



## Landscape Company Moving To All Propane Equipment

**H**istorically, Tarantino Landscapes (Bridgeport, Conn.) has used mowers and pickup trucks that ran on gasoline. Over the past couple years, the business, which is a sister company of propane company Hocon Gas (Shelton, Conn.), is going through the process of switching its entire fleet of trucks and equipment to run on propane. Tarantino is a full-service landscape company that works on commercial and residential properties, schools, and parks. It includes a separate division for baseball, football, and soccer field renovation and maintenance, mound and base installation for baseball fields, and field lining. For residential customers, the business provides services such as spring clean-up, tree or shrub plantings, or planting a completely new garden. Tarantino's website states, "Tarantino Landscapes has made it a priority to use the latest in propane landscaping technology to maintain equipment efficiency, lower fuel costs, and bring awareness to green concerns."

"We're not completely propane yet, but that's what we're working on," said Don Dickson, operations manager at Tarantino Landscapes. "As we replace [machines], we've been replacing them with propane units."

Six to eight of the trucks in the fleet are propane-fueled. The Ford F-250s and F-350s, which pull trailers, use the Icom liquid-injection propane system converted by Don Cusson from Cusson Automotive in South Windsor, Conn. The landscaping company formerly used gasoline- and diesel-fueled vehicles. The first truck conversion took place three years ago, another was converted about a year later, and last year the company converted four trucks to propane.

The conversion of the mowers took place on a similar path. Tarantino converted two Exmark mowers about three years ago, and they worked well. Now the mowers come from Exmark already converted to propane.

Dickson has noticed no difference in power and speed compared to gasoline and diesel trucks. Tarantino workers who drive the trucks every day use propane almost exclusively. Running out of propane is rarely a problem because the Tarantino location is only about a couple hundred yards from a Hocon Gas site. "You really wouldn't know they're propane-powered," he said. "They run clean, and we have had no issues with them."

The same holds true for the propane mowers, most of which are Exmark Lazer 60-in. and Exmark Tracer

52-in., along with a couple 48-in. models. The mowers perform "exactly like gasoline mowers," Dickson noted.

"When they first came out, they were a little lacking in power, but Exmark added more powerful Kohler engines with increased horsepower in its propane unit [from 16 to 18]," he explained. "Now it's fine. We don't use any additional fuel, so even going up to a bigger horsepower engine, the fuel consumption seems to be pretty much the same. Now it's exactly where the gas was as far as power and climbing hills."

Dickson added that the mowers have been well received by clients. The company performs much of its work around senior housing and schools, and he has heard compliments from clients about the mowers emitting no fumes, and they appreciate that the company is not polluting the air.

"We'll continue doing four trucks a year, converting them and our older gasoline mowers to propane mowers, so eventually our entire fleet will be propane."

Hocon Gas vice president of operations Bill Cummings noted that Hocon is active in the propane autogas business. Hocon services the Town of Shelton's school buses and soon the City of Waterbury's buses, along with a pump station for the town of Torrington school buses. About half of Hocon's vehicles run on propane, including two Freightliner S2G bobtails. Hocon Gas has been in business more than 60 years. Tarantino and Sons Landscaping, founded by Generoso Tarantino in the 1950s, changed its name to Tarantino Landscapes in 1987. Generoso's son Gino Tarantino, who is vice president and CFO of Hocon Gas, and Hocon president and owner David Gable became partners in the landscaping business about 10 years ago.

Regarding the mowers, Cummings noted that Tarantino Landscapes has purchased more than 15 propane-powered lawn mowers over the last few years. "We didn't have an old fleet, so we're not changing any out this year," he stated. "But next year, we probably will, and we'll go propane with those, too."

He is excited to see the landscape business switch over to propane trucks and mowers. "The mowers are powerful, and of course the pickups are all running well. We're having a good experience with this changeover. You've got to try it. People hesitate, but we've had absolutely no problems at all."

—Daryl Lubinsky