

The Dream Team

BY PATTY VAUGHAN

Arborscapes
 Tree & Landscape Specialists

**Jason Tebben and
 Nathan Morrison**
**Arborscapes Tree and
 Landscape Specialists**
Pineville, North Carolina
www.arborscapes.net

North Carolina landscapers use entrepreneurial spirit, friendship to find success

Creating a successful and lasting business is a lot like maintaining a lifelong friendship. It takes patience, common sense and the ability to learn from mistakes.

Together, Jason Tebben and Nathan Morrison have been able to achieve both in Pineville, North Carolina.

After meeting in the sixth grade, participating in the same extra-curricular activities, becoming

roommates at The Ohio State University, Tebben and Morrison capitalized on their entrepreneurial spirit and opened Arborscapes in July of 2000.

With degrees in landscape horticulture and urban forestry, Tebben and Morrison knew the Charlotte area was calling their names. "We had in our mind that we were going to start a business, but we didn't exactly know when and how," Morrison says. "We knew collectively we could start

something unique in the fact that we'd be taking care of trees and planting landscapes."

After several interviews and even working for larger corporations in the industry right out of college, the two quickly realized they wanted to start their own business.

"We sat down one night before (Tebben) even moved here, and we were coming up with names," Morrison says. "We were thinking trees and landscaping, and we came up with the name Arborscapes — that's what stuck."

Building a business

After three years of working side-by-side, Tebben and Morrison split the business into two separate divisions — landscaping and tree work.

Through word of mouth and very little advertising, Arborscapes grew from operating a truck and a trailer to currently owning 22 vehicles, as well as employing 45 fulltime employees divided into 12 crews — three maintenance, three install, four tree work, one fertilizer and one stump grinder.

The tree care division helped establish the business, but the landscape division started to thrive, especially after a very important relationship was established in 2007.

Tebben and his crews started working with a well-known landscape architect in the area

named Bruce Clodfelter. "He did bid out work to other landscape companies at the time, but after a number of years of us doing the work, he saw the quality of work that we were putting in comparative to other companies," Morrison says. "He tells

his clients, 'If I'm going to design it, I want to work with Arborscapes to do the work.'"

From there, it didn't take long for clients to start pressuring Tebben into starting maintenance. Maintenance became inevitable after Tebben and his crews would complete large-scale jobs for clients that would start to look unsightly from poor upkeep. "It wasn't something that I was thrilled about, because I typically don't enjoy maintenance, but it's an evil necessity for what we do."

Both owners agree that a large part of their success reigns from their initial thinking — two unique divisions coming together that feed work to one another. "That's what

makes us unique, because of everything that we do — irrigation, outdoor lighting, landscaping, drainage, tree care — there's always so much potential for other work," Tebben says.

Smart decisions

Every year, Arborscapes has continued to see increased profits and growth, even through the



Because of the high-end properties and type of work Arborscapes crew members complete, Tebben has made it his mission to train and educate his employees on proper safety techniques from operating construction equipment to being extremely cognizant of the jobsite environment.

recession in 2008. “We were very fortunate,” Tebben says. “We didn’t feel the recession like other people did.”

The company works with high-end residential clients who had the money through the downturn to still invest in landscaping and tree-work services. Additionally, Tebben and Morrison continuously put money back into the business to keep a low overhead.

Even with the right clients and the proper investments, Tebben and Morrison still made a few changes to help their business save money, including moving to a four-day work week and 10-hour days to minimize overtime. Tebben and Morrison even switched from owning large trucks to going on sales calls using Priuses.

The switch in vehicles, besides looking environmentally friendly to clients, saved the company \$18,000 at the end of the year. “We’ve had zero problems out of them,” Tebben says. “They have been the cheapest vehicles we have ever owned.”

Finding balance

Consistent growth can sometimes cause big headaches when managing a booming business. Tebben and Morrison have dealt with the struggle and say the biggest challenge is playing the balancing game. From a business perspective, it’s all about finding the right employee at the right time. “Finding the right employee can either make your life easy or it can make it challenging,” Tebben says. “When you do find the right employee, that makes your whole balance so much easier.”



Although Arborscapes will work with any subcontractors on a job, the company prefers to use their select subset of companies such as pool contractors and carpenters to make sure the job is done efficiently and effectively.

Because of the high standards of quality at Arborscapes, Tebben says it can be a daunting task to train new employees to get things done the way they need to be done on a day-to-day basis. The balancing act is more than dealing with too much work – it’s about balancing everyone’s personal life as well. “Monday through Friday we’re



Tebben and Morrison pride themselves on not stretching too thin by either starting a maintenance or irrigation company, although both are very possible. The two have focused on what they do best to make sure they don’t cut corners, lose the quality of work in each job and to maintain a solid reputation throughout the Charlotte area.

working sun up to sun down,” Tebben says. “We’ve made it pretty clear that we don’t like working weekends, because that’s our time with our families.”

Thinking ahead

Creating a successful business is only the first step in the equation for owners like Tebben and Morrison. Both continue to love what they do every day, but for them, finding how they can capitalize on their success down the road is equally important. “We enjoy what we do, and we’re trying to grow the business so that it is marketable to a bigger company to eventually purchase so that we do have an exit strategy,” Tebben says. After gaining insight from industry professionals,

Tebben and Morrison have come to understand the importance of making the company appealing to others in the industry, whether competitors, larger entities or even their own children. “That’s the problem with the bulk of the people in the green industry,” Tebben says. “They don’t plan an exit strategy. They just work, and then when they’re 55 or 60, they say they’re done, but they didn’t plan for how they can actually make money out of this.” As for the here and now, the options are unending for the company, and Tebben and Morrison continue to build on their success. “I love what I do,” Tebben says. “When you show up on a construction job, it looks like a bomb went off. It looks like chaos, and then you come in there and turn the jobsite into a pristine place. It’s instant gratification.”