



Business partners and twin brothers Brendan, left, and Patrick McNaughton, 16, started an environmentally friendly lawn care business in Albany, New York, called Zero Carbon Lawn Care. (CNS photo/Cindy Schultz, The Evangelist)

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Brendan and Patrick McNaughton are fighting climate change, one lawn at a time.

Last summer, the twin brothers started "Zero Carbon Lawn Care," a lawn-care business dedicated to cleaning and beautifying yards with no guilt over the environmental impact.

"It's a way to help others because they don't have to do [their lawn] on their own, and most people use gas mowers," Brendan told The Evangelist, newspaper of the Albany Diocese. "We're kind of doing our part and their part."

When they say zero carbon, they're not kidding. The 16-year-olds use real push mowers, hand shears and brooms. Nothing that would account for carbon emission or gas consumption. None of their equipment is battery powered; it all runs on elbow grease and a lot of muscle.

Even getting to their customers' houses adds zero carbon waste. The brothers, who are sophomores at La Salle Institute in Troy, New York, ride their bikes, towing their equipment in an attached trailer.

The idea to go "zero carbon" was kicked around by the brothers and their dad, Tom McNaughton, while putting the basics of the business together.

"We explained to them that ideas have to be meaningfully unique to set yourself apart from those around you," their father said. "At La Salle, they were studying environmental science, and in religion class they were discussing 'community good.' We tried to tie the whole thing together, successfully I believe."

It's a climate-conscious business approach that's more relevant than ever.

After months of seeing scorching wildfires out west and drastic temperatures sweep across parts of the nation, the impacts of human inaction and carbon emissions are dominating the world today.

According to the Pew Research Center, two-thirds of Americans think the government should [do more](#) to combat climate change.

The McNaughton boys are capitalizing on that trend. Over two summers, the brothers are now up to eight customers, all located within a few miles' radius.

Each customer's lawn is priced differently based on its square footage. The brothers use a measuring wheel for the yard and measure the linear edges of bushes that require hand trimming. While it varies, each lot averages between \$36 and \$42.

As the seasons turn, Zero Carbon Lawn Care will switch to leaf cleanup and snow shoveling for parts of the fall and winter seasons.

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"They're really good kids and hard workers," said Tim Tyrrell, a customer since the spring. "They're very thorough in what they do. They don't cut corners."

More than having a summer job, the McNaughtons are glad to give back to the community. The family belongs to Mater Christi Parish in Albany, and the boys' faith and education has taught them the importance of making an impact.

Mercy Sr. Rosemary J. Sgroi is one of the brothers' loyal customers. For years, Sgroi insisted on caring for her own yard. Her Albany house once belonged to her parents, and after getting approval from her order to move in, she has lived there since 1994.

"Even though I never grew up here, I have wonderful memories of [my parents] in this house with me," she told The Evangelist.

While she didn't mind the labor, the lawn mower was growing heavier over the years. This past summer, a friend suggested Sgroi give a local business a try: Zero Carbon Lawn Care.

"They've been doing my lawn all summer for me," Sgroi said. "They've been great."

The brothers insist on caring for Sgroi's yard free of charge, but admit they happily accept the cookies and candies she offers in exchange.

The McNaughtons themselves are no strangers to the Sisters of Mercy. Growing up in Buffalo, New York, Tom McNaughton was taught by the Sisters of Mercy from

kindergarten through eighth grade, along with his brother and three sisters.

He joked that his family "could never make up for the heartache of dealing with my three sisters" that was put upon the nuns, but he sees helping out Sister Sgroi as a start.

"It all just worked out," he added. "There was a lot of synergy there and it was a great opportunity to do something for somebody who has given so much of her whole life to others."

The brothers hope to continue their business for the foreseeable future, possibly adding another employee next year if the need grows.

"I want people to know how respectful they are," Sgroi said. "They come over every single week and they are so faithful. I'm just grateful I don't have to lug that heavy mower around."

[Emily Benson is a staff writer at The Evangelist, newspaper of the Diocese of Albany.]