

## Forming a team

**R**yan Jardine, president and founder of Quality Irrigation, believes in team work. In fact he believes in it so strongly, he doesn't like the term "employee" – he prefers "volunteer" – and he constantly attributes his company's success to the entire team. He recently shared some of his best tips for putting together a great team.

**Be slow to hire.** When recruiting, Jardine says the current team is the best tool. "(If) someone comes in and talks to our people they see how happy they are."

He also takes the hiring process seriously. "I'm always amazed that people get hired after a one hour interview. That's a one hour investment of your time compared to a minimum of 2,080 hours they'll be putting in while working for you."

**Be quick to fire.** Jardine says a good way to know whether someone isn't a good fit for the company is to ask yourself honestly if you'd rehire them again. "If the answer is no, you should free up their future to do something else instead of just hanging on to them."

**Create camaraderie.** Part of the reason Jardine is constantly using the terminology "Q team" is to remind everyone he views them as a team. He's also adamant about using the word "our." "I never say 'that's my truck' or 'those are mine.' It's always 'ours.' I do understand why people are apt to say 'mine' when they built the company from the ground up, like I did. But I also recognize that I wouldn't have gotten to where I am without my team and I want everyone to know that."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF QUALITY IRRIGATION



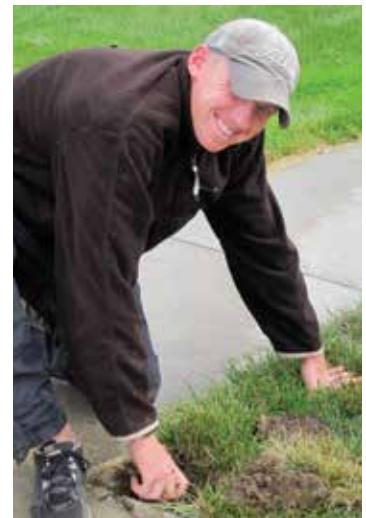
## A dream come true

Ryan Jardine got the irrigation bug at an early age, and has made a successful career in the industry.

**R**yan Jardine began working in the irrigation business while he was only 16 and still in high school. He says the grocery bagger jobs he'd previously had just weren't for him and with irrigation he really felt he'd landed a kid's dream job. "You get to play in the mud and run through the sprinklers," Jardine says. "I'd see the little kids staring at me in awe because I was playing in the mud and nobody was yelling at me."

Following high school, Jardine continued working in the industry as a college student while also studying business management. His passion for the outdoors coupled with an entrepreneurial spirit led Jardine to start his own irrigation business upon graduation and in 2003 he launched Quality Irrigation, one of Omaha's few irrigation-specific companies. The fact that the company focuses solely on irrigation has been a differentiator and helped the business grow. But it's also been Jardine's hard work and his focus on a team effort that has made the business a success as it celebrates more than 10 years in business.

Jardine says he strongly believes in team spirit – something he attributes partly to playing a lot of sports. He knows that success is achieved much easier when everyone works together.



Jardine landed his dream job.



Therefore, he has taken that team approach to heart as a boss. “I’ve had jobs where all the boss does is yell at you,” Jardine says. “I believe that people don’t leave jobs, they leave bosses, so I keep that in mind when running my business. I’m a big believer in treating our employees like volunteers. I don’t like hearing someone say ‘he works for me.’”



Jardine

**FACING CHALLENGES.** While the company has grown steadily every year, like everyone else, they were challenged by the downturn in the economy when new construction in the area came to a halt. Still, they managed to grow a bit that year, just not as much as in previous seasons. With the recession also came the new challenge of increased competition. Many jumped into the irrigation field – including landscapers and lawn care companies – in order to seek new lines of revenue for the deficits caused by the economy. But Jardine says the company’s specialization in irrigation is what has continued to differentiate them.

“It’s not a side line for us and we know what we’re doing,” he says.

Jardine says the company was able to hold prices firm and push quality as the reason customers should consider paying more for its services.

“We only do one thing and that’s irrigation – so we do it quite well,” Jardine says. “We’re not trying to be a jack of all trades and I think the customer recognizes that.”

Another key challenge for the business has been in keeping up with the latest technology and ever-changing communications. Jardine says the company is always learning new billing or scheduling programs and has had to adapt to all different ways of reaching and communicating with customers.

“It’s been beneficial, however, because

almost all of the changes have allowed us to provide better service to our customers and to build even stronger relationships with them,” Jardine says.

“There are tremendous competitive advantages to technology and if you’re not learning, you’re dying. It’s so important to keep up. If you’re still doing your estimates on carbon copy, I’m going to look a lot more impressive when I show up with my iPad. Regardless of what age you are, I think all customers expect today’s businesses to be on top of the latest technology.”

Although the Midwest states have not been as engulfed in the water conservation issue as other parts of the country, that has not stopped Quality Irrigation from pushing smart technology. Jardine says that the company installs systems only using water-efficient sprinkler components. If customers need parts replaced, those parts are always upgraded to smarter technologies.

“We’ve really pushed and promoted rain sensors and smart controllers, offering them at discounts or even giving them away for free,” Jardine says.

**OPPORTUNITIES IN MAINTENANCE.** When Jardine first began the business, his focus was on new installations. But today that has shifted and the company is very focused on service work. In fact, the company is comprised of one install crew and five service guys because Jardine says he’d rather do five times as much service as install.

“Frankly, we enjoy it and it’s our strength,” he says. “There are a lot of companies – and even independent

one-man bands – who can slam in a cookie cutter system. But then they disappear and the customer is left hanging. We’re not like that.”

A lot of businesses say they’d prefer to get more install work but Jardine sees maintenance is his bread and butter. It’s steady and ongoing, plus it requires less manpower. Instead of sending a whole crew to an install job, it can be tackled by one technician. Plus it doesn’t require all the heavy equipment. “It’s easier to be nimble when you stay small,” Jardine says.

Of course since the downturn in the economy, many irrigation companies have had to get more involved with maintenance purely out of necessity. There isn’t much new construction going on and it’s



Quality Irrigation recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.



easier to find repair or retrofit jobs than new work. But there are also brand new competitors jumping into the maintenance sector. Jardine says the fact that the barrier to entry is low – there’s not a lot of investment in big equipment or manpower – has also meant that more one-man-and-a-truck operations are springing up.

“It’s not just the guy that has been mowing and says ‘I can fix a sprinkler’ but even people who have lost corporate jobs and are looking for a way to make money,” Jardine says. “One of our biggest frustrations is when there is work being done out there without a license and there’s no repercussion. There is nobody patrolling it and if we saw someone clearly operating without a license and called the city they wouldn’t even know who should handle it. Licensing is a hot topic here because it’s not enforced.”

Fortunately Jardine says that even though more competition in maintenance

exists, Quality Irrigation has been able to hold its own. “There are a lot of people who have had a bad experience in something because they tried to save a little money and go with the lower cost provider,” Jardine says. “Not just in irrigation but in anything – roofing, electronics, you name it. So we find that most people are willing to spend a little more if they believe they’re getting value out of that extra expense. The most valuable thing you can do for anyone is save them time and if they believe you’ll get the job done faster and also correct the first time, they’re willing to pay more for that. We’re more organized and more efficient and customers recognize that.”

**BUILDING SUCCESS.** As Quality Irrigation celebrated its 10th year, Jardine says he can’t reiterate enough how much of that can be attributed to team work.

“I learned a long time ago that if you hire talented, enthusiastic people that ev-

erything else becomes much easier,” he says.

“Every job is valuable. From that first point of contact with your business – the friendly and helpful person you hear when you call to schedule service – to the knowledgeable and friendly service techs that come to your home, every team member plays a critical role. I have a team that works with me – not for me.”

Jardine says that because the team members are so committed to providing their customers with outstanding service, it has been easy for Quality Irrigation to back up its work with a 100 percent satisfaction guarantee.

“That isn’t just hype,” Jardine says. “We live by it. That’s why we all work really hard to get things right the first time for our customers and why so many of our customers are so willing to refer us to friends and family. They know they can trust us and they know that we do all of our work to the very best of our abilities.” **L&L**

## Become an award-winning company

**Q**uality Irrigation in Omaha is an award-winning company. In fact, the business has won quite an impressive number of awards.

While it’s always a nice honor to win things, company founder and President Ryan Jardine says there have been other benefits as well. For one, the name recognition that it’s helped produce gets the business recognized within the community.

It also gives customers an automatic sense of trust. And it never hurts to get free PR since many of the rewards get reported by local news.

Jardine, himself, was named a “40 Under 40” award winner by the *Midlands Business Journal*, an award that recognizes entrepreneurs, executives and professionals in Omaha who are under the age of 40, and the business has been recognized for everything from an Angie’s List Super Service Award to Small Business of the Year by the local Chamber of Commerce, among many other honors. Jardine says the service awards give him the most pride and satisfaction.

“This means we’re meeting or exceeding our customers’



expectations,” he says. “The Chambers’ Small Business of the Year award is personally prized due to the recognition from the business community.”

It’s also an honor that Jardine says they don’t solicit the awards but that in most cases they have been nominated by customers or won recognition for excellence in customer service. The one exception is the “Best of Omaha Award,” which Jardine knows gets a lot of recognition from residents and would be a great business builder. He says the company did ask customers to vote for them. When it comes to awards like that, it can help to remind customers to consider taking a moment to vote.

Offentimes without a reminder they just might not realize or remember to do so.

Winning awards has helped Quality Irrigation stand out in a crowded marketplace and has definitely helped build their reputation.

Jardine adds: “I think it helps show that we are a quality company with a great team and will do everything we can to make our customers happy.”