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ON THE ROAD Heere's PLANET

By Marisa Palmieri
10/30/2007

This year's keynote speech at PLANET's Green Industry Conference on Oct. 25 wasn't your typical motivational or business-focused address. Emcee Michael Flannery mixed humor into his presentation, dubbed "The PLANET Show," which was structured like a late night talk show, complete with a top-10 list and a parade of guests visiting his "set."

In his monologue, Flannery showed a video of his pre-show visit to the expo floor and lauded the variety of equipment (with 650 booths) and number of expected attendees (around 20,000). "Since Woodstock, there haven't been this many people in one place thinking about grass," he quipped.



Michael Flannery warms up the crowd.

Guests who joined Flannery on "The PLANET Show" included PLANET staff, board members and volunteers who all spoke to PLANET's current and future initiatives.

First up was PLANET President Jim Martin and CEO Tanya Tolpegin. They reviewed the history of the organization, which was formed in 2005 when the Associated Landscape Contractors of America merged with the Professional Lawn Care Applicators of America. They also discussed PLANET's offerings at the show – a popular one being the money booth at PLANET Central (located in the A Lobby, outside trade show booths 1000 & 1010). Attendees should note there are three ways to step in the money booth while here at the show: 1) Become a PLANET member on the spot, 2) Purchase \$325 in PLANET publications or 3) Drop your business card off for the hourly drawings.

Mary Wheeler of Wheeler Landscaping, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, and PLANET's H-2B committee also visited "The PLANET Show" stage with a message about the critical action the industry needs to take on getting the H-2B returning worker exemption passed. "We're not there yet," she says. "We've got it through the Senate, but we have a long way to go." Wheeler also promoted the H-2B toolkit, a section on PLANET's Web site that allows contractors to easily connect with their legislators. "You have a voice; use it," Wheeler says.

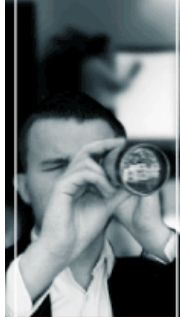
Members also discussed PLANET's certification efforts and its Trailblazers program, which sets up new members of the organization with veteran members for a day's worth of consulting. Jason Cupp, PLANET's president elect, also announced a new initiative for the 2009 Student Career Days: a YouTube video contest, which will award \$1,000 to the winning team for their school's landscape program. At the 2008 Student Career Days, attendees will make humorous videos that highlight PLANET and Student Career Days and promote the green industry. Once they're uploaded onto viral video site YouTube.com, they'll be judged on creativity, number of views and number/content of comments.

The event wrapped up with a message about ProjectEvergreen's GreenCare for Troops program, which recruits volunteer green industry contractors to provide complimentary services to the families' of service members deployed overseas. Karen Delaney, a recipient of complimentary service provided by A Plus Mowing Service, Lawrenceburg, Ky., thanked contractor John Rennels for his volunteerism and told the crowd how the program given her some sanity during her husband's deployment. Rennels encouraged contractors to look into the program, letting them know that they are able to control their level of commitment, so even small companies like his can participate.

Tuesday, October 30, 2007

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