

Edmonds-area entrepreneurs survive recession to grow major landscaping business

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After graduating from Edmonds-Woodway High School in the mid '90s, Peter Roberts and James Jakobson merged their respective skills into an Edmonds-based landscaping company, focusing largely on residential customers. That worked well, said Roberts, until the recession hit in 2008.

“Within a month, we lost 80 percent of our customers,” Roberts explained. “For them, landscaping was the first thing to go. They figured they could mow the lawn themselves.”

Things continued to deteriorate. “People stopped paying us,” he said. “To stay afloat, James and I did all the work ourselves. We made payment plans with our creditors. In six months, we were \$400,000 in debt.”

Roberts added that it took time to dig themselves out but they did it with integrity. “We didn’t screw anyone over in the process. After that, we decided to focus only on commercial clients because we didn’t want to go through that ever again.”

The business partners hoped to scale up to a national presence, adapting a commercial landscape management model. The new company, called ManageMowed Franchising, subcontracts landscaping to local crews while franchises oversee individual businesses. “This way, franchise owners can focus on sales and client relationships,” said Roberts. “It’s a unique, low-overhead approach to landscape management without the burden of personnel and equipment. We give franchises two weeks of in-house training, then a week of on-site training where they’re located.”

Most recently, ManageMowed inked an agreement to manage landscaping needs for Taco Bell locations across the Portland, Ore. area and signed an

agreement to offer snow plowing and removal for Public Storage locations in the Denver region. Additionally, it has added a full-time position to its account management team to support its growing work with Safeway, a national grocery chain.

“The interest and trust among facilities managers in ManageMowed is booming. Our services are in high-demand,” said Roberts. “Through 20-plus years of experience, we’ve perfected our model to make the lives of our clients easier and take the headache out of landscaping.”

As the company continues to grow its corporate team and client roster, it’s expanded to new markets as well, launching corporately run offices in Denver and Portland in the past 18 months.

The friends not only recovered from recession losses but have built a 3-million-dollar enterprise that emphasizes work-life balance — no 80-hour work weeks required — while promoting a culture of responsibility. “We have a sense of urgency to get the work done,” Roberts said, “and we care about our clients like it’s our own property.”