

Plantscapers helps make good impressions

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By Mike Copeland

Tribune-Herald business editor

First impressions count.

For example: What does a dirty bathroom say about a store or restaurant? Probably plenty.

With that in mind, Susan Sadler believes that plants speak volumes about a place of business.

"We try to present an image," said Sadler, president of a company called Plantscapers. And she and her staff vigorously guard that image by pampering the plants they place in a restaurant, professional office or hospital.

They water them, groom them, replace them if necessary. They even help companies choose the right plants to fit a mood, a lighting scheme and a decor.

"As part of our remodel, we put as much emphasis on selecting the right plants as purchasing new furniture," said Eric Shero, chief operating officer at Fidelity Bank of Texas, which recently spruced up its location at 1901 W. Lake Shore Drive.

Plantscapers was there every step of the way.

The company has been around close to two decades. Susan and Chris Sadler bought it in April 1999.

Both have business degrees from Baylor University, said Susan Sadler, and they felt they could take Plantscapers "to the next level." It has grown to include clients all over Central Texas, including Waco, Temple and Killeen.

Sadler was hesitant to say exactly how many clients Plantscapers has or to identify all of them. She has local competitors, and she did not want to spill any trade secrets.

One rival is Lyn Cox, owner of In The Green.

"I used to work for Plantscapers, the original owner, but I later started my own business," said Cox, who has 60 clients, including Richland Mall, and recently opened a branch in Lubbock.

"There is a lot of demand for our services," she said of companies like In The Green and Plantscapers. A well-placed plant, she said, "gives a good look to a building, softens corners, provides noise barriers in restaurants."

Plantscapers will rent or sell plants to businesses and maintain them. It also helps with the selection of plants.

It does this for a monthly fee that varies widely with the number of plants a company has on the premises.

"One firm may pay \$350 a month while another pays \$75 a month," said Sadler, adding that those are just examples. "Some accounts are higher than that and some are lower."

Liz Taylor, executive director of the Waco Convention and Visitors Bureau, said the city has contracted with Plantscapers for several years and is pleased with the results.

"A lot of people come through the center, and the plants sometimes take the brunt of what happens. Taking care of them is a big job," Taylor said. "We don't have to touch them. Every week, they check on them, water them, replace them if need be. We think what they do really brightens up the building."

Coldwell Banker Jim Stewart Realtors has used Plantscapers "at least 20 years," said president Earl Patrick.

"They're professionals, and they've always done a wonderful job for us," Patrick said. "If I'm sitting at the conference table with somebody, the Plantscapers people excuse themselves, do their watering, and they're gone."

Plantscapers has a lean staff of one manager and three technicians who tend to day-to-day plant maintenance.

It advertises "through one-on-one referrals," Sadler said, adding that "if we notice a new facility going up, we contact them directly and tell them what we do."

"Are we profitable?" she asks, repeating a question. "Absolutely."

mcopeland@wacotrib.com
757-5736

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