

Landscaper expands reach

Entrepreneur also offers holiday decor, auto detailing

By Karen Maserjian Shan
For the Poughkeepsie Journal

Duane Phillips enjoys landscaping. Why shouldn't he? His father's a landscaper. His mother's family is in the landscaping business.

Perhaps it's no wonder, then, that Phillips, 32, established his own landscaping business seven years ago, X-Scape Landscaping in Poughkeepsie.

"I love what I do," Phillips said. "You want to call it genetics? You want to call it guilty by association? I just always did it, always loved it."

The state Department of Labor reports there were about 54,520 landscapers and groundskeepers employed in the state in 2006. The figure is expected to rise to 60,670 by 2016.

Phillips' early start in the business began when he was a preteen, cutting grass with his dad. When he hit 16, differences with his stepmother mounted and Phillips moved out of their Poughkeepsie home, temporarily taking up residence with relatives in Wappingers Falls.

Things moved quickly from there. By 17 he was living on his own, working part-time at the landscaping business of his uncle, Bill Neave, and making additional money by dealing poker at a local men's club.

He was also finishing up at Roy C. Ketcham Senior High School, where he meet guidance counselor Roger Higgins.

"We talked about what I wanted to do," Phillips said of his conversations with Higgins. "He wanted to make sure that I got there."

With Higgins' help, Phillips enrolled in Dutchess Community College's business degree program as he continued landscaping for his uncle's company. After graduating from DCC, he used what he'd learned from Higgins about the college application process and, at 21, entered himself in the landscape contracting program at the State University of New York at Cobleskill, Schoharie County.



Duane Phillips started Poughkeepsie-based X-Scape Landscaping seven years ago. Landscaping is in his blood; both his father and his mother's family are in the business. SASHA BUSH/FOR THE POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL

Once he had his degree, Phillips returned to his uncle's company full-time, learning not only the business of landscaping but also about life.

"He taught me about doing the right thing," Phillips said of his uncle, "about (how) if I'm going to do a job, to do it right the first time."

Several years later, Phillips, 26 and newly married, felt it was time to move on and left the company. He established X-Scape Landscaping in Poughkeepsie and, as he built up his clientele, worked for a landscaping friend in Westchester County.

"It blew up extremely fast," Phillips said of his business.

Within six months he focused fully on his company, the inception and success of which he credits to his wife, Nicole.

"She is the reason and backbone, why I'm in business today," Phillips said.

Late in 2005 Phillips established X-Mas, a holiday decorating company, and last January he founded X-it! Detailing, an auto detailing company in Poughkeepsie.

Brian Whitten of Whitten Construction in Poughkeepsie has known Phillips since high school. The two have worked together on jobs where Phillips has done the landscaping and Whitten, the construction.



DUANE M. PHILLIPS

Age: 32

Title: President, X-Enterprises, including X-Scape Landscaping, X-Mas and X-it! Detailing

Education: Associate's degree in business, Dutchess Community College; bachelor's degree in landscape contracting, State University of New York Cobleskill

Training: Various certifications, including Certified Landscape Technician and New York State Commercial Pesticide Applicator and others through PLANET, Associated Landscape Contractors of America, Snow and Ice Management Association, Unilock

Information:

www.xscapelandscape.com

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"Very professional," Whitten said of Phillips. "Definitely knows what he's talking about."

Whitten isn't surprised that his friend established three companies, nor would he rule out more expansion.

"If the opportunity arises, I'm sure he'd be all over it," he said.

"I want to be the benchmark," said Phillips, whose business boasts 50 employees in the winter and about a dozen in the spring and summer. "I want to be the landscaping company that everybody else has to keep up with."

Karen Maserjian Shan is a freelance writer. Reach her at mkshan@optonline.net.