

Greener Lawns



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Michigan company turns to propane

Jesse and Hilary Triick believe in buying American. They also are dedicated to setting their lawn care business apart and succeeding in the green industry. The husband and wife team in Grand Rapids, Mich., found that changing to propane power has been a great help in accomplishing these goals.



Pristine Green Complete prides itself on being fueled 100 percent via propane and is able to operate year-round with its array of equipment.

The move from gasoline to propane began nearly two years ago when Jesse was doing some online research. "I'd run a lawn care service for about five years, and I was on the Exmark website looking for an owner's manual for a used mower I had purchased," he recalls. "There was a tab on the bottom of the page that said something like 'Alternative Fuels.' I clicked on that and there was information about propane equipment. I thought that was really neat, so I started doing some more research about propane mowers. The low emissions was important to us, and a big attraction for my wife and I was that 90 percent of propane is domestically produced."

For about eight months, Triick did more research on the subject and the various propane mowers available on the market. In summer 2009, he settled on two Exmark Turf Tracer propane walk-behind mowers. The hard part of the research was that nobody was using them. He went to his local dealer to ask about propane mowers and even the dealer wasn't aware that Exmark produced a propane mower. "Luckily I had printed the page from the website," Triick says. "After they looked at it, they quickly got on the phone, and by the end of the day they had one on its way from Oklahoma for me to test out. They must have just built it, because when I got it, the mower had one hour on it."



Pristine Green Complete Landscape Management was recently renamed to reflect the sustainable operations of the company. A selling point for both the company and its customers is that the propane-fueled equipment produces considerably lower emissions than their gasoline-fueled counterparts. PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRISTINE GREEN.

The test drive sold Triick on its performance. "Short of seeing the propane tanks on the side, I wouldn't have known the difference from gasoline," he says. "It had plenty of power." He was also assured by the dealer's positive attitude toward working with the new unit. "They told me they would be able to service it, and if they needed to bring someone in to train their mechanics on propane, they would."

The Triicks, who service a mix of residential and commercial lawns, then expanded their propane equipment arsenal with LEHR trimmers and blowers. In the spring, he plans to purchase four-stroke commercial trimmers and blowers and have them converted for propane use. "At the GIE show, I saw AltFuel, and they can convert anything that runs on gas," he explains. "In the spring, we also have plans to purchase an additional truck, and we have two smaller mowers [Exmark Metros] that we used to run converted to run on propane. They're just sitting in the shop right now."

The couple's latest – and largest – propane purchase, in April 2010, was a Roush CleanTech pickup truck. "When I saw that truck, I thought, 'Well, this is it, we're all in now,'" Triick recalls. The result was a lawn care company running completely on propane. With that in mind, they changed the name of their business to Pristine Green Complete Landscape Maintenance (www.pristinegreenonline.com), with a slogan that encourages customers to "Reduce your carbon footprint while maintaining a beautiful landscape."



In addition to two propane-powered Exmark Turf Tracer mowers and propane hand-held equipment, Pristine Green uses a propane-powered Roush Clean- Tech pickup truck to give it a low-emissions edge in lawn care.

"We formed a completely different LLC for Pristine Green just so we could show that we're completely operated by propane," he says. "As far as I know, we're the only one in the area using 100 percent propane, and that helps set us apart."

Triick says that the use of an all-propane fleet provides a chance for Pristine Green to distinguish itself from other lawn care companies, but says it takes work to get customers to understand the difference. "Right now we're in the education phase. Most people don't really know about propane mowers. They know about propane, but all they know is that you can grill with it," says Triick. "They don't understand that it's low emissions, and we're trying to get that message out."

To help educate customers, the Triicks feature their propane mowers and truck in their marketing. Some appreciate the low-emissions fact; others are not as interested. "Some really get into it, some couldn't care less," says Triick. "It seems like homeowners more than businesses are just concerned with price,

that's it, especially these days." Commercial accounts, in general, are more interested in learning more about it.

It's also been an education process for Jesse and Hilary. "One of the first things I did was to research fuel prices in the area," Triick explains. "We needed an on-site filling station so that we could refuel the truck, so a tank exchange program just wouldn't fit in to what we were doing." After quite a bit of searching and little cooperation from local propane dealers, Triick contacted Amerigas. "They were great. I had barely finished explaining the concept of what I was doing and they were on the way out with a filling station for me," he explains. "They were so supportive, and they have been ever since. They think that what we're doing is the coolest thing, and if I have any questions, they're always there with the answer."

The filling station includes a 1,000-gallon tank with a 4-by-4-by-4-foot cabinet with the pump and hoses. "There's a small hose for filling tanks, and the big hose dispenses liquid for the truck," Triick explains. "You can get about six hours of mow time out of a tank, so usually you can get a full day on one tank." That means less downtime because there's typically no need to stop and refuel. He adds that he has seen a drop in his business expenses after switching to propane. "Not only with the price of fuel, but also with maintenance costs. I just serviced the mowers and, if I didn't know any better, I would have thought it was new oil coming out. It looks brand new, it's not black at all." After changing the oil on the recommended schedule for a gasoline engine at first, he's since been able to reduce that frequency.

Triick advises other lawn care professionals considering switching to propane to do their research and not be afraid of using a new type of fuel. "If you can run a gas mower, you can run a propane mower. There's absolutely no difference in the operation at all," he explains, adding that there are now more manufacturers offering propane equipment, filling stations and related equipment than there were when he began his research. "I had to do a lot of leg work, but I think if I had to do it over again now it would be a lot easier because there's a lot more it out there. Every day there's more equipment out there, there is more information available and it's a lot more accessible."

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