

Lawn service owner keeping grass short and his list of clients long

By Jackie Benton
Special Sections Writer

Joshua Bailey's story sounds like one written by Horatio Alger, in which hard work, pluck and a bit of luck saves the day for the hero and leads him to success. Bailey's lawn service, Sublime Lawn, has grown from the days when he single-handedly got it off the ground. Since then, he has built enough business in Austin that he plans to expand to Round Rock and Georgetown.

"It's been quite the process," he said. "Starting a lawn business and growing it into a successful one is not for the faint of heart. It's not for someone who doesn't want to work. All the guys who have successful lawn businesses now worked insanely in the beginning."

Bailey's foray into the lawn business began quite literally by accident. A biking mishap sidelined his college career in Atlanta, and Bailey made the decision to move back to Austin in 2002. He had started a lawn service the summer before in Atlanta and brought his mower with him. Once here, he found work at a direct marketing company.

"I got a job with Harte-Hanks through a temporary service, and then put up lawn service flyers in Circle C and quickly got 22 yards to cut a week," Bailey said. "I would work at Harte-Hanks from 7a.m. to 4p.m., then jump in my truck and drive to Circle C from Wells Branch and could cut four or five yards until dark and get done about 9:30p.m., then drive back to my apartment off Jollyville Road. I did that for a full summer."

Building this type of business isn't as simple as it might sound, Baily said.

"A lot of guys say they want to start a lawn service," he said. "I mean, that runs through any guy's head at some point: 'Hey, I can do this!' But then you get out there the first year and realize how much work it really is."

Bailey has come a long way from the days when he personally cut every lawn and worked seven days a week. Sublime Lawn now has five full-time employees — an office manager, crew manager, an assistant and two laborers — in a business that grosses just under \$500,000 per year. Bailey's not-so-secret secret to success is understanding the law of attrition.

"You're going to get a ton of customers and you're going to lose a ton," he said. "For every 10 there will be one that thinks you're the cat's meow, and you'll keep those and eventually build your business. If you get someone to give you praise, then by all means take it and keep it for those days when you get that kick in the head."

Now that he has a good crew in place to keep things running, Bailey plans to expand, but wants to do so in an ecologically responsible way.

"I'm desperately searching for someone out there to create an electric commercial lawnmower. I know it can be done," he said. "And, I'm just waiting for hybrid gas/electric trucks to be made available. My goal is to be the cleanest lawn service out there. I think it is real important to be the cleanest and fairest in business. If you can do that, everything else will work and people don't mind paying a dollar more because they know it's a better service all around."



Photo by Beth Bond
Joshua Bailey build his Austin lawn service from the ground up. He has plans to expand it to Round Rock and Georgetown.