

PLANET NEWS

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Going green
*Sustainable choices can be
good for the environment
and for your business*

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PLANET leader keeps mentally busy – all the time

The president of The Raimondi Group, Inc., in Ho-Ho-Kus, New Jersey, appears to have a relaxed, serene veneer. But with Chris Raimondi, Landscape Industry Certified Manager, what you see isn't what you get. In addition to owning and operating essentially three businesses in one with his wife and company Vice President Leann Surz, Landscape Industry Certified Technician, he's deeply involved with his community as a volunteer firefighter, teaches horticulture as an adjunct faculty member at two institutions of higher learning, routinely speaks at garden clubs and other organizations, and has been an active member of PLANET for more than a decade.

"That's my nature," says Raimondi, modestly referring to his "overactive" mind. As he points out, the trait has been helpful, allowing him to reinvent his company and adapt to

an ever-changing marketplace. Formed in 1974, his original company, Raimondi Landscape, evolved over the years into The Raimondi Group, which now consists of three divisions: The Raimondi Horticultural Group, Inc. (RHG), providing interior and exterior horticultural services; The Little Flower Shoppe, a retail florist operation; and LFS Productions to handle unique special events.

The interior portion of the business accounts for approximately 75 percent of sales revenue. Together, though, the divisions have great synergy and their interaction helps generate activity for all three business segments. "One needs to be constantly on the cutting edge with New York City only 15 miles away," says Raimondi. "Many of the top interior landscape contractors make their home here, and compared to them, we have limited resources for marketing our services. The interaction of our three divisions, my teaching, and, yes, my involvement and networking with PLANET has been instrumental in growing our company."

Green thumb

Born and raised in northern New Jersey, Raimondi wanted to be in the green industry from the time he started mowing his neighbors' yards in the eighth grade. As a youngster, he was also the perpetual winner of a Boy Scout-sponsored, fund-raising event. "The event generated funds through selling lawn fertilizer, and I sold a lot of it to my mowing customers and other neighbors," Raimondi recalls. "I guess I impressed the nursery that supplied the fertilizer. After one such event, the owner told me I could sell anything in the store and asked me to continue selling fertilizer."

Working with the nursery and mowing lawns was how Raimondi was originally introduced to the green industry. The interest carried over to SUNY-Farmingdale where he received an Associate in Applied Science degree in ornamental horticulture while operating his young company and working part-time for an interior plantscaping company.

After graduating, he devoted all his time to his company and, admittedly, was constantly challenged to grow beyond the three- to five-employee stage. "One of the reasons I joined PLANET was to get to know veteran landscape contractors such as Chapel Valley's Landon Reeve," says Raimondi. "Landon was very willing to share information with me, as were other members."

He continues: "The other reason I joined was to fulfill a promise I had made to myself early on in life, to leave this

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Chris Raimondi
Landscape Industry Certified Manager

Leading the Way

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earth as a better place. I felt that PLANET (then ALCA) provided the resources and means for me to achieve that goal through nurturing landscapes, people, and business.”

Raimondi has since been a very active member. He currently is serving his second stint as chair of the Interior Plantscaping Specialty Group and as a member of the PLANET Board of Directors. He also chairs the Interior Industry Coalition (IIC), a group that represents 10 associations, including PLANET, and he is the PLANET representative for Green Plants for Green Buildings. Over the years, he has served on the World Work Place Committee, representing the interior plantscaping industry at the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) show, has been the association’s liaison to the Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition (TPIE) show, and has served on several other PLANET committees.

“I think one of the biggest challenges facing the green industry and interior plantscapers specifically is getting a clear message out to the public,” Raimondi emphasizes. “We have several issues that need to be addressed, not the least of which is educating the public about the value green plants have both inside and outside buildings. Having a single, unified voice will help us get that message out.”

Raimondi is helping relay that message in his various capacities with PLANET and through efforts closer to home. He is a member of the adjunct faculty and is on the Horticulture Advisory Board at Bergen Community College and has been teaching interior plantscaping courses at The New York Botanical Garden for the past 15 years. Through his work with Green Plants for Green Buildings, he also teaches continuing education courses to architects who want to learn more about the value of plants in building designs.

In his spare time, he annually logs hundreds of hours training to fight fires as a volunteer for two local fire departments. Raimondi is a former Chief and current Safety Officer in one department and Captain in the other. When not fighting fires, installing plants, or working on green industry initiatives, he likely can be found with Leann and his daughter Kim enjoying boating, fishing, or just being near the water.

At this point in his career, Raimondi says he has two immediate goals. One is to keep his firm on the cutting edge while growing employees into managerial positions. “We have 19 employees and many already hold their certifications. I’m a firm believer in PLANET’s certification program and the level of professionalism it brings to the industry.”

The other is to further the interest of the green industry by working with other PLANET members, something he plans to do for years to come. ~

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