day of college, and is the proud father of three children—Gus (15), Mae (11), and Iris (6). Family, integrity, and commitment to community guide both his professional and personal life.

Zach Byrer Byrer Lawn & Landscape



Zach Byrer is the owner of Byrer Lawn & Landscape, a full-service lawn and landscape maintenance company based in Westfield, Indiana, serving both residential and commercial clients throughout Hamilton County.

Byrer Lawn & Landscape focuses primarily on recurring

maintenance services, including lawn care, landscape maintenance, and seasonal services, with an emphasis on consistency, communication, and long-term client relationships. Founded in 2022, the company has experienced quick, intentional growth

by prioritizing quality work, operational efficiency, and a strong team culture.

Zach began mowing lawns in his neighborhood at the age of 14 and quickly fell in love with the lawn care and landscaping industry. That early experience taught him the value of hard work, consistency, and taking care of people—principles that continue to guide how he runs his business today.

He earned his bachelor's degree in Organizational Leadership from IUPUI through Purdue University, but the foundation of his business has been built through hands-on experience, learning through failure, and relationships with other owners and leaders in the industry.

Outside of work, Zach's faith in Jesus Christ is central to his life and influences how he leads, serves others, and conducts business. He is passionate about mentoring, giving back to the landscaping industry, and helping those around him grow both personally and professionally. Zach is honored to serve on the Board of Directors for the Indianapolis Landscape Association and looks forward to supporting its mission and members.





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Chris Geryak hosted the final ILA board meeting of the year and welcomed a number of past ILA Presidents to the meeting. It was great catching up and sharing lots of memories, while getting work done for the association. Cheers to 2026!

Pictured: Ryan Coyle, Jon Carr, Scott Levy, Charlie Swartzell, Dave Todd, Zach Byrer, Wesley Addington, Brian Franco, Alex Gafe, Chris Geryak, Roy Western, Joshua Brown, Ken Barthuly, Jim Calvin, Warren Macaroni, Todd Engledow, Jonathon Richards, Rich Blankenship, Dan Wasson.



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The Power of 3D Designs in the Landscape Industry: The Ultimate Sales Tool



In today's competitive landscape market, homeowners expect clarity, confidence, and creativity before investing in an outdoor project. Traditional 2D plans—while useful—often fall short in helping clients truly visualize what their future space will look and feel like. This is where **3D landscape design** has become one of the most effective sales tools in the industry.

A New Era of Visualization in Landscaping

For decades, designers relied on 2D drawings to communicate concepts. But as technology has advanced, customer expectations have evolved. Clients want more than lines on paper—they want to **experience their space before it exists**.

3D landscape designs bridge the gap between imagination and reality. They allow homeowners to step inside a fully rendered version of their future patio, garden, outdoor kitchen, lighting plan, or poolscapes. This immersive approach creates excitement, emotional connection, and confidence—all key drivers of closing sales.

Why 3D Designs Are So Powerful as a Sales Tool

1. They Eliminate Uncertainty

One of the biggest obstacles in selling landscape projects is helping clients picture the end result. Even the most detailed verbal explanations or sketches can leave room for doubt.

3D designs answer questions instantly:

- *“How big will this patio feel?”*
- *“Will the fire pit overpower the space?”*
- *“How will the plantings look in summer versus fall?”*

With crystal-clear visuals, clients understand exactly what they're investing in.

2. They Build Trust and Professionalism

Offering 3D renderings signals that a company is modern, organized, and client-focused. It **sets you apart from competitors** who still rely solely on traditional drawings.

When clients see their future landscape rendered with realistic textures, lighting, furniture, and plant material, they instantly perceive more value—and more professionalism—from the team presenting it.



3. They Speed Up the Decision-Making Process

A confused or hesitant client delays projects. A wowed, confident client makes decisions quickly.

3D designs help:

- Reduce back-and-forth revisions
- Shorten the sales cycle
- Prevent scope misunderstandings
- Secure approvals faster

Homeowners can visualize the full picture, making them more decisive and committed.

4. They Increase Project Size and Budget

3D renderings make it easier for clients to fall in love with features they may not have considered:

- Pergolas
- Outdoor kitchens
- Water features
- Lighting plans
- Expanded patios
- Planting enhancements

When clients see the upgraded version of their property—and not just hear about it—they are far more likely to invest in a more comprehensive project.

This often leads to larger contracts and higher revenue per client.

5. They Reduce Miscommunication and Change Orders

Misalignment between customer expectations and contractor execution is a common issue in landscape construction.

With 3D designs:

- Clients approve exactly what the final project will look like
- Crews know the intended layout, materials, and elevations
- Designers have a visual reference for every detail

This clarity dramatically decreases surprises during installation and protects profit margins.



How 3D Design Strengthens the Contractor's Workflow

3D designs don't just help sell—they help build better projects. They create:

- Clearer plans for crews
- More accurate material takeoffs
- Better collaboration between designers, project managers, and clients
- A visual blueprint that aligns everyone involved

The result: **fewer delays, smoother installations, and happier clients.**

The Future of Landscape Sales Is Visual

As technology continues to evolve, 3D design will only grow more influential. Companies embracing it now are positioning themselves as leaders in clarity, creativity, and customer experience.

In a marketplace full of options, clients choose the company that helps them see the dream—not just hear about it.

3D landscape design isn't just a design upgrade. It's a sales advantage, a communication tool, and a competitive differentiator.

Common 3D landscape software: Uvision, VizTerra, PRO landscape, SketchUp, Vectorworks Landmark, Realtime landscaping Architect

2025 ILA Annual Meeting and Holiday Party



2025 has come to an end, but we wanted to reflect on what an EPIC 2025 the ILA had! The ILA enjoyed a great bus trip this summer to Cincinnati, Ohio. Members who attended were able to tour MacAllister Machinery, Unilock's newest manufacturing facility, and enjoy a private tour of the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Gardens. We also had a wonderful evening at Great American Ballpark to watch the Cincinnati Reds vs. the Atlanta Braves in our own personal suite!

The ILA also had an EPIC annual golf outing with the most attendees we have ever had. There were 148 golfers and 36 sponsors for the event!

We wrapped up 2025 with our Annual Meeting and Holiday Party. This year, the event took place at Action Duckpin Bowling in Fountain Square, with a total of 78 members in attendance. We had a wonderful evening that included food, beverages, bowling, socializing, raffle prizes, and the passing of the gavel to our newest president, Ryan Coyle, from outgoing president Chris Geryak.

We want to thank Chris Geryak for his many years of service to the ILA, and we look forward to what Ryan Coyle has in store for the association. We also want to thank all our members who attended



the holiday party and for your continued support of the ILA. Finally, we would like to welcome our nine newest members to the ILA as we look forward to an EPIC 2026!



Membership to Date:

Regular (84), Allied (38), Educational (1), Honorary (10)

Newest Members:

TD Exterior, MH Eby Trailers and Truck Bodies, Company Wrench, RPM Exteriors, Stark Leasing, Sugar Creek Landscapes, Surroundings by Natureworks, BGW Construction, and Summit Landscape and Design

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Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from the entire Indianapolis Landscape Association Board of Directors!



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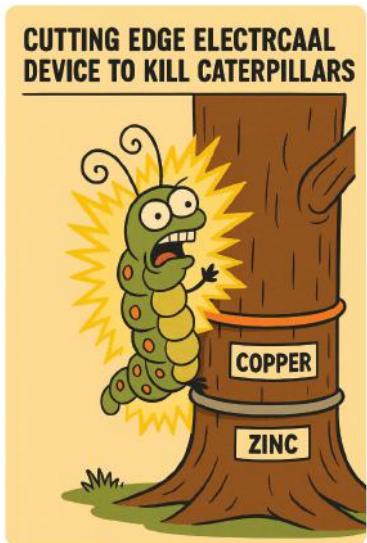
Cutting Edge Electrical Device to Kill Caterpillars



Consulting Arborist Corner

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Registered Consulting Arborist



Carl Bering, the well-known electrician, has invented a curious device to prevent caterpillars from crawling up trees, which he intends to put to practical test next summer. It will do away with the unsightly band of tar or bundle of cotton which has heretofore

answered the same purpose, conveying the impression that the trees were suffering from acute sore throat.

Mr. Bering's scheme is simply to run alternate wires of copper and zinc around the trunk of the tree, at a distance of about half inch apart. It is a well-known fact that copper and zinc produce a slight magnetism. When the wires have been placed in position, Mr. Caterpillar starts his ascent. He strikes the copper wire pokes his little nose over it and continues. Half an inch farther up his feet strike the zinc wire, while his body is still in contact with the copper. Immediately the current is carried through his body. With a howl of pain, Mr. Caterpillar drops to the ground, or, if the

current be strong enough, remains a prisoner until the grim reaper comes and carries him away to the happy hunting grounds of the caterpillar.

Mr. Bering has every confidence in the success of his device.

Reference: Indianapolis News, Indianapolis, Marion County, 17 March 1892, quoting (Philadelphia Record.)

About the Author: Jud Scott is a lover of trees landscapes and history and has earned the designation of Registered Consulting Arborist #392 (RCA) with the American Society of Consulting Arborists. As an RCA, Jud advises Attorneys, Landscape Companies, Park Departments, Developers, Architects, Insurance Companies, as well as homeowners concerning their trees and landscapes. Jud can be reached at

317-815-8733 or by email at Jud@arboristexpert.com.
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