



**JULY 2009**

**With** the season in full swing, I hope your sales are progressing nicely. In my travels, I have talked to contractors across the country and I've heard mixed reviews. Some are very busy, many are steady, and plenty would like more work. I think one contractor I talked to in Minnesota said it best: "I am refusing to participate in the bad economy." He is a contractor with a steady workload and does not see it slowing down soon. Not everyone is feeling that way, but if you can remain positive, stand out in the crowd and create a loyal referral base, you will be positioned well when the economy turns around.



**TIM HUINKER**

[Contact Tim>>](#)

## **Project Profile: Transforming an Ordinary Lawn into a Winning Backyard**

Since 2005, the Ultimate Backyard Challenge, sponsored by Watkins Concrete Block Co. in Omaha, Nebraska, has given residential contractors the opportunity to show off their skills in creating beautiful and innovative backyards for homeowners. For Jim Gryzanowski, owner of JNL Construction in Omaha and a three-time competitor in the Ultimate Backyard Challenge, the 2008 competition presented a challenge that he was more than ready to tackle.

"The homeowners contacted me about doing a simple raised patio on their property," Gryzanowski said. "I mentioned the Ultimate Backyard Challenge to them, and they were interested in working with me to create a more elaborate backyard to enter in the competition. I presented them with a design, and they fell in love with it."

His design incorporated several different applications. In addition to a raised patio, it included a built-in grill, custom lighting, a water feature, a firepit and several seating walls, all built using the Anchor™ Highland Stone® wall system.

"This was a really great project from start to finish. The homeowners were so involved and open to a creative design, and we were able to use the Highland Stone product to the best of its potential."

The project wasn't without its challenges. The home's original landscape had an elevated wooden deck and lots of flat, grass-filled yard, which made building the raised portions of the new backyard difficult. "We had to take some extra time to work out the drainage, but we resolved the issue pretty quickly." Gryzanowski credits good planning and solid construction know-how with building the project smoothly and easily, completing it in about six weeks.

So, how did the project fare in the competition? Gryzanowski and JNL Construction were awarded the winning title of the 2008 Ultimate Backyard Challenge for their work on this project. They took home a CAT Skid-Steer valued at \$32,000. JNL Construction wasn't the only winner in the contest. Each contestant entered in the competition was promoted in Watkins advertising campaigns for the following year, providing them with another opportunity to showcase their businesses.

"It felt pretty nice to win the competition, especially since we'd entered the contest for three years in a row," Gryzanowski said. "The homeowners were really happy with the project, and this job will be one of my favorites for a long time."

To see more photos of this and other Ultimate Backyard Challenge projects, [check out their website](#).



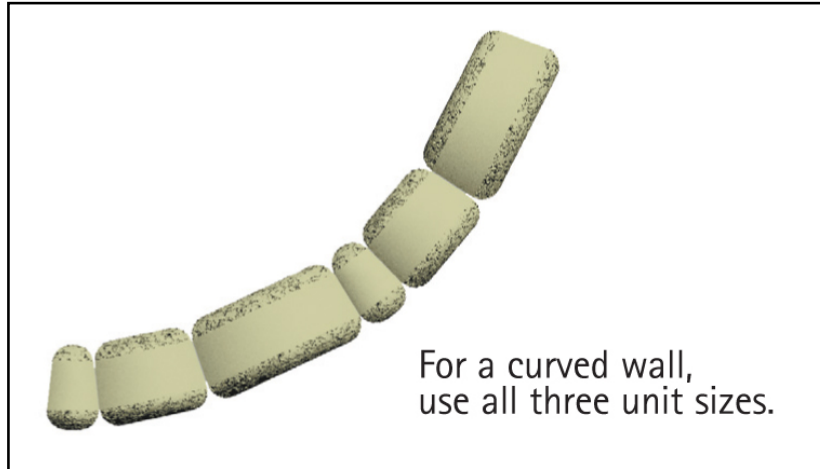
Before: The original landscape was a simple grassy area and a raised deck.



After: The new landscape has transformed the backyard into an outdoor cooking, dining and entertaining space.

### **Detail of the Month: Curved Freestanding Walls**

Use curves to add stability and a natural flow to Anchor™ Highland Stone® freestanding walls with curves. While units can be turned somewhat, it may be necessary to make cuts with a concrete saw or splitter. As a rule, the smaller the units, the tighter the radius. Conversely, the larger the units, the larger the radius. Use approximately the same number of units of each size for each course. The approximate minimum radius the Highland Stone system can turn, using all three lengths without cutting, is 3 feet, 9 inches measured to the outside face of the wall.



## **Business Sense: Improving Customer Service**

Creating buzz about your customer service can help you stand out in a crowd. One simple thing you can do is to send thank-you cards to every potential customer. During the design and bid process, send a card thanking them for the opportunity to bid their work. It is another chance to get your name in front of the homeowner.

You can also follow up a completed job with scheduled visits to check for any possible warranty issues. A simple door hanger announcing your visit and reason for being there again keeps your name fresh in homeowners' minds. For example, visit one month, six months and one year after the completion of a job. Imagine homeowners' pleasant surprise when you make a visit, find a warranty issue and repair it before they even know it exists.

In these challenging times, every good impression could mean another referral--and that means more business for you. Good Luck!

Got a question? [Ask Tim!>>](#)