



DOLLAR 88.35¢ US -0.53¢	GOLD \$641.20 US +\$17.10	EURO \$1.4455 CDN +1.21¢	TSX 11,792.98 +138.25	TSX VE 2,637.37 -6.67	TSX 60 668.24 +8.01	DOW 11,134.77 +31.22	S&P 500 1,272.52 +5.18	NASDAQ 2,128.86 +11.93
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Going green without grass

Turf-free, natural landscapes are Waterloo firm's specialty

BY ROSE SIMONE
RECORD STAFF**SMALL BUSINESS****WATERLOO**

The summer of 1998 was particularly bad for Ontario homeowners with traditional lawns. A prolonged drought turned most grass completely brown, even beneath trees.

That summer, Derek Lippert finished college and took a job in forest management. Where he worked in the forest, the wild plants were thriving.

Seeing the contrast, Lippert became convinced that lawns don't make sense. He could also see that if people were to replace their lawns, they would want nice-looking alternative landscapes.

That's how Lippert's business, Naturally Maintained Ltd., came to be born.

The following summer, Lippert put on his in-line skates and began delivering flyers he had produced to get the venture off the ground.

He was still only 24 and was working out of a spare room at his parents' house in Kitchener.

SLOW START

At first, he ran the business part-time. He was also working for a company in Whitby, where he learned to manage a greenhouse and a work crew and do large-scale planting projects.

"Delivering the flyers on Roller Blades got me one job, for about \$100. I was almost ready to give up," Lippert recalls.

But his client list slowly grew and he left the Whitby job to run Naturally Maintained on a full-time basis. Today, the business is located on 0.8 hectares (two acres) Lippert rents on Erbsville Road at the north end of Waterloo, near the Erbsville village centre.

A greenhouse on the site has space to grow the thousands of plants that he uses for a wide variety of urban, rural, commercial, residential and municipal projects.

"In the past two or three years, the business has really been spreading its wings," he says.

Lippert, now 31, says many of the contacts he made while pounding the pavement in past years are finally paying off.

"Three or four years ago, I was calling up every consulting firm in town that did ecological design and also landscape architects that had clients with estate lots. So now, that work is coming in."

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DEREK LIPPERT
NATURALLY MAINTAINED LTD.

Lippert has also been able to win contracts to do the planting for major municipal projects.

He was hired, for example, to do plantings at sludge-containment and wetland projects that Dillon Construction Inc. took on in the Chatham-Kent and Elgin County areas. The plants grow on nutrients in the excess sludge from sewage lagoons.

That allows the sludge to be managed on site, so it doesn't need to be hauled away and disposed of at great expense.

90,000-PLANT PROJECT

In one of those projects, Naturally Maintained put in 90,000 plants started in an old tobacco greenhouse near Drumbo. Most were grown from seeds that Lippert and his employees had collected in the wild.

Naturally Maintained has also planted demonstration gardens for the Region of Waterloo, including plots at its administration centre on Frederick Street in Kitchener.

It was also involved in developing a turf-free landscape at the region's emergency medical services building on Maple Grove Road in Cambridge and the gardens at the Greenbrook pumping station in Kitchener.



Derek Lippert, 31, an ecosystem management technologist, started Naturally Maintained in 1999 from a room in his parents' home. He now has several employees and this spring incorporated the business.

RECORD STAFF

Q&A

We asked Derek Lippert of Naturally Maintained Ltd.

Q. What factors have caused your business to grow over the years?

A. "I focus on the design of lawn alternatives, as opposed to just thinking of design as a sidebar. But also, it was a matter of timing. It was the right idea at the right time... and every year now, the sell is less difficult."

These projects show how homeowners and commercial property owners can use low-maintenance plants, grasses and shrubs — and help to make them more comfortable with the idea of removing their lawns.

That, in turn, provides a boost to Lippert's business.

He now employs four to five people through the spring and summer and into the fall planting season. He also hires extra people for landscaping projects as they are needed.

In April this year, Lippert incorporated the business.

That will mean paying more for accounting and other fees, but Lippert says it should pay off in the long run. There are tax advantages and his personal liability will be reduced in the event of any setbacks.

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LOCAL SCENE**Local entrepreneurs nominated for awards**

Several entrepreneurs from Waterloo Region have been named Ontario finalists for the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year awards.

Steve Mai, the president of Eclipse Automation in Cambridge, is one of three finalists in the emerging entrepreneur category.

John Keating, Gary Calhoun and Michael Pley, the top executives at Com Dev International in Cambridge, have been nominated in the turnaround entrepreneur category.

Don Bowman, Dave Caputo, Tom Donnelly, Marc Morin and Brad Siim, founders of Sandvine Inc. in Waterloo, are among the finalists in the technology and communications category.

Ontario winners will be announced Oct. 19. They will then compete for the national Entrepreneur of the Year awards, to be presented Nov. 2.

Intellitactics sells software to WestJet

Intellitactics Inc. is supplying its security management software to WestJet Airlines.

The company, which employs 42 in Cambridge, announced the deal yesterday. It said the Calgary-based airline will use its products to automate processes that detect and analyze breaches in the security of its computer networks.

Intellitactics was launched in Kitchener in 1986. It is now headquartered in Reston, Va.

Construction spending falls in second quarter

Spending on non-residential construction tumbled 5.3 per cent in Waterloo Region in the second quarter.

Investment in industrial, commercial and institutional projects totalled \$123 million in March, April and May, Statistics Canada said yesterday. That's down from \$130 million in the first quarter. The figures are adjusted for seasonal variations.

Across Canada, investment in non-residential construction increased 0.9 per cent to \$8.7 billion in the second quarter.

Natural: Care required in scheduling projects

CONTINUED FROM PAGE F1

He also incorporated the business, he says, because "it adds an air of professionalism" that gives him an edge when he's bidding for large projects.

"The contractors know that you are not here today and gone tomorrow," he says.

Lippert said his goal now is to try to get one large anchor project each year through the bid and tender processes. With that in hand, he can fill in the rest of the time during the busy growing season with residential projects, which often result from word-of-mouth referrals by clients.

Lippert often works with independent landscape designer Mark Peterson, of Kitchener.

"I'll contract him to work on a design and likewise, if he's working on a project and looking for prices for his clients, he can come to me."

Design is a critical element in convincing urbanites to get rid of lawns, Lippert says.

An ecological purist could simply throw wildflowers into a landscape and recreate a natural ecosystem. But the problem is that the average homeowner or commercial property owner will shun that if it doesn't have that design element, Lippert says.

"It ends with people saying: 'I can't do this: It is too wild, too crazy.'"

Lippert also explains to residential clients that these landscapes, no matter how well designed, will require patience and care in the early years, while the plants grow in.

"It's not an instant landscape," he says.

For his own part, he is careful about scheduling and planning projects.

"You have to make sure there is the amount of time that you need allotted for the project, and that you are being realistic in talking to clients," he says.

"You can't tell them that you will be there next week if you can't be there for a month and a half."

Lippert says he also must be careful about managing business growth.

"The season isn't that long and so you need to bring in enough work to feed yourself."

"But at the same time, if you take on too much before the business is ready, then you won't be able to do the quality of work that needs to be done, or else you end up working 18-hour days and that's not good for you or your clients," he says.

Nevertheless, Lippert has discovered that the movement to replacing lawns with more natural landscapes is happening quickly.

In previous decades, when no one imagined that the region's wells could run dry, this type of business would have been impossible, he says.

"The level of environmental awareness among people in the region has increased dramatically, even from when I started in 1999. Now, people are constantly hearing about watering restrictions and pesticide bans, so they are seeing that lawns are not the way to go."

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