



CAITLIN BATTERSBY

Cheryl and Rusty Woodall at a custom residential landscaping project under way in Windermere

Optimism cultivates Success

Landscaper stays positive in light of tough economy



Staying Power

Tales of business survival

BY JENNA REW

City Beautiful Landscaping was formed in the midst of a recession in the 1980s, so owner Russell "Rusty" Woodall believes his company is well-positioned to survive the latest economic downturn.

"This company was born out of the exact same times we are going through now," Woodall said. "I never focused on the economy, and I still don't."

Formed in 1989, the business has grown from lawn maintenance and simple installation projects to include outdoor lighting, carpentry, pond installation, paving services and pest control. "I started with a truck and a trailer and went from there," Woodall said, adding that as he got jobs, he financed equipment.

That's not to say that Woodall has not been affected by the latest recession. City Beautiful's revenue hit \$3.4 million in 2007, \$2.6 million in 2008, and Woodall projects \$1.9 million for 2009.

Woodall also has struggled with rising operating costs, as the price of gas and

City Beautiful Landscaping

Line of business: Landscaping

Headquarters: Orlando

Year founded: 1989

Top local executive: Russell "Rusty" Woodall, president

2008 revenue: \$2.6 million

Employees: 23

Contact: (407) 381-1910; www.citybeautifullandscaping.com

fertilizer doubled in 2008. While the price of gas dropped in recent months — from a high of more than \$4 in July to \$2.61 a gallon as of Dec. 15 — the cost of fertilizer has remained about the same.

Commercial projects bring in the most money for City Beautiful, even though the biggest hardship in landing this type of work has come from more pressure to bid lower to get new projects. As a result, Woodall quit bidding on projects not already operated by existing customers. Commercial projects used to comprise 70

percent of his business, but that has fallen to 50 percent. A typical commercial project that used to fetch \$100,000 now often goes for about \$30,000, Woodall said.

Despite his struggles, Woodall is optimistic about the future.

"We know margins are not going to be good with this kind of economy," he said. "So we are just going to live with a lower margin and do the best we can."

That means lower bids and doing more work to produce the same revenue.

Woodall also sought the help of the University of Central Florida's Small Business Development Center.

Staff there have provided him with a board of directors, which meets quarterly and focuses on how to streamline his business using better systems and creating a better work force. He has met with his board twice, with another four meetings scheduled during the next 18 months.

Woodall said the center and its volunteer board have helped him clean up his financial records. In fact, he said, he's spent more time on the company's financials in the last 90 days than in its entire history.

The SBDC also helped him refine company policies and operating procedures — moves he said will help him better market his businesses.

specialreports@bizjournals.com | (407) 649-8470