

Helping clients establish roots

Landscaping contractor sees plants as key assets

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For J. Mark Smith, commercial landscaping involves much more than planting trees and watering bushes. It's about managing assets and has "an immediate impact on both the environment's health and a company's bottom line," he says.

That approach has helped Smith's Environmental Design Landscape carve a well-established niche in the Carolinas since 1998.

The company has handled all vegetation management for Duke Energy Corp. for the last six years. Other clients include the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department and the Charlotte Housing Authority.

QUICKINFO

DID YOU KNOW?

•**Smith is** president of the Carolina Green Industry Network. In that role, he's active in efforts to create an N.C. licensing system for landscape contractors.

Environmental Design Landscape is based in the Newell community on the northeast side of Charlotte. It also has had an office in Greer, S.C., since 2001.

The company has 67 employees, and it touts itself as a low-turnover business in a high-turnover industry.

This year's first quarter was the best in the company's history, though Smith acknowledges, "We had to fight for it."

Smith, 48, notes he started his career in landscaping by mowing lawns at age 11. At Environmental Design Landscape, he encourages clients to take a strategic view of landscaping.

"Plants are assets, and you want the proper plant in the proper location. If you don't, it's wasteful. You can extend plants' lives and buy replacements less often. It's a way of preserving and prolonging your assets, as well as the earth. It's about sustainability from an ecological, engineering and conservation standpoint."

Such an approach can help the client avoid "distractions and failures that have to be fixed" and waste energy, Smith says.

"I have a passion to bring information to the table," he adds. Toward that end, Smith recently published a how-to book, *Design with the End In Mind*, that also serves as "a tool to give us credibility."

Smith

