



OPTIMAL Design

LANDSCAPER MEETS CUSTOMER DEMAND FOR MAINTENANCE SERVICES

As a successful, well-established force in the local design/build landscape segment since 1978, Southview Design began receiving requests from some of its satisfied customers for critical ongoing maintenance—a service they did not provide at the time.

Recognizing this as a bonafide opportunity, Southview launched a sophisticated maintenance operation during 2014. The net result is they have nearly doubled their sales volume in just seven years.

Headquartered in St. Paul, Minn., Southview Design has a well-earned reputation for excellence in design, architecture, construction, landscape care and client service throughout the Twin Cities metro area. Their core clientele for both design-build and maintenance resides within a 50-mile radius.

Southview handles the carriage trade among the area's uber high-end residential customers—such as the luxurious homes surrounding Lake Minnetonka—and also

serves the needs of residential landscape design/build and commercial landscape management.

Southview strives to deliver the finest possible service to its many loyal clients while burnishing an image that bespeaks quality.

“We’re known for quality, communication and service,” says Johannes Louwers, COO at Southview who manages day-to-day operations as well as landscape sales for the landscape/maintenance side of the business. “We’re growing incredibly fast.”

Southview’s design/build business will do about \$18 million in sales this year, while the maintenance side will realize sales of about \$12 million.

“Snow removal is going to be the new focus for significant growth,” Louwers says. “Our three-year goal would be north of \$50 million dollars. We’re fortunate. We don’t really pursue work. It’s all organic growth. I shouldn’t say



SOUTHVIEW DESIGN

Location: St. Paul, Minnesota

Primary Business: Landscape design/build, architecture, construction, landscape care and client service

Cat® equipment: Compact Track Loaders: 249D3 (9), 259D3 (5); Skid Steer Loaders: 262D3 (2); Mini Hydraulic Excavators: 306, 308H2R; Wheel Loaders; 914, 926M (5)

Photo: Johannes Louwers, COO (L) and Theo Lenneman, director of sourcing and procurement, stand proudly beside the sign at Southview's corporate headquarters.

all—but the majority of our growth has come through existing relationships and referrals.”

Initially founded as a residential design/build firm, the company transitioned in 2008, when the current owner, Chris Clifton, bought the company and decided to focus on custom, high-end design/build that essentially carried the company through 2014. Then, as demand for maintenance grew among its customers, Southview expanded its scope of operations to add maintenance—resulting in explosive growth.

Today, the commercial side—healthcare, corporate campuses and large industrial parks—comprises 95 percent of the maintenance business and operates on three- to five-year contracts. Weekly maintenance performed by care crews includes lawn trimming, mowing, weeding, pruning and fertilizing.

Interestingly, proactive communication by the company's landscape care reps served as the catalyst for the explosive growth in its maintenance operations, according to Louwers.

“All of our reps do weekly site visits for

our clients. We've developed a unique app that enables us to send a document with photographs of site visits, updates and other things that clients may want to see. A lot of these property managers don't visit their sites on a weekly basis, so we pride ourselves on being the eyes and ears on their properties while they're at their offices working.”

Another contributor to its success is Southview's brand image.

When Southview crews arrive on a jobsite, they're all attired in full uniforms including hats and required PPE. Clean, newer Cat® machines make a statement. “We like to have the latest and greatest equipment and we maintain it all really well—our trucks included—they don't have a speck of rust on them and they are washed and meticulously maintained,” Louwers says. “That's the image that we have fostered in the marketplace.”

Southview is staffed by 225 employees during peak season, with about 85 to 90 salaried employees and the rest seasonal. In winter, they drop down to about 100 hourly workers. The broad scope of Southview's diverse operations requires 26 landscape crews, five irrigation

crews, two irrigation/install crews, and three boulder crews. The company also employs 25 workers on the H-2B work visa program to supplement its hourly workforce who often renew their visas each year.

Southview has an average employee tenure of almost seven years, with annual turnover below four percent—both unusually good for a landscape firm.

And with such a large workforce, Southview crews hold daily safety meetings at their worksites, while the company maintains a safety committee that meets weekly to develop new programs to help ensure employees keep safety top of mind.

Savvy equipment management

Southview operates 24 pieces of Cat equipment, including 16 compact track loaders and skid steer loaders, plus mini hydraulic excavators and wheel loaders. Most of their Cat machines are leased.

Louwers says the primary reason for choosing Cat machines was the excellent lease program offered through Cat Financial.

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“As we evaluated the amount of time we use these machines, leasing was the best option for our company. Ziegler and Caterpillar fit the needs our Company had really well. It has been a great partnership that has grown into multiple lines of our business.”

“We rely on our Cat equipment quite a bit,” Louwers says. “Downtime means that we’re losing money, and we can lose it quickly. The uptime on our Cat equipment has always been phenomenal, close to 100 percent. If machines do go down, the response from Ziegler is great. It’s been a really good experience for us having Cat equipment on our sites and the guys love the machines. They are

comfortable with their state-of-the-art designs, and that makes our crews excited to come to work every day.”

With their low ground pressure tracks, Cat machines tread softly on palatial residential lawns as well as rapidly maneuvering across large commercial worksites. Their compact size and high power-to-weight ratios enable the machines to handle the many diverse tasks performed by landscapers—such as positioning heavy boulders, carrying pallets of sod and truck loading—with precision and efficiency.

Cat dealer relationship

“I think the service from Ziegler is second to none,” adds Theo Lenneman,

Southview director of sourcing and procurement and certified arborist. “In the snow removal world, where uptime is especially critical, Cat machines have been significantly better than other makes used in the past.”

Reliable equipment and timely customer service make Caterpillar the market leader, Louwers says.

“We’re thrilled that Caterpillar and Ziegler work as well as they do with us, because we’ve used other equipment and it just hasn’t gone as well—which is ultimately another factor that drove us to Caterpillar. Ziegler’s customer service is phenomenal. And the equipment itself is second to none.” **OTJ**