

Garrick-Santo Landscape Company

Experience the Difference

by Pamela Schweppe

They say you never have a second chance to make a first impression. What first impression does your condominium complex make? Chances are, the first thing people notice is whether it looks attractive and well cared for. And that has everything to do with landscaping.

One of the leading landscapers in the region is Garrick-Santo Landscape Company, which has been serving clients in the North Shore and greater Boston area for nearly 30 years. Garrick Landscape Company was founded by Richard (Rick) Gottschalk Jr., with no more than station wagon and a lawnmower, in 1981. In 2003, Garrick Landscape Company joined forces with Robert (Rob) Santo's Santo Landscape Services to create Garrick-Santo. Today, the firm serves a mix of residential and commercial clients, including many condominium associations.

Full Service, Fully Professional

Just what it is that Garrick-Santo provides is a little more difficult to pinpoint. "We're not just strictly landscaping," declares Donna Verolla, Garrick-Santo's administrative manager. "We're truly a full-service landscaping company." In addition to basic maintenance and lawn care, the company provides design and installation services such as hardscaping (walls, patios and outdoor living areas), plantings and seasonal enhancements.

To provide these services, the company employs a diverse staff of 25 to 30 landscape professionals, many of whom are TWIC Certified by the Department of Homeland Security, and many hold industry certifications,

including Industry Certified Landscape Managers, a national designation, and Massachusetts Certified Landscape Professionals (MCLP). Specialty licenses, including hoisting and pesticide applicator, are held by many of the field personnel. "It's unusual to find so many licensed and certified employees on staff," Verolla says.

What's most important, according to R. Gottschalk, CLP, MCLP, is making sure the property retains its "curb appeal" over time. "We're maintenance oriented," he says.

Vice President Santo, MCLP, agrees. "We don't want to just sell our clients stuff," he says. "We want to improve the property in a way that makes sense."

He points out further that the physical appearance of a condominium property has a direct impact on the market value of individual units and that being proactive is the best way to maintain quality — and avoid costly and unexpected repair bills.

A Philosophy Rooted in Service and Safety

Garrick-Santo's service goes beyond the aesthetics of the landscaping. Safety also is a crucial concern. Overhanging branches, crumbling walkways and other issues can create hazards for residents that can easily be avoided.

Part of what the company likes to call the "Garrick-Santo Difference" is that it keeps close watch for such issues among the communities it services through complimentary site visits, and a site evaluation is conducted each year for every association property under contract. "We don't just mow with our heads down," notes Santo. The client or property manager is provided with a report

that can be presented to the board of trustees. "If the board comes to us and says, 'We have a budget of X,' we have the expertise to show them how to get the best value for it," says Santo.

Adds Verolla, "We don't have a one-size-fits-all mentality. We work with the unique needs of each community, which is another difference we think clients will experience with us."

To further address staff and client safety, all new employees of Garrick-Santo undergo extensive safety training from day one. "Safety kits" for eye, ear and hand protection are provided for every crew, and employees are monitored regularly to make sure they are following protocol. In addition, safety meetings are held weekly to cover seasonally related topics, as well as to share ideas and best practices on issues that come up on site. "Input from our employees is important," says Anita Gottschalk, CLP, MCLP, the company's design install manager.

That kind of concern for clients and employees alike is embedded in the company philosophy and motto: "We care!" As Verolla puts it, "Our deep commitment to our clients is one of the differences new customers will notice in working with us. It also contributes to our ability to forge long-lasting relationships with them."

That attitude is appreciated by Lorraine Rava, chairperson of the board of trustees for Dexter Estates, a 49-unit complex in Malden, Mass. The property has a large grassy area in front, as well as backyard picnic tables and a swimming pool surrounded by tall shrubbery for privacy. "It's the only place in the city with so much grass," Rava declares. "A lot of

people bought here because of the curb appeal.”

With so much invested in its landscaping, it’s significant that Dexter Estates has chosen Garrick-Santo to maintain the property for more than 20 years. “The quality is excellent,” Rava says. While unit owners do most of the planting themselves, Garrick-Santo helps to deliver materials and also makes recommendations, backed up by photographs.

“We’re very satisfied,” she says. “I would recommend them to anyone looking for a great landscaping company.”

Even new clients are impressed by Garrick-Santo’s quality and service. Just a few months ago, the company acquired Millbrook Square in Arlington, Mass., as a client. “They presented a very good proposal, and they’ve done more than we expected,” says Al Olson, superintendent of the complex. Already, the company has helped with spring clean-up, plantings, cutting, edging and clean-up of driveways and parking areas. “This is elderly housing, and you know that elderly people can be critical,” Olson smiles. “But I haven’t heard any complaints. The residents here are very happy with them.”

No Pruning Back on Special Services

Occasionally, a client will request a service that falls outside the scope of traditional landscaping, and Garrick-Santo strives to offer complete customer satisfaction nevertheless. “We never say ‘I don’t know’ if a client asks us for something,” Verolla says. “Even if it’s not landscaping per se, we do the research and get back to them.”

“We like to say that one phone call solves it all,” says Santo. “If we can’t do it ourselves, we’ll find someone who can. Whether it’s massive tree work like we had after the recent storm emergency or an electricity or plumbing problem, we know someone who’s good.”

A case in point involves a client who recently asked to have a flagpole

installed. “I didn’t want to disappoint them, so I said I’d look into it,” he says. “That means we own it.” Not only did Garrick-Santo get the flagpole installed, they also did their research and presented the client with complete information regarding the proper care of the flag, such as when and how to raise and lower it. “We go the extra step,” he says. “That’s the Garrick-Santo difference.”

A Landscaper for All Seasons

The off-season for landscaping is still a busy time for Garrick-Santo, which also provides snow and ice management services. The company is usually plan-



A condominium property landscaped by Garrick-Santo demonstrates the company's flair for creating curb appeal.

ning a season ahead throughout the year, to make sure it’s prepared. As winter approaches, all equipment is checked multiple times to ensure it’s in proper working condition, and routes are tightly planned to minimize travel time and provide the quickest response for customers. And all crews are organized and trained in the full scope of snow and ice management. “We have a lot to do before the first flake falls,” says Santo.

An important aspect of Garrick-Santo’s approach to winter conditions is the use of “Magic Salt,” a biodegradable de-icing substance that helps prevent ice and snow from bonding to pavement and makes clean-up easier — and less costly.

“We feel very strongly about not using sand,” says Verolla. “When we pre-treat

with Magic Salt and then plow, it’s a much cleaner job. That way, people aren’t tracking sand into the building and damaging the interior. And at the end of the season, they don’t have a beach for a parking lot.”

A Spirit of Responsibility

Another advantage of the Magic Salt is that it’s environmentally friendly. While being a “green company” may seem natural for a firm that works the land, Garrick-Santo has made it a deliberate focus of its business practices. The dumpster in back of the offices used to be “80 percent filled with plastic pots,” says Santo. Those pots are now recycled, as are grass clippings. In the office, soy ink is used for printed stock, along with recycled paper. Fans and shop lights are set on a timer so that energy isn’t wasted. And the company is looking into installing a waste-oil heater to help with heating the shop areas.

In the field, the company uses more native plants and promotes the use of rain sensors and proper watering techniques, to avoid wasting water. More importantly, the company has invested in four Specialized Landscape Maintenance Vehicles — transportation and storage vehicles that are specifically designed and constructed to enhance fuel efficiency and eliminate the need for a separate trailer. As Santo puts it, “Being an overall ‘green’ company is important to us.”

Garrick-Santo is equally dedicated to social responsibility. To celebrate Earth Day this year, the company donated time and materials to renovate a traffic island in the historic district of Wilmington, Mass., and also beautified the grounds of the Town Hall in Reading, Mass. “We always have the community in mind,” says Verolla. “We want to beautify the region, one area at a time.”

For more information about Garrick-Santo Landscape Company, call (888) 354-0006, or visit www.GarrickSanto.com.