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# Perks and Recreation

Mike Dahl, LC/DBM editor



A growing corporate trend that is more than welcomed by the landscaping industry is an emphasis on creating green spaces, not just for appearances sake but specifically to enhance working conditions, which then helps improve a company's bottom line.

Studies bear this out. Employees with access to green areas report more job satisfaction, less job pressure, even fewer headaches and other ailments than workers without green spaces to enjoy. And with this comes increased productivity.

Chicago Decking, a steel erection company in Merrillville, Ind., was hoping for these results when they enlisted Smalls Landscaping to create a nature-rich, em-

ployee break area. The Valparaiso, Ind., firm was responsible for all aspects of the project: designing and building a fully landscaped area highlighted by a natural-looking waterfall and a fishpond.

The section of land they chose already had an oval pond on it. An excavator, bulldozer and off-road truck were brought in to re-grade the property and reshape the pond – giving it a curving shoreline. The existing soil was then reused to fashion a waterfall, as well as for contouring the site and building berms for increased privacy.

Over 1,000 yards of additional pulverized topsoil peat was added to develop substantial planting beds. The waterfall was created using moss covered lime-

**Above:** The highlights of this green space built for the employees of Chicago Decking out of Merrillville, Ind., include a waterfall, a three-fourths acre pond with a sculpted shoreline, plants and stone from throughout the nation. Smalls Landscaping selected all of the stone from confidential sources that they have found over the years.

**Left:** The waterfall is built out of moss rocks brought in from Missouri, and cobblestone brought in from Wisconsin. Plantings included the Siberlocke fir tree seen in the top left of the picture, the Acrocona spruce tree in the top middle, and the dwarf fountain grass (*Pennisetum a.hamelin*) in front of it.

**Top:** The waterfall is 15-feet-wide, over 12-feet-high, and 40-feet-long. Approximately 10,000 gallons of water is pumped over it every hour by a pair of five-horsepower Gould GCP50 external pumps. 100 amp service was needed to power the pumps and the decorative lighting. There is a "hidden walkway" set across the falls made from large boulders.

**Middle:** The pavers for the patio and the paths are flagstone from Utah. Outcropping stone from Michigan was used for the seatwalls. The eight-foot fire pit and grill was built out of tumbled stone from Missouri. Surrounding it are teak benches and tables provided by the company owners. Ground cover (*Mazus reptans*) was planted in between the pavers. Perennials, grasses, and a variety of shrubs and trees were included in the plant pallet. In this picture are purple coneflowers, white coneflowers, perennial geraniums, coral bells, Japanese irises, love grass, gold thread cypress, a blue Montgomery spruce, a dwarf white spruce, a purple robe locust tree, a Rivers beech tree, a Japanese bloodgood maple, and dwarf Alberta spruces.

**Bottom:** The existing site had an oval pond on it, which was enlarged and had its shoreline reshaped with the help of an excavator and bulldozer. The property was re-graded and the surplus soil was used to build up elevation for the waterfall as well as for contouring the site and creating berms for additional privacy. Over 1,000 yards of pulverized topsoil peat was put down for planting beds.

stone boulders from Missouri and cobblestone from Wisconsin. It is 15-feet-wide, over 12-feet-high, and 40-feet-long. It has two sources of water, each with a five-horsepower pump that together provide 10,000 gallons of water an hour, which supply ample aeration for the fish in the pond. To meet the electrical requirements of the pumps, and the decorative lighting, 100 amp service was installed.

As a stream crossing, Small's built a "hidden walkway" from boulders. They also incorporated a "lily pad walkway" that extends out into the pond and ends with a four-ton boulder.

The landscapers used outcropping stones to create a long set of steps down to the pond. At the pond's edge, they installed a flagstone patio with a seatwall made from outcropping stone. Tumbled stone was used to build an eight-foot, fire pit and grill with a gas starter.

Teak benches and a moss rock bench are spread around the pond to provide various resting areas to take in the waterfall and the landscaping. The client wanted a wide variety of trees and plants so Small's sourced the plantings from around the country. The plant pallet consisted of hundreds of perennials and grasses for year-round color, as well as for cover and food for birds.

To help screen the area from a busy road, a hornbeam hedge was planted around the back of the bed and evergreens growing throughout the property were relocated to the new berms by the street. Additional trees include a weeping Alaskan cedar, Japanese maples, dwarf conifers, unusual evergreens, sweet gums, and oaks.

Varied perennials were selected, many for their ability to attract hummingbirds and butterflies. Ground covers were added throughout the flagstone patio and plantings, providing a layered look. Irrigation was installed with drip irrigation to all the containers placed on the patios.

The owners of Chicago Decking thoroughly enjoy the end results (they have their morning coffee while sitting on the patio watching the sun come up) as do their employees. Small's Landscaping succeeded in creating a green space that helps them to unwind, and also provides a pleasant view from their office windows and a buffer from the busy road.

The clients weren't the only ones who were impressed. The project won first place in the Commercial Landscape Design/Build category at a yearly Indiana Nursery and Landscape Association's Awards of Excellence. 

