

# FLAK'S NEWS

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1996 - 2006  
Thank you for  
**10**  
wonderful years!



Member,  
Minnesota Nursery and  
Landscape Association  
"Creating and caring for  
your environment"

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## Flakne's Celebrates 10 Years!

Ten years ago, I was managing a landscape department for another firm. I was continually frustrated with my boss' final say on customer service issues. After ten years in my own business, I can now relate to how my previous employers made their final business decisions. It's not easy! In the past ten years, I expected and experienced some of the challenges of being a business owner. But of course, there were those unexpected challenges. I think I am supposed to think of them as opportunities. I hope I treated them as such!

I decided to commemorate my 10th anniversary with a top ten list of highlights and "aha!" moments of my first ten years of business.

1. Winning 'Honorable Mention' for one of my landscape projects at the Minnesota Landscape Convention the first year (and only year) I entered.
2. Learning that staying awake all night during a torrential downpour has absolutely no affect on how much rain will fall on a project we have just started.
3. I have been blessed to work on some of my most rewarding projects with customers who gave me complete creative license with their yards.

4. The Boss upstairs is the only boss I have to answer to in running my business. That honesty and 'doing the right thing' are the business ethics that make every-one happy.
5. I have been fortunate to maintain business relationships with such responsible and hard working crews who take pride in their work.
6. When Mother Nature wants to fill a new pond before I am ready to fill it, I will need to allot time during my very busy schedule to study up on heavy duty industrial pumps!
7. Knowing that I am the last word in Customer Service and that there may be a time when a customer may not agree with that last word. And if I have done my best, I can live with that.
8. Realizing I don't have the patience for or enjoy the bookkeeping aspect of my business. And having a bookkeeper manage my books leaves me more time to do what I enjoy more and do best so I can best serve my customers, my family, and myself.
9. Before laying sod in a



snapping turtle nesting grounds, I should check the Farmer's Almanac for their hatching schedule.

10. I have so much for which I am thankful: my family, my health, and my great customers who continually refer me to their friends, family, and neighbors! And I am grateful for ten successful years!

One of the more difficult hurdles I continue to face is whether or not to expand my design staff. If I hire additional designers, I may increase my income and enjoy more time with my family. On the other hand, I would spend more time supervising employees and less time with the homeowners. And it's the homeowners who bring me the most enjoyment in my work.

*Continued on page 2, col. 3*

# Eradicating Backyard Buckthorn

Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), was brought to Minnesota by Europeans in the mid-1800s as a hedging plant. **BIG** mistake! Buckthorn rapidly became an invasive species in natural areas. The nursery industry stopped selling it in the 1930s, but the damage had already been done. Glossy buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*), also from Europe, also invades our natural areas. It comes in either a tall, narrow form or can be a spreading variety which has narrow, almost fern-like leaves. This particular variety of buckthorn invades our wetland areas. With no shortage of wetlands in Minnesota, this variety has spread like wildfire. Desirable native plants can't compete with buckthorn for nutrients, light and moisture. And if that isn't enough, the fruits of the buckthorn actually release chemicals that restrict the growth of the native plants. Buckthorn erodes the soil by shading out other healthy plants, serves as a host to pests, forms an impenetrable layer of vegetation, and destroys natural habitats of wildlife in forests, wetlands, and prairies. To make matters worse, there are few, if any, insects or diseases that curtail the growth of buckthorn. It is not only a nuisance, it is a threat to our beautiful Minnesota natural vegetation.

Some experts have gone out on a limb (sorry about that) to say that if buckthorn growth in Minnesota is not controlled, we may not see any of our beautiful fall colors in the future. In Minnesota, both of the above-named varieties of buckthorn are listed as restricted noxious weeds. It is illegal to import, sell, or transport buckthorn in Minnesota. But it's not enough to stop the growth of new buckthorn, we all need to do our part to eradicate it from our yards and parks and keep it from spreading.

Speaking from personal experience in my own backyard, I know that if you don't control buckthorn, it will control you! Buckthorn is usually not a problem in mowed areas, but let it have



it's way in natural areas and it can be incredibly invasive! In my own backyard woods, dozens of buckthorn were removed several years ago. As dismayed as I was about the large open areas that remained, I am thrilled to see the growth and rebirth of the maples and oaks. In a few more seasons, those holes will be filled by the growth of desirable vegetation and the woods will once again glow with beautiful fall colors.

If you have dealt with any buckthorn that has recently rooted, you will know they are easy to remove by simply pulling by the stem to remove it by its roots. But try to pull a fairly established buckthorn by the stem and all you will get is a handful of bark! Special instructions must be followed to remove all of the buckthorn plant. The buckthorn berries contain three to four seedlings so care must be taken to remove the berries and continue checking for new growth. Buckthorn roots are not deep, as they would seem, however,



they grow horizontally to make removing a chore. Some residents of older homes may even have buckthorn planted in their landscapes. Minnesotans must remove all buckthorn from their property. Here are some tips for successful buckthorn removal.

The best time to remove Buckthorn is in late summer and throughout the fall. Cut or saw off the upper part of larger buckthorns. Remove all buckthorn brush and berries from the site.

The stumps need to be chemically treated with products such as Roundup or Ortho Brush-B-Gon to prevent regrowth. Make sure you wait at least 4 hours after a rainfall to ensure these water soluble products are effective. Apply one of these products with a paintbrush right onto the stump. Here's a tip! Add an indicator dye or food coloring to the chemical before you begin. When you paint each stump, the colored chemical will show you which stumps you have already treated and which still need your attention.

Always recheck the area for regrowth. Remove any new seedlings you see. It is possible for seedlings to appear up to five years after a stump was removed! And birds are known to carry and drop seedlings elsewhere. Your continued diligence will be paid in full with spectacular fall colors! If your buckthorn eradication project is larger than you wish to handle, my crews can get the job done for you. They did a great job in my backyard!

*Flak Celebrates ...Cont. from page 1*

Many of you know that I have struggled with this issue for a long time. For now, as long as my customers continue to recommend my company, I can maintain a satisfying business and comfortable lifestyle for my family. Again, thank you for ten great years. It has truly been my pleasure working with you!

**Greg Flakne, CP**

# Not-So-Extreme Home Makeovers

My family and I love to watch the television show, "Extreme Makeover (Home Edition)". How uplifting to see such deserving families get a brand new home with all of the trimmings! Actually, there are so many makeover shows on the air these days. How to dress, how NOT to dress, how to completely change your appearance with expensive dentistry and plastic surgery. I found myself thinking about some of the extreme and not-so-extreme landscape makeovers that I have helped homeowners achieve over the years. With thoughts of spring cleaning, I put together another top 10 list (just feel fortunate that this isn't my 20th anniversary!) of what you can do to give the front of your home a Not-So-Extreme home makeover.

When you drive up to your home, do you sense joy and pride? Your home is your castle and you should feel like royalty inside as well as outside your home. How does the front of your home make you feel? A realtor would call this "curb appeal". But why wait to spruce up the front of your home for a next homeowner? Just a few easy steps can give you the curb appeal you and your family desire and deserve.



1. First, look at your house through someone else's eyes. Do you see any physical damage that needs repair? Sometime we get so accustomed to our eyesores that we don't see them anymore. Have those items that have been on the "honey do" list inadvertently been dropped off and are no longer even thought about? Well, it's time to think about them again and get them repaired!
2. Do your bushes and trees need trimming to give them a fresh new look? Easy!
3. Is your lawn trimmed, mowed, and weed-free? Easy! (well maybe not

the weed part)

4. Are your windows clean? Is your front door area inviting? Is it uncluttered? Clean and swept?
5. Do you have a visual pathway from the curb to your front door welcoming people to your home? Sometimes all that is needed is a pair of pots, brimming with flowers or evergreens. How about a nice wreath or arrangement on your door to welcome you and your visitors to your home?

ance.

8. Don't want to paint your whole house? Sometimes a fresh coat of paint on your front door and trim is all that is needed to say "Welcome" to you and your guests.
9. Display something that tells everyone that this is YOUR home!! Put out a decoration or trinket befitting your own personality, hobby, or lifestyle—something to put a smile on your face when you pull in the driveway and give your guests a remembrance of your home.
10. Finally, how does your home greet you upon returning in the evening hours? Are your favorite home and landscape features accented with a soft glow of light?

Landscape lighting technology has come so far. "Smart" photocells and transmitters can turn your outdoor lighting on and off automatically! As evening approaches, the photocell will turn on all of your home's exterior lights with one command. Then as the night progresses, certain zones can be programmed to be turned off at various times,

according to your needs. Of course, if you are entertaining one evening or just want to linger in your outdoor paradise, manual controls can easily override the preset programs. Outdoor lighting also provides safety and security to your home in the evening hours, not to mention the pride in showing off your beautiful home at night!

Try these tips to spruce up the front of your home for spring. But if your yard needs more, please call me. I am happy to provide my professional landscape and lighting design services to provide that curb appeal that will put a smile on your face when you arrive at your castle!

6. Are your landscape beds and bed lines neat? Fresh mulch or bedding material can make the front of your home look freshly manicured. Use a hoe to fluff existing mulch or rake rocks or other bedding material evenly over the soil and make the edges neat. Call me for an early spring mulch clean-up and edging repair—a "must do" spring cleaning.
7. Does your sidewalk need a makeover? Try a pressure wash on concrete to clean and "whiten". Kill any weeds that are growing in cracks and crevices to give sidewalks a fresh, clean appear-

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# FLAKNE'S NEWS

FLAKNE'S EXTERIOR DESIGN/SCAPE CO.

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1996—2006

*Your satisfaction is my success—for 10 years!*



The Perennial Plant Association recently announced the 2006 Perennial of the year: *Dianthus gratianopolitanus* 'Feuerhexe', commonly known as Firewitch. This showy perennial is a sun loving evergreen with fragrant, purple-pink flowers. Blooms appear in mid-spring and this Minnesota hardy perennial can rebloom in the summer and into the fall. This low-growing plant forms mats of flowers that can grow to 8 inches tall, while the contrasting bluish-gray foliage only grows to a height of 3 to 4 inches, making it a beautiful groundcover. Also known as "Cheddar Pink" this perennial offers many other landscaping possibilities. It can serve as a border plant, a rock garden creeper, or can fill in wall crevices. It can also hold its own as a groundcover on a hillside.

2006 Perennial Plant of the Year

*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*  
'Feuerhexe' (Firewitch)

