

Digging *for a better way*

by JAMES HURLEY Tribune Staff Writer

He doesn't have a street named after him like Norman Eddy or a museum honoring his successes like the Studebakers. His is not a household name, yet many in the community have likely been affected by the legacy of his work. As founder of Foegley Landscape Inc., Robert Foegley's passion for creating beautiful spaces has left an indelible mark on the Michiana area.

The company is the realization of one man's innate desire to watch things grow. While founded in 1959, its seeds were planted years earlier, when at the age of 7 Robert's parents entrusted the management of the family garden to him.

"He started playing around in the garden and fell in love with it," says his son, John Foegley.

What followed was a childhood spent experimenting with growing things such as peanuts and hydroponic tomatoes. The discovery of his passion so early in life allowed Robert to focus his studies and eventually led to a bachelor of science degree in ornamental horticulture from Michigan State University.

Equipped with only a shovel, wheelbarrow and rake, a few years after graduating Robert began growing what is today a \$4 million landscaping company that employs up to 60 people during peak season. Known for its "legacy of excellence," Foegley Landscape Inc. specializes in creating and maintaining functional and sustainable outdoor spaces.

"We're a company that covers the broad spectrum of landscape services that are out there," says John, who now owns and man-

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ages the company.

The services available include creating, planting, fertilizing, mowing, pruning, and irrigating landscapes; designing and building brick patios, walks, driveways, and water features; and snow removal — to name just a few.

"When Dad was running the company, it was basically just design, build, install, and a little bit of maintenance. Over the last 10 or 15 years, we've been slowly pushing more into maintenance because it's what clients want from us," John says.

Diversification has been central to the company's growth, and it's been a particular focus of John's since he assumed control. His degree in business from Indiana University South Bend lends itself to guiding the legacy of his father's creation.

In a self-effacing way, he refers to himself as the "bean counter," the head of a team that includes three landscape designers (two with degrees from Purdue and one with a degree from Ball State), a horticulturist who runs the plant nursery, a certified landscape technician, registered pesticide appli-



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cators, and a host of maintenance, grounds keeping, and office personnel necessary to keep such a diverse operation running smoothly.

"Our team is what sets us apart from everyone else in

the area," he says. "They love what they do and love seeing great landscapes come into reality."

But perhaps a better description of John, and one that provides insight into the success that he's nur-

tured, might be that he's practical and measured. He's given to searching for perspective, an attribute that he says was intensified upon being diagnosed with muscular dystrophy.

"One of the things it's

taught me is to find solutions to problems," he says. "I'm always thinking that there's a better way to do things, a more efficient way to do things."

Brian Lakin, standing, a landscape architect with Foegley Landscape Inc. and John Foegley, owner of Foegley Landscape in a garden located in front of the main office on Lilac Road. The company was started in 1959 by John's father, Robert Foegley.

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Those qualities are apparent in the team that he employs and in the landscapes that they create and maintain. He offers ample opportunities for training and certification, with a keen understanding that what's good for business is what's good for the client. And, it just so happens, what's good for the client is what's good for the business.

While some landscape contractors delight in underselling the competition, loading their projects with cheap labor and erratic design, John is focused on the quality and longevity of the landscapes his team creates.

"We don't want to be the cheap landscape contractor in town; we want to be the best," he says. "That doesn't mean we're not competitive, because our pricing is competitive, but we provide a better

value."

And it's delivered in the form of experience and knowledge. His team operates on the principle that landscaping, when done right, will add value for years to come.

"We always try to make our design work sustainable so that it's friendly to the environment and friendly to the needs of the client," he says. "If you have to cut the spruce tree down in four years because it was planted in the improper environment, did you really get a deal by going with the cheap guy who didn't know what he was doing when it comes to design?"

Permeating seemingly all of the company's considerations is a sincere appreciation for the community that has allowed it to flourish. The company donates time and resources to various charitable causes and nonprofit organizations. Recent contributions include an upgrade to a park that the company designed across from Riley

High School and assisting with the design and installation of the new Chris Wilson Pavilion at Potawatomi Park.

"We think the community would be lesser if it didn't have things like the Civic Theatre and the Symphony ... those are things that mean a lot to the community."

Contributing to them is his way of thanking the community that welcomed his father's passion 50 years ago. Its support enabled his father to retire securely with a sense of fulfillment — an accomplishment of which John is most proud.

"All of our successes are measured by our abilities to support our families that work here ... that we give back to the community, and that our clients are delighted and happy with what we do."

For more information, contact Foeogley Landscape Inc., 52215 Lilac Road, South Bend; (574) 277-2424, or visit www.foeogleylandscape.com.