

## Profile in Leadership: Charles Brian Quinn, aka CBQ

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By Wanda Kenton Smith

In this issue of OPE+, we're pleased to recognize one of our industry's most progressive entrepreneurs whose pioneering product developments have ushered in a new level of innovation, productivity and efficiency for the commercial sector.

Charles Brian Quinn, or "CBQ" to friends and colleagues, is CEO of Atlanta-based **Greenzie**. This five-year-old upstart provides autonomous technology for outdoor power equipment. Our interview addressed everything from CBQ's tech background and launch into the field, his passion and motivation, challenges he's faced along the way, his advice for young professionals considering an industry career and more.

### OPE+: What was your career background before launching Greenzie?

**Charles Brian Quinn:** I'm new to the OPE industry, but not new to building software and automating things. I started building software when I was a young kid on my father's Apple IIe. I fell in love with creating things.

Out of college, I was a software developer and dabbled in a few startups that didn't make it big. Before Greenzie, I built up a software development consulting business; just me and a friend built a 100+ person powerhouse company called Big Nerd Ranch. We became known for developing apps for Fortune 500 companies and training engineers all over the world. I remember several fun automation projects along the way: Honeywell thermostats, Toto toilets, Whirlpool appliances. You name it, we had a hand in developing software for those iconic brands. I was CEO for several years, and then stepped down to serve on the board, and we eventually sold it to a big agency who grew it even bigger.



### OPE+: When and how were you introduced to the OPE industry?

**CBQ:** Everybody always says they mowed the lawn when they were a kid, and I was no exception, first figuring out how to "put stripes in the yard" and do it faster by tinkering with and installing a few extras on my dad's mower. Later, professionally, I invested in a company called lawn.com with a college buddy, some local lawn pros and an investor. At first it didn't quite go as we'd hoped but has risen like a phoenix and is doing great today.

### OPE+: What was the genesis of Greenzie?

**CBQ:** At lawn.com, we thought that back-office help was what landscapers needed but they kept telling us: "I've got plenty of work, I just need reliable help to do it all." When one of them said, "If I could just get autopilot or cruise control on my mowers," I remember thinking that there are robomowers, but there was nothing like this for commercial cutters who do this professionally. That's when I joined a good friend's venture studio, which is a fancy way of saying an incubator for forming companies, and we decided to start Greenzie as an outdoor robotics company providing self-driving or "cruise-control" on commercial mowers. My first job at Greenzie was to call every single commercial landscaper and ask them what to build, and then build exactly that. I still do that every day.



### OPE+: What has been your greatest professional achievement in the OPE space?

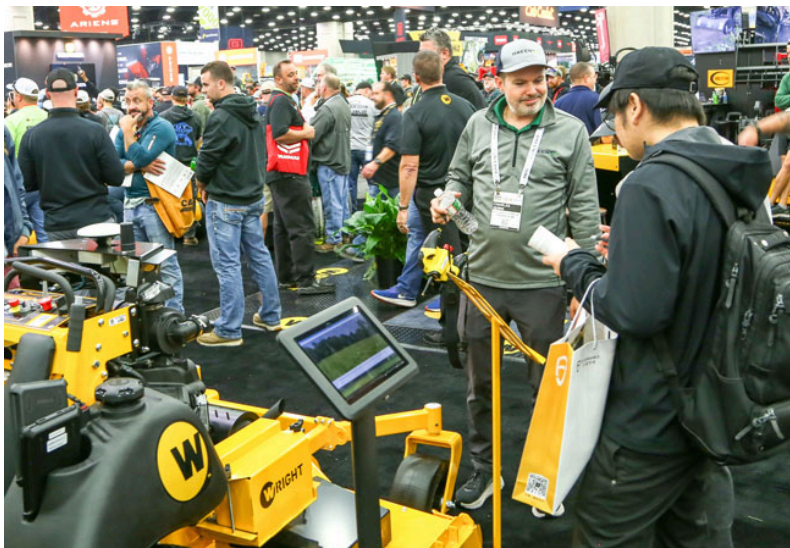
**CBQ:** We launched the first commercial zero turn automated mower in production with our industry partner Wright Manufacturing in 2021, and it has changed the game for commercial landscapers.

### OPE+: As CEO, what's your area of focus?

**CBQ:** My 10-year-old self would be pinching himself. I get to work on robots and software and help some of the hardest working people care for the most beautiful properties in the world. As co-founder and CEO, I lead our team of robotic software developers,

systems engineers and operations teams to partner with the best manufacturers of OPE to offer Greenzie-equipped mowers.

On a typical day, I'll work with our software team to make sure our software running on hundreds (for now) of mowers in the field helps our customers get more work done, and that it meets the needs of landscapers and those who support them. I'll help our systems team with new prototypes and pilot units, including getting them into the field, and then get feedback to make them better. I also assist our amazing manufacturers, distributors and dealer teams to demo and sell this new product.



## OPE+: What have been the biggest challenges for Greenzie?

CBQ: A lot of people think that autonomous mowers will put people out of jobs. That's the biggest push back we get, and mainly from social media commenters who haven't run a mower for eight hours in the hot Georgia sun. When our partner dealers demo a mower to anyone who actually runs a crew (or is on a crew), they say, "About damn time." They were waiting for this technology. They need all the help they can get.

Like all technology used right, this technology can make them more productive and efficient, giving them more time to do the work they need and love, that's making properties look beautiful. It's still a big change though, and there's always fear of changing the way things have been done.

Safety is also a concern. We often hear from landscapers, "Is it safe?" And the answer is yes. One day, we'll look back and ask, "Why did it take so long for the industry to find solutions to mitigate accidents, rollovers, cuts, burns, extreme sun exposure and other repetitive stress injuries for workers?" Robotic software is capable, affordable, proven and always improving to address such concerns. And Greenzie is leading the way to help those outdoor workers operate more safely and efficiently.



Gravelly is working with Greenzie on its autonomous mower project.

## OPE+: What's been key to your success?

CBQ: We listen carefully to customers. But it's not the loudest ones, or the brashiest ones complaining. It's the hardworking ones that are just silently getting it done, the ones who suggest a new feature or change that would save them even more time. We regularly take feedback and weight it.

## OPE+: What gives you the greatest professional satisfaction?

CBQ: I love empowering my team to implement technology, from our software team that adds a new cloud computing test framework to our customers who implement technology to help their crews get more done efficiently, faster, safer.

## OPE+: How do you inspire your team?

CBQ: I'm a visionary, I like to paint a big picture, and then see how close we can get there as quickly as possible. I love a good timeline and constraints to help build things. And I love to challenge and push people to do their best. I'm super optimistic and see the best in situations. I think my team would say that I'm positive, optimistic and don't accept mediocrity. I believe in causes bigger than me and getting everyone on the bus who wants to be on the bus, for as long as possible.

## **OPE+: What are the biggest short- and long-term challenges you see facing the OPE industry?**

**CBQ:** It's the regulations from well-meaning government agencies that don't think through the short-and long-term ramifications of edicts that can be strangling to businesses. You get what you incentivize, and if thought from first principles, we might all decide to change or tear down certain rules that are taken as givens because "that's just the way we've always done it."

In the long term, technology adoption is a constant investment that requires adaptation, which is tough during the day-to-day when things are busy.

## **OPE+: What advice would you give a young person considering an industry career?**

**CBQ:** I'd love to see more high school grads decide to skip college and start or join service companies. Too many people want to be the next Mark Zuckerberg and there's only one of him with survivorship bias. Joining or starting a service business like a landscaping company or other outdoor business doesn't seem glamorous. But when you're driving in a big F-250 King Ranch to the bank from a project you just crushed it on, talking to your employees and customers, while your friends are getting automated out of their boring 9-5 desk jobs, you might be the smart one.

## **OPE+: Outside of the work environment, what do you do for fun?**

**CBQ:** I really do love programming; I love automating things. I also enjoy lifting weights and running. My ideal Saturday is listening to a great podcast about business, while trail running in the woods after a strength workout, followed by a cold plunge and then sauna. I also love playing sports with my kids, and getting into whatever they're into: Legos, Barbies, Hot Wheels. I'm game to play and build contraptions with them anywhere and anytime.

## **OPE+: Besides work and family, what are you passionate about?**

**CBQ:** I automate things, just ask my wife and kids. Everything is automated at our house: the window shades, lights, music, locks, HVAC, you name it. When you walk into the bathroom, the lights turn on, the toilet seat goes up, and if it's not bedtime, the music starts playing through speakers in the ceiling. And I never have to yell at the kids to turn off the lights, because the home automation does it for us. A good home automation is like a phone, you've got to upgrade it every few years. I'm getting excited just thinking about the next automation project.

## **OPE+: Mantra and/or words you live by?**

**CBQ:** Iterate: Do. Learn. Repeat.

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