



## NURTURING THE HORTICULTURE INDUSTRY

**H**orticulture is an industry with a high turnover rate. In spite of this, Russell Corrie, Managing Director of Nature Care - one of the Caribbean's leading full service plant nurseries and landscaping businesses - believes it is critical to invest in technical and vocational education and training.

Since establishing his company in 1983, Mr. Corrie has seen numerous people enter "the industry because they need a job". And, he has seen many go simply because that job wasn't something they wanted to do.

He decided the best way to combat this challenge was to ensure training was engrained in Nature Care. Each worker has to undergo on-the-job training provided by Nature Care's best supervisors who have more than 20 years of experience in the industry.

The company, which also has a franchised operation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, established the Green School, a National/Caribbean Vocational Qualification (N/CVQ) assessment centre for Amenity Horticulture Level 1 at its Balls, Christ Church location in Barbados.

Nature Care partnered with a training provider called Asymmetric Consulting Inc. to receive a grant to fund the initiative from the Competency Based Training Fund (CBTF).

"We have been granted funding to train 200 people to certification in CVQ Amenity Horticulture Level 1 by the end of

next year. Our goal is to do 25 candidates every cycle, so every six weeks we will train some of our employees and people from outside," Mr Corrie said.

"We recognised people are going to come and go and that a lot of people don't stay very long in the industry. But if Nature Care is going to deliver consistent standards, a high quality service and high quality products to its clients, we have to ensure that all of our people who are on the front line have a certain degree of training that is in keeping with the job they are supposed to do," he reasoned.

In 2013, Nature Care copped the top spot in the TVET Employers Recognition Awards in the agriculture sector. Organised by the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Council, the national biennial awards competition acknowledges and celebrates employers who provide quality workforce training and integrate such development in its business planning through innovative design and delivery.

"Winning the award was a milestone for us... there is a sense internally that we are doing something good, we are doing something right," the Nature Care Managing Director said. He added that the publicity was a plus.

"It never hurts to have our photograph in the press and the Nature Care brand out there. People get to see that although we are in the business of landscaping, we are not just here to make a quick buck. They see we are here for the long term and that



Training Consultant with Asymmetric Consulting, Inc.  
Dr. Richard Graham, conducting a class at Nature Care

we are reinvesting in our staff.”

Mr Corrie pointed out that the Green School is designed to become “a purpose created facility that delivers horticulture training to Nature Care’s staff and the public”. The next step is for the institution to provide Level 2 and 3 NVQs certification.

He insists that when this training is introduced, staff would acquire technical skills in areas such as carpentry, masonry, irrigation and installing lights.

“We do a lot of masonry and carpentry work in landscaping but generally we subcontract that. So we would bring in somebody to build a pathway or build a deck but these are all landscaping skills that at some stage in the NVQ training will be taught. So staff would now get an understanding of how those things work and gain skills they would not have learnt on the job,” he explained.

Although Nature Care is investing heavily in training, Mr Corrie is not afraid of staff leaving. As a matter of fact, he can point to five landscaping businesses that were started by persons who worked and trained at Nature Care.

While some people may see this as creating competition, he acknowledges that his business has not suffered as a result. Ironically, he has subcontracted some of those five firms to assist Nature Care on large projects and when it faces tight deadlines.

According to him, “It is good that when we go to someone we

know the quality and standard that we would get and although they won’t quite deliver the Nature Care standard, we are able to jump back in and polish up the rest.”

Furthermore, he sees it as another way to develop the horticulture industry.

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“The reality is that if the standards in the industry keep going up, the industry will get bigger and the whole pie gets bigger. I see in other islands where the

landscaping industry is a little younger and less sophisticated, clients generally won’t invest the sort of money that they would in Barbados because they have confidence that if they buy landscaping or a horticultural product in Barbados, they are going to get value for money and good quality.

“That doesn’t mean they are going to buy from Nature Care, but the pie that might have been a million dollar market is going to become a hundred million dollar market because people know that they are going to get good quality work,” he surmised.

So regardless of how many people enter and leave the industry, or how many stay, Nature Care is committed to providing quality training in horticulture.

“That is where I see the future benefits to the company... Training and constant improvement of skills are critical to us adapting to a changing market. This keeps Nature Care on the cutting edge with developing technology and customer trends,” Mr Corrie concluded.

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