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FROM THE CEO

Lawn care on his mind, franchising his expertise

39-year-old takes Spring-Green to next level

BY DAVID SHAROS

For The Sun

James Young knows something about the grass always being greener. He should, given he's the president of the Plainfield-based Spring-Green Lawn Care company.

Young, 39, arrived in 2004 and was faced with the challenge of offering value for lawn service to local customers as well as growing the franchise on a national level. Seven years into the job, Young has accomplished both.

"Our national revenue back

in 2004 was \$21 million, and we've grown to \$37 million since then," Young said. "We've also added 30 franchises over that time, and while we wish our numbers were even better,

we've done pretty well in spite of a poor economy."

Young said the Spring-Green enterprise has a dual focus: providing support and marketing for local franchisees and growing the franchise throughout the country.

While not a lawn expert, Young said he is "a franchise guy." While in his late 20s, Young climbed the ranks at Verlo Mattress Factory Stores in Whitewater, Wis., where he played a critical



Young

role in the production of franchise committees and was responsible for creating an atmosphere "of change, acceptance and growth." He eventually became the company's

vice president of franchising. Later he took a job as the vice president of franchise development with Schooley Mitchell Telecom Consultants in Stratford, Ontario,

"(I) was responsible for all marketing strategies and systems related to franchise growth," Young said. "During 2003, we delivered 68 new franchises to the company."

Young then joined Spring-Green Lawn Care in April 2004 and revitalized the

company's sales and marketing efforts. Under his leadership, several new initiatives were implemented that helped Spring-Green prosper. In 2006, Young was appointed president of the organization.

CEO Ted Hofer of Spring-Green Lawn Care Corporation, who also serves as president of Superior Lawn Inc., a Spring-Green subsidiary, said Young is the major force behind a successful direct mail campaign that took the company to new heights in 2007 as well as the major inspiration behind a lot of the company's use of technology in attracting lawn care customers.

"James' background in franchising was certainly the

reason why we brought him on seven years ago, but over time, his role and leadership have developed way beyond that," Hofer said. "His consumer marketing efforts four years ago with direct mail made us so much better than we had been. We're also using more complex technology like incorporating satellite imagery to measure lawns and provide potential customers with customized estimates about their annual lawn care costs."

Young, who lives in Oswego with his wife, Becky, and three children ages 10, 8 and 6, said Naperville remains one of the strongholds in terms of clients and that, despite the economy, "lawn care isn't one of the top three

things that falls off the list of discretionary spending."

"Most people pay about \$400 to \$500 a year for our service, which is usually about eight times a year, and that's less than you pay over the same period for a cleaning service," Young said. "Naperville has embraced Spring-Green, and we're fortunate in that this city is one of our top lawn care markets."

He said if Naperville isn't No. 1 for lawn care needs, it comes in a close second.

"Naperville is one of the country's top lawn markets and that means there is a lot of competition here each year," he said. "Brand loyalty is the key, and we work very hard here in this community to maintain that."