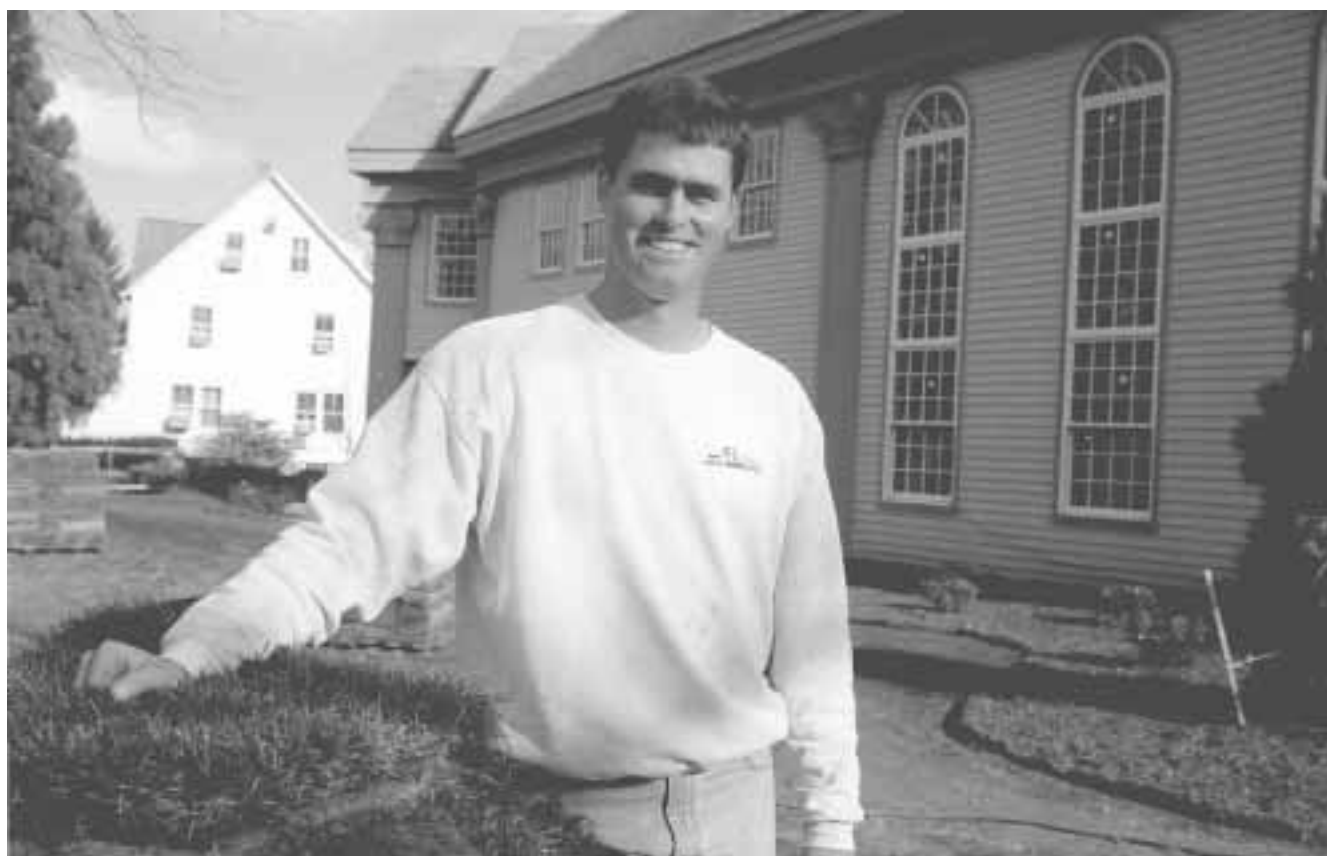


**“I wanted to give something back to the school that gave me so much.”**  
—Mark Hutchins '96



## Hutchins Seeds Rhody Spirit on 79 Upper College Road

Although he usually grows plants and shrubs, Mark Hutchins '96 has been spreading seeds of Rhody spirit on the University of Rhode Island Kingston campus lately. Hutchins, the owner of the South County-based Mark Hutchins Landscape, Inc., has found a way to give back to his alma mater using what he learned here. Hutchins' company is landscaping the site of the new URI Foundation building and has donated much of the materials and resources needed for the project.

“I wanted to give something back to the school that gave me so much. It has been wonderful doing this work for them, and it has been a lot of fun to be back on campus again,” said Hutchins.

While Hutchins only graduated six years ago with a degree in plant science, he is an old pro at landscaping. At 14 years old, he started his own landscaping business with a friend to earn spending money and continued the business throughout high school. A star baseball player at South Kingstown High

School, Hutchins attended URI with the hopes of earning a baseball scholarship. However, a baseball injury during the fall of his freshman year cut short the dream of being a starting pitcher for the Rams. Hutchins then decided to attend Roger Williams for his sophomore year to build up his arm again. Although baseball was working out at Roger Williams, he missed URI.

“The baseball was going well, but I wanted to come back. At URI I had the opportunity to really study landscaping, which has always been my area of interest,” explained Hutchins.

It isn't a choice he regrets. While studying at URI, Hutchins had the chance to do a lot of hands-on work and develop a greater understanding of industry standards. His classes were small and often included visitors from the business world who spoke about new techniques or breakthroughs.

“The program at URI does a good job of combining schoolwork with what is going on in the industry. They keep you in touch with modern methods. You can learn a lot from a book, but they made you apply what you learned,” said Hutchins.

Hutchins' work at the URI Foundation site has become a learning laboratory for current students. Brian Maynard, Hutchins' advisor while on campus, brought over his classes to see the work that was being done.

Hutchins has quite a bit of experience that he can share with others. His business employs anywhere from six to sixteen people, depending on the season. While most of their work is residential, they have also done such commercial projects as landscaping at the Wakefield Mall.

Handling a rake or grading a slope is not the only thing Hutchins does these days, though. Still an avid baseball fan, he coaches American Legion baseball, which is semi-pro baseball for teenagers.

While the job with the URI Foundation should wrap up this spring, Hutchins is glad for the time he has had on the URI campus and for the chance to give something back.

“It's fun really. It is nice to be with students again, to be part of the educational experience. I learned so much when I was here, it is nice to be able to share that with others,” he said.

*By Jennifer Smith '02*

