

## Forever Green

### Landscape management company nurtures its business model for growth

By **JESSICA VERNABE**

Staff Reporter

**R**ichard Angelo has a green thumb. He nurtured his Santa Clarita-based gardening business, **Stay Green Inc.**, from a garage start-up to a \$12.5 million landscape management company with about 220 employees.

Angelo, who founded the company more than 40 years ago and serves as the executive chairman, and his son **Chris Angelo**, Stay Green's president and CEO, say the company's success is rooted in hard work, diverse markets and their willingness to adapt.

Stay Green has been growing in recent years. Revenues totaled \$12.5 million last year, up 9.6 percent from \$11.4 million in 2009. This year, revenues are expected to reach about \$14 million.

Stay Green provides services for a broad range of clients, including residential developments, shopping centers, schools, commercial properties and more, Richard Angelo said. The company's three divisions are landscape maintenance, plant health care and tree care.

Stay Green has received various honors and recognitions for its work. In June, **Landscape Management** magazine ranked the company the 22nd largest landscaping contractor in the West. The company was recognized as one of the nation's 150 largest landscaping companies.

During the same month, the company also received seven awards from the San Fernando Valley chapter of the **California Landscape Contractors Association**. The company received the best overall project award for the **Westfield Valencia Town Center** mall, according to the landscape association.

#### Building Clients

Richard Angelo's entrepreneurial journey started when he lost his job at another landscaping product company at the end of 1969, he said. He launched Stay Green in 1970.

"I took a loan from our church credit union," Angelo said. "It was about \$1,000, and with that I bought a truck and all the equipment."

Angelo then started advertising in a local newspaper and began building his client base. He stationed the business in the garage of his home in Sun Valley, and his wife helped him to answer calls and handle billing, he said.

After about a year, Angelo was able to hire



PHOTO BY DAVID SPRAGUE

**Plants: Stay Green Inc. Founder/Executive Chairman Richard Angelo (left) and President/CEO Chris Angelo (right) oversee a project at Valencia Town Center.**

another worker. About four years into the business, he had three or four trucks and a crew, which enabled him to step back and supervise the business, he said.

Stay Green established its roots in Santa Clarita early on. In the early 1970s, the company landed a contract with developer **Newhall Land** to do landscaping for three industrial buildings, Angelo said.

"We were fortunate they liked our work and our customer service," he said. "We kept growing as they grew and built (properties)."

**Marlee Lauffer**, spokeswoman for Newhall Land, said Stay Green's work adds to the quality of its various residential and commercial developments.

"They're very customer service-focused," Lauffer said, noting that they listen to clients and offer professional suggestions.

Angelo's company also is well-respected among area homeowners' associations, which handle the landscaping upkeep responsibilities in many residential neighborhoods, Lauffer said.

#### Stay Green, Inc.

**FOUNDED:** 1970

**HEADQUARTERS:** Santa Clarita

**CORE OF BUSINESS:** Landscape maintenance, plant health care and tree care

**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 220

**REVENUES IN 2009:** \$11.4 million

**REVENUES IN 2010:** \$12.5 million

**PROJECT REVENUES FOR 2011:** \$14 million

"The principals of the company live here in Valencia and the Santa Clarita Valley, so they're personally dedicated, and they're involved in the community, as well," she said.

In the late 1980s, Stay Green started doing work for the city of Santa Clarita. It gained work with **Westfield Valencia Town Center** and the **Valencia Commerce Center** in the early to mid-2000s, the Angelos said.

Stay Green moved its corporate offices to its current location in November 2006. The company also has three "yards" — or work stations where its workers gather before jobs — in North Hollywood, Canyon Country and Oxnard, the Angelos said.

In addition to basic landscaping services, Stay Green also offers specialty services such as tree care and removal, plant health care and pest control and water usage management.

Chris Angelo said offering those services in-house has helped the company distinguish itself from competitors.

"We're full-service, and some of our competitors may have to subcontract that (work) out," Chris Angelo said. "We have licensed, certified arborists and pest control applicators (on staff)."

#### New Collaboration

Richard Angelo said shifting from a do-it-yourself, entrepreneurial mindset to a more

collaborative way of thinking was one major challenge he had to overcome.

Chris Angelo, who grew up working in the family business, helped him to do that, he said. He joined the company's management team in 1999 and became president and CEO in 2009.

Chris Angelo said he and his father started focusing on operating the company more efficiently as a whole, rather than getting caught up in the day-to-day business activities.

"So many times, entrepreneurs get stuck just working in the business because they don't surround themselves with enough like-minded, competent and committed individuals that are passionate like they are to help execute the mission," Chris Angelo said.

To help guide them in strategic planning, the duo brought in horticulture business experts and consultants. They also eliminated some positions and added others, set more stringent policies and goals for employees and created new employee incentives for good work.

Richard Angelo said he now makes fewer decisions by himself.

"We have more of an executive committee that meets and discusses things and sets priorities for the company and strategic plans," he said. "We're much better on watching our budgets."

Richard Angelo said the changes were necessary in order to get ahead in an industry with growing competition.

The company also has had to learn how to cut costs due to the economic downturn, which it will continue doing in the future, Chris Angelo said.

Going forward, the father and son team said they hope to expand through organic growth and acquisitions. Some target areas are communities in San Diego, Orange County, the Central Valley and the Central coast, Chris Angelo said.

"We're looking to expand our footprint beyond the current L.A. and Ventura counties," he said, noting the company also is looking to add to its existing presence.



**Grow: Stay Green, which started with one landscaper, is now an established business with about 220 employees.**