

MAIN STREET

# Youth not wasted on DeCastro owner



PBN PHOTO/KATE WHITNEY LUCEY

**SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE:** DeCastro Landscaping President Gairad DeCastro started mowing lawns when he was 15 and launched his own company at 17. Now 23, he owns an expanding firm with two affiliated franchises.

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At 23 years old, DeCastro Landscaping President Gairad DeCastro always has to be at the top of his professional game when he meets new customers.

“Here’s what I run into, and it happens almost daily,” said DeCastro, who started mowing lawns when he was 15 and launched his own company at 17.

“If I go out and look at a large job, people kind of look at me as if they’re thinking, ‘Why didn’t you send someone with more experience?’ These people are spending a lot of money – \$30,000 for an average job or bigger jobs of \$50,000 to \$70,000 – and they want to know the job will be done right,” said DeCastro.

To assure potential customers he can complete a job professionally, he arrives in uniform, with references and a portfolio of projects his company has done, including pool and patio designs, waterfalls and outdoor kitchens.

He tops off the pitch with a lifetime guarantee, based on his certainty that he and his employees are well-trained and all work is done to industry standards. DeCastro started getting training and earning certification early in his career from the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute, the trade association representing the industry, and the National Concrete Masonry Association.

Keeping his employees up-to-date on training is par for the course, he said.

“If it’s installed the way we’ve been trained, a paver driveway installed to ICPI standards will last 40-100 years,” said DeCastro. “A retaining wall done to industry standards will last up to 110 years.

There are rare instances when the company returns to a project.

“We’ve gone back maybe a few times with all the jobs we’ve done,” DeCastro said. “Those are generally for minor issues, and sometimes not even because of our work.”

Occasionally it’s what DeCastro calls a “Mother Nature problem,” like some minor storm damage. Or it could be human error, not company error.

For instance, if a homeowner has a dump truck drive onto driveway pavers when it’s not intended to handle that kind of weight, the company will go back and do the minor repair of replacing a couple of pavers, at no cost, as a good-faith effort to maintain the relationship with the customer.

Although his company is still relatively young, DeCastro is finding his clientele building at a steady pace.

“It starts off trimming bushes, then they ask us to do a patio, then they refer us to a friend to do a patio,” said DeCastro. In addition to residential, about 25 percent of his business is commercial, including assisted living, condo and apartment communities.

DeCastro has an appetite for growth. The landscaping business has about 25 percent more growth potential in order to keep it at a manageable size and maintain personal relationships with clients, he said.

Looking for expansion two years ago, he bought a franchise for Mosquito Terminators of Rhode Island.

Last month, he launched his Weed Man of Newport franchise. The two franchises allow him to offer services his customers were already asking for.

“We were subbing out that work through another company,” he said. “I constantly watch dollars and we had a lot of business leaving our hands. The best way to add to our bottom line was to buy into the franchises.”

With heightened public awareness on environmental issues, DeCastro said he chose carefully when he took on the franchises.

“We only use chemicals when we need to and we only use as much as we need,” he said. “People still want a green lawn and they want an insect-free lawn.”

As he continues training and company expansion, DeCastro is sometimes surprised when people mention his business acumen and ambition.

“It’s funny, because I’m constantly thinking I could have done more, even though I’m buying additional businesses, with the franchises,” DeCastro said. “I think the first two years, when I was a little uncertain where we were headed, I could have done more if I had a better game plan.”

He figures his motivation comes from the work ethic he learned from his mother, who lost her husband and worked hard as a nurse to support the family, aided by his grandmother.

“I had the work ethic drilled into me,” said DeCastro,

That work ethic means DeCastro has his company’s game plan in place now.

“We’ve been growing an average of 40-50 percent a year for the past five years,” said DeCastro.

“I know good employees are the key to success,” he said. But when it comes to making decisions, “I’m the only decision-maker.” •

## **COMPANY PROFILE**

### **DeCastro Landscaping**

**OWNER:** Gairad DeCastro, president

**TYPE OF BUSINESS:** Full-service landscaping, including design, installation and maintenance; affiliated franchises under the same owner are Weed Man of Newport and Mosquito Terminators of Rhode Island

**LOCATION:** Portsmouth

**EMPLOYEES:** 17

**YEAR ESTABLISHED:** 2007

**ANNUAL SALES:** WND