Electric Lawn Care Q & A with Jay Thomas, Bear Mountain Mowing
www.bearmountainmowing.com

Sally Burrell: The Bristol Energy Committee explores ways the municipality and residents can reduce energy use and lower greenhouse gas emissions through efficiency, conservation, and renewable energy. Most of Bristol landscaping is done with gas-powered machines. We'd like to hear what you've learned about electric powered landscaping.

Jay Thomas: While electric mowers, trimmers and blowers are still relatively new, the technology is improving rapidly. Electric push mowers designed for homeowners have greatly improved their power and run times, and the prices are somewhat reasonable. Unfortunately, the commercial end of things has been slower to advance, with only a very small handful of manufacturers getting on board. That said, the technology and machines these few manufacturers have is completely comparable to commercial gas machines.

Gas-powered lawn equipment has VERY little regulation or oversight from the EPA, and thus, it is some of the worst polluting machinery out there. While many people consider the environmental impact of the cars they drive, the way they heat and power their homes, and the products they buy, unfortunately, very few people consider the environmental impact of their lawn care.

Which came first for you: having a lawn care business or using an electric mower?
The idea for my business came about through a series of events. Firstly, I had been in an office job that I had grown to dislike and had a strong desire to work on my own and be outside. Around the same time, I was attempting to mow my lawn, and after dealing with mower issues (not wanting to start and smoking like crazy once it did), I thought there had to be a better way, and I started looking online for an electric mower. It was at that time that I discovered Mean Green Mowers, who produce commercial-grade electric mowers and handheld equipment, the equipment I use now. Living in Addison County, with so many environmentally conscious people, I thought it would be a great business model, and thus, Bear Mountain Mowing was born.

How does it feel handling electric equipment compared to handling gas-powered equipment (noise, weight, air quality, maneuverability, accuracy/effectiveness, time spent)?
With quality electric equipment, you have all of the benefits of gas-powered equipment such as power, maneuverability, efficiency, and quality of cut without all of the downsides of gas. There's much less noise, no fumes, no smoke, no pulling and pulling on it to start, and no buying, spilling, or smelling gasoline. Not to mention, there's virtually no maintenance required since it has no belts, hoses, oil, oil filters, gas, sparkplugs, etc.

How do you charge the batteries? Does the cost of electricity compare to the cost of using gas and oil for the same amount of work done?
For my commercial grade mowers, I simply plug them in each night, and they're good to go for another 7+- hours the next day. Charging all of my equipment costs roughly $35 per month, and if I were using comparable gas-powered equipment, I'd be using 6 to 8 gallons of gas PER DAY. So...electric is a huge savings despite the much larger up-front cost of the machines.

What are the maintenance needs: cleaning, storing, replacement of parts and battery, life of electric mowers and trimmers?
For my particular equipment, the only required annual maintenance is to grease the front wheels every 100 hours. Seriously, that's it! The batteries have an estimated life of 8,000 hours. Obviously, you couldn't expect this kind of lifetime from a residential electric mower but if you were to purchase a quality machine with lithium-ion batteries and you mow your lawn once a week, most homeowners could plan on this being the last mower they would ever have to purchase.

What are the various reasons your customers choose Bear Mountain Mowing?
I initially got all of my clientele due to the environmentally friendly business model. Since then, I get most of my business from referrals for doing high-quality, reliable work, and I also pick up a lot of neighboring homeowners who love the look of their neighbor's lawn and are impressed with how quiet the equipment is.

Newer technology usually costs more as it enters the market. How does the recent pricing for electric equipment relate to comparable gas-powered machines?
At the moment, electric equipment is 2-3x more expensive than its comparable gas-powered counterpart, but that higher initial cost is quickly offset from the savings in fuel and maintenance costs.

At our Wednesday meeting, September 16, we'd like to brainstorm ideas for promoting electric mowing in Bristol. Are there ways people can collaborate to own shared electric equipment?
Absolutely! Since most people only mow their lawn once a week, most mowers just sit in the shed or garage unused for most of their life. It only makes sense for neighbors to pool together and purchase a quality machine.

Would a group of proximate neighbors consider hiring an electric lawn care company (possibly at a discount?) to save on noise, chemicals, emissions, etc.?
Again, absolutely! I always offer discounts for multiple properties that I can mow on one visit, and there are only benefits for using an electric lawn care company and no downsides.

What else can the BEC do to explore and encourage electric landscape care for residents, schools, and the municipality?
I believe education is the most important aspect. Like I mentioned above, lawn care is something that very few people consider when they think about the carbon footprint their household produces. If more people realized how detrimental gas-powered lawn equipment is to the environment and if they knew they could buy an electric mower that was as good or better than a gas-powered machine, I'm sure more people would get on board.