



APRIL 2019
MACGREGOR *life*

A SOCIAL PUBLICATION FOR THE RESIDENTS OF MACGREGOR DOWNS AND MACGREGOR WEST

MEET EILEEN WYNNE

*MacGregor West resident,
NC Symphony violinist*

+

Энн Брилл в России (Anne Brill in Russia)
Canine colorblindness cure found!
Giving Back with The Caring Place



Triangle Custom Landscaping

Andy Russ and Rob McCombs offer high-end design/build and maintenance for MacGregor Downs and MacGregor West.

sponsor spotlight

Ever think about what percentage of your life has been spent outdoors? Talking with Triangle Custom Landscaping owner Andy Russ, you get the sense that he's an "over-50-percenter." Without breaking that down, that's meant to say that Andy's way above average ... as is his education, experience and expertise relative to many other landscaping companies. Same for T.C.L.'s Maintenance Account Manager Rob McCombs.

Andy grew up around Ocean Isle Beach, NC, and got his start in landscaping in the form of summer jobs in high school. "I've always been in the landscaping industry. Landscaping was pretty much my summer job in high school, and I really liked it. Even during college, I would come home and work landscaping jobs all summer."

Andy graduated from high school and attended North Carolina State University, receiving a Bachelor of Science in **horticulture** (with a concentration in **landscape design**) in 2000. After moving back to the coast he worked several different jobs in the industry and then co-founded a business with another NC State graduate. "Running that company for several years, I sold my half and then located back to Raleigh. I just needed a change of pace."

For the first five years in Raleigh, Andy worked for a company that did grading and landscaping for some of the big national home-builders. "It was very fast-paced, and the focus was on



quantity over quality. It was a very good job, but I always wanted to get back into owning my own company again," he explains. "Having that direct interaction with the homeowner – it gives you the freedom to be more creative and to know that what you're doing is what the homeowner wants ... versus working through a builder and the homeowner being stuck with something that's not exactly what they want when they buy these production homes."

As a company, Triangle Custom Landscaping has been in business for about 12 years. Andy purchased it in July 2017. "This opportunity just fell into my lap," he says. Andy's wife, a hairstylist, was chatting with a client of hers one day. He was an accountant and told her that one of his clients – the then-owner of Triangle



Rob McCombs, Maintenance Account Manager



Andy and Rob with one of the Triangle Custom Landscaping crews.



Andy Russ, owner.

Custom Landscaping/Southwest Greens – was looking to sell his business. After getting connected with the owner, and some back and forth on the deal, Andy was again a business owner.

Andy kept all the employees, and for good reason. Maintenance Account Manager Rob McCombs, for one, boasts 21 years in the **green industry** and had already been working for Southwest Greens for about two years before Andy bought it. Rob was educated at Wake Tech for **landscape architecture** and then went to N.C. State for **turf grass management**. "I was interested in civil engineering but then shifted over to landscape architecture, and something clicked, being out in the sun and fresh air."

In describing their roles, Andy says, "Rob handles the maintenance scheduling and goes out and gets new clients. I run the installation side of the business ... the construction, pavers, patios, stuff like that ... what my background was. It worked out well because Rob already was on a first-name basis with all our clients."

Rob adds, "We like getting Christmas cards from our customers, running into them in a grocery store and actually knowing who they are."

They're a small company. Andy says, "I prefer that. Yeah, we want to grow, but we don't want to lose that personal touch that we have right now. We have six employees, so that size works out well right now."



As with anything pertaining to the home, landscaping can get complex, and homeowners easily get overwhelmed when considering a project. Andy offers this advice: "Make sure you're comparing apples to apples when getting multiple bids on a project. If one bid comes in \$5,000 cheaper than another company, something's off. Maybe their materials are lower quality, maybe their installation process is incorrect.

"Have a budget too. Many clients call us up and say they don't know what their budget is, but there's always a number at the top of their comfort level. If they have a budget in mind, a landscaping company can make the process quicker and easier for the client by zeroing right in on options that fit within that budget.

"Ask a landscaper about their background – and also ask for customer referrals to see if they had a good experience.

"The biggest piece of advice would be just to ask a bunch of questions. If it's not spelled out in the estimate for, say, a patio, you need to ask if they're digging deep enough and setting the proper foundation so in a year the pavers aren't settling."

Rob agrees. "Do your research, know what you want, and ask a million questions. A good landscaper would rather be asked a million questions and have their customer get what they're looking for than just guessing." On the maintenance front, he recounts the words of an old boss of his: "He said that anyone can get a lawnmower and trailer and call themselves a lawn-care company. But only the guys who truly know what they're doing can all themselves true landscapers."