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10

FROM THE FIELD

FEAR IS NOT AN 'OPTIMAL' MOTIVATOR

BY MICHAEL WILLINS | GROUP CONTENT DIRECTOR

The Ken Blanchard Companies' John Lusardi spoke at the recent Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes Vision Conference.

MISO UPDATE

PANEL DEBATES SPECIALIZATION, OEM ROLE, 'FAT MARGINS'

10 Multi-shop operators should consider specializing in repair types by facility, John Yoswick reports.

INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

AAIA RELEASES DIGITAL COLLISION REPAIR TRENDS REPORT

10 The Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association's report highlights the size and scope of the U.S. collision industry.

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15

FEATURE

LOUISIANA ASSOCIATION HOLDS INAUGURAL MEETING

BY BRIAN ALBRIGHT | ABRN BLOGGER

The upstart Southeast Louisiana Collision Repair Association (SeLaCRA) held its first meeting Dec. 3 in Baton Rouge.

[COMMUNITY PULSE]

15

BEST OF THE BLOGS AUDIO WEBCASTS TOP HOW-2 VIDEOS READER PHOTOS INDUSTRY CALENDAR MESSAGE BOARDS INDUSTRY GROUPS VIDEO WEBCASTS



Q&A WITH...

THOMAS HOERNER, BASF

18 Hoerner discusses the concept behind Advanced Process Solutions (APS).

FEATURED COLUMNS

THE SHOP OWNER

BY MIKE LEVASSEUR

DON'T MAKE THEM SINK OR SWIM

20 An employee orientation process sets the stage for a positive culture and employee success.

THE LAST DETAIL

BY MIKE ANDERSON

ANNUAL WISH LIST

54 Here's what we should all resolve to make happen in 2014.

WHAT IS ABRN COMMUNITY? The ABRN community is an online NETWORK for your business. It's a place to go to post articles, blogs, videos, photos and audio clips to share ideas with other collision repairers. Community content is used in ABRN's twice weekly e-newsletters. Check it out at <http://workshop.search-autoparts.com>



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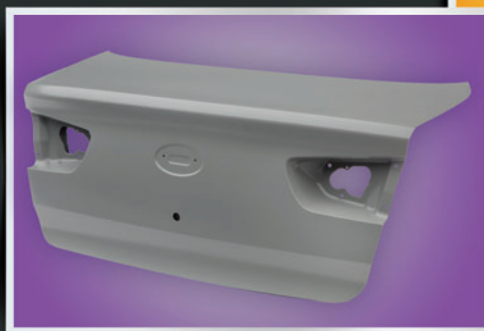
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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INSIGHTS, BEST PRACTICES & IMPLEMENTATION



22

MINDING YOUR BUSINESS

ON THE HORIZON

BY JOHN YOSWICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

ABRN highlights what lies ahead for the collision industry this year.

FEATURES

THE SHOP PROFILE

GREAT BEAR AUTO REPAIR & AUTO BODY

JAMES E. GUYETTE / CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

30 This Queens-based shop roars ahead with a "telling, not selling" education campaign to draw in customers.



THE PROFIT MOTIVE

THE POWER OF TWO

TOM MCGEE / CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

28 When looking to make a change or improvement, don't overlook communicating with your team.



HOW2 KNOW-HOW TIPS & TECHNIQUES FROM THOSE IN THE KNOW



32

COVER FEATURE

THE FINER POINTS OF METAL FINISHING

TECHNICAL TRAINING

BY AL THOMAS | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Consider this your refresher course on the art of dent repair.

TECHNICAL FOCUS

KEYS TO COMPLIANCE

BY TIM SRAMCIK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

38 Meet OSHA requirements with these five steps.



MECHANICAL FOCUS

BENT INTO SHAPE

BY DONNY SEYFER | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

45 Old Man Winter brings plenty of front-end damage into your shop. Here are some tips for improving efficiency and revenue with these vehicles.



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48

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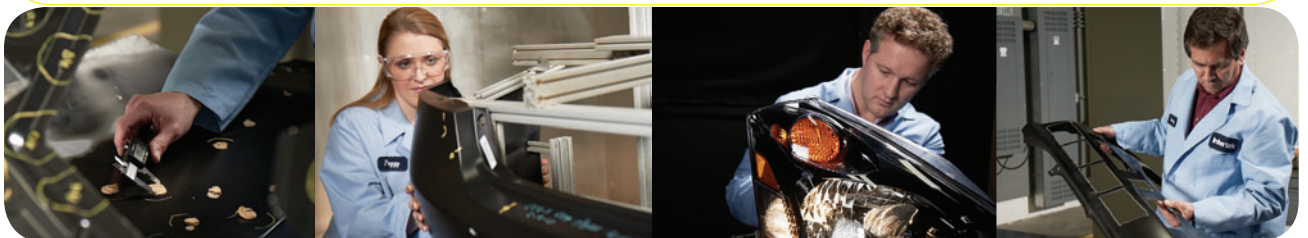
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FROM THE FIELD

Fear is not an 'optimal' motivator

PALM SPRINGS, CALIF. — There's a saying, "Fear is a great motivator," but John Lusardi of The Ken Blanchard Companies would consider that outdated thinking in today's collision repair shop world. Lusardi prefers motivation to be derived from a combination of factors that help build a strong, supportive workforce and create a positive work environment.

Lusardi spoke about motivation last month during a workshop at the Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes 2013 Vision Conference in Palm Springs, Calif. "Everything that comes out of my mouth as a business owner should be positive," he told the group of more than 100 "A" shop attendees. "If I want to complain, I'm calling another business owner to complain. If you complain to your employees, you multiply (that complaint) by 10."

The A-Plus Network Vision Group Conference combined a big-picture industry view with hands-on best practices sharing to support and educate Sherwin's Vision Group members as they formulate 2014 business plans. The program was designed to help shop operators improve customer service, employee growth, insurance relationships, process refinement, productivity and profitability.

Lusardi led a discussion on "Optimal Motivation," to help shop owners better relate to team members. One of the foremost adjustments bosses need to make is eliminating rash decisions and thinking

>> CONTINUES ON PAGE 12

NEWS FROM NACE
MSO UPDATE

PANEL DEBATES SPECIALIZATION, OEM ROLE, 'FAT MARGINS'

LAS VEGAS — Multi-shop operators (MSOs) should consider specializing in repair types by facility. The "fat margins" enjoyed by collision repairers in the United States is driving institutional investors into this industry. And MSOs in the United Kingdom have closer to 1:1 ratio of production vs. non-production employees.

Those were some of the views shared by an international panel during the third annual MSO Symposium held recently in Las Vegas, during the International Autobody Congress and Exposition (NACE).

About 275 attendees at the daylong conference also heard from Sidney Finkelstein, a professor and associate dean for executive education at

>> CONTINUES ON PAGE 12

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>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

FEAR IS NOT AN 'OPTIMAL' MOTIVATOR

through any changes they want to implement. When shop owners are unsure and haven't thought through a situation, emotion rule, which can be problematic.

Leaders need to recognize three basic psychological needs within their employees — Autonomy, Relatedness and

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

INTERNATIONAL PANEL DEBATES SPECIALIZATION, OEM INVOLVEMENT, 'FAT MARGINS'

Dartmouth College, who said growing businesses sometimes get tripped up when company leaders make decisions based purely on their experience.

Finkelstein is the author of a number of business books, including *Think Again: Why Good Leaders make Bad Decisions*. He said one sign of the downside of relying on experience is that after a successful acquisition, the odds that the next one will be as successful are less than 50 percent. That's because that second acquisition is probably very different from the first, yet company leaders are likely to handle it based on what worked and what didn't with the first. It's like betting on "27" on a roulette wheel because the ball landed on "27" the last spin, Finkelstein said.

"You know it's ridiculous in that example, but when you do it in business, we don't think of it as so ridiculous," Finkelstein said. "But it's equally ridiculous. We're making generalization and assumptions on the basis of a tiny sample size."



From left are Andrew Peet, Michael Macalusco and Bob Kirstuik.



David Lingham

IMAGES: JOHN YOSWICK

Competence — and understand those needs while relating to their workers.

- **Autonomy:** The ability to make choices and have a purpose.

- **Relatedness:** The need to care about others and be cared about, to contribute to something greater than ourselves.

Although organizers of the MSO Symposium did not allow the trade press to attend the segments of the meeting at which U.S. MSOs spoke, one panel discussion featured some international perspectives on MSOs and the industry. Facilitator David Lingham is a long-time organizer of the International Bodyshop Industry Symposium (IBIS) (an ABRN media partner), which has held conferences through Europe, Australia, South Africa, and most recently Russia and Dubai. Lingham said he'd spent the previous two days talking with shop operators in Nevada.

"I have to say that from my experience of going around the world, I could have been anywhere," he said. "Everything they talked about is happening all around the world."

Lingham said MSO models vary somewhat country to country. The U.S., he said, leads the world in terms of outside equity being invested in the industry. OEM and dealer networks are stronger than they are in the United States — in some cases, such as in Russia, dominating the market. And elsewhere, more loose-knit networks of independently owned shops, without some of the elements of the more formal franchise model, are more common. They pool some funds for such things as group marketing, for example, Lingham said.

One thing that doesn't seem to vary as much by country is the expectations of the insurers, Lingham said. They almost universally are looking for predictable and consistent outcomes in terms of service, cycle time and average repair costs; and the flexibility to meet customers' needs.

Lingham believes collision repairers — and MSOs in particular — are likely to move away from fixing all types of cars with all types of damages at a single shop to a more specialized model.

- **Competence:** The need to feel effective at meeting everyday challenges and opportunities; demonstrate skill over time; and feel a sense of growth and flourishing.

"It all starts with you going through your head and saying, 'What do I want to accomplish?'" he said. — *Michael Willins*

"Effectively, what you're doing is acting like a car manufacturer that's making a Nissan on the same production line as a Rolls-Royce," Lingham said. "You and I both know that's not how manufacturers can make their cars. They streamline the same type of vehicle in the same production line."

Lingham said on average, about 35 percent of wrecked vehicles require structural repair and another 15 percent are total losses — which leaves about 50 percent that require non-structural or cosmetic repairs.

In Australia, he said, an insurer has set up a network of 30 shops that do nothing but these cosmetic, non-structural repairs, those with fewer than eight labor hours. These shops, Lingham said, have recruited front-office staffs from the retail industry, people who focus on customer service. With the exception of painters, the production jobs have been largely deskilled as well, he said, with teams of employees descending on a vehicle and sticking with it until the job is complete.

He said he also believes, based on his research worldwide, that auto manufacturers will take a greater interest in collision repair than ever before — both because of the increased complexity of their vehicles and their interest in selling parts.

Technology either built into the vehicles or through such things as "smart watches," Lingham said, will be able to notify a central hub whenever a vehicle has been in an accident. That could give automakers immediate notification of (and greater control over) what happens to that vehicle after the accident, Lingham said.

"MSOs need to link in with this, just as they do with their insurance partners," he said. — *John Yoswick*

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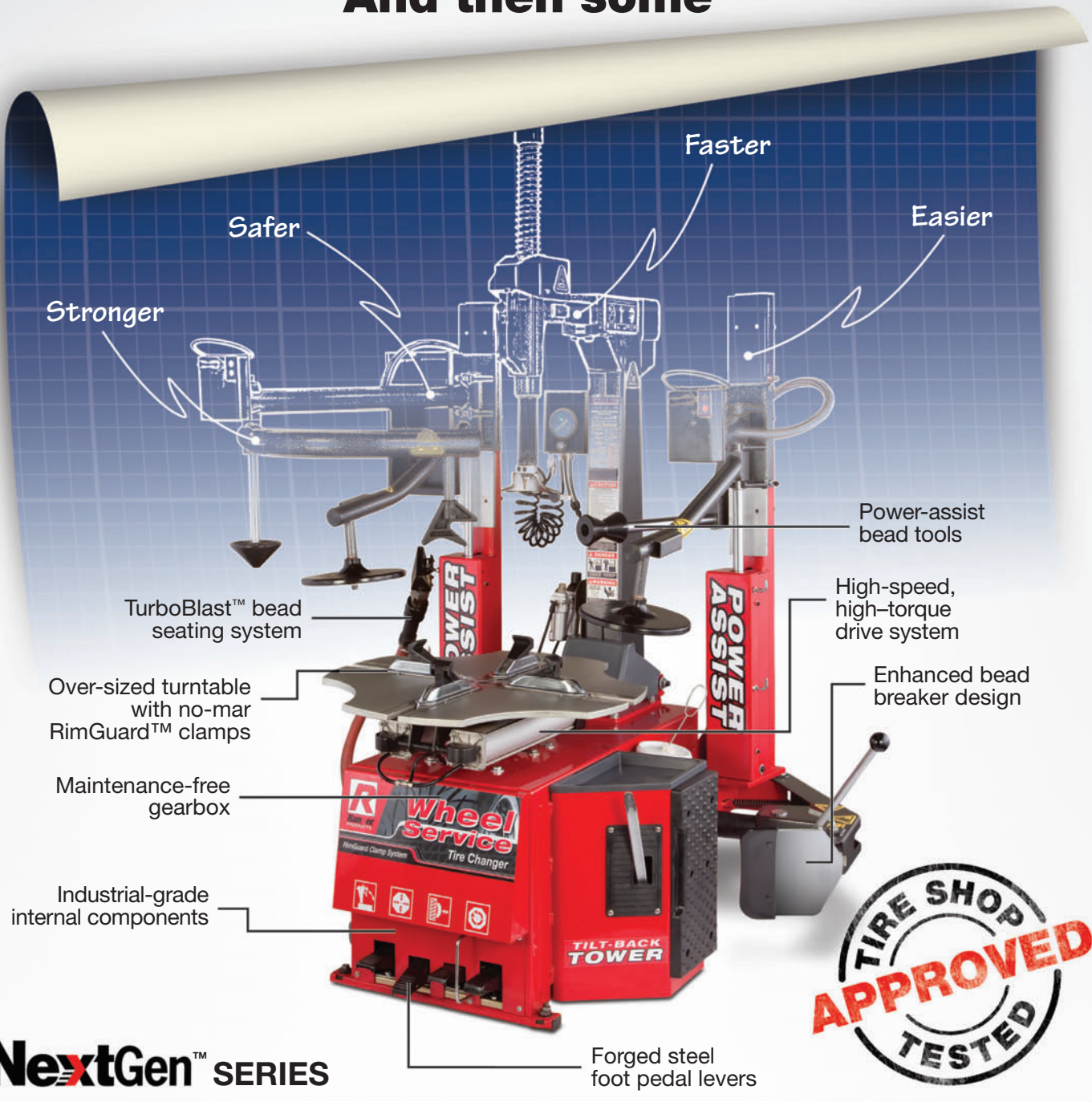
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COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY Stats & Trends

Approximately **one of every seven** collision industry technicians (13.9%) left their jobs in 2013, down from the 27.5% reported in 2007.

— Source: Collision Repair Education Foundation, co-sponsored by I-CAR



Louisiana association holds inaugural meeting

BY BRIAN ALBRIGHT | ABRN BLOGGER

The upstart Southeast Louisiana Collision Repair Association (SeLaCRA) held its first meeting Dec. 3 in Baton Rouge. The meeting drew 200 repairers from around the state, as well as observers from autobody associations in Texas and Tennessee.

The meeting was organized by Alysia Hanks, office manager at Lakeway Collision Center in Mandeville, La. Speakers included consultant Ron Perretta; John Mosley, president of the Mississippi Collision Repair Association (MCRA); Steve Plier, president of the Alabama Automotive Repair Industry Society of Excellence; and attorney John Eaves, Jr.

Hanks was inspired to launch SeLaCRA after taking industry training classes over the summer. "I saw that shops in other states were more organized," Hanks says. "We're trying to work together to support each other and share knowledge. We need some changes in our industry."

Hanks has repeatedly stated that the association is not being formed in order to pursue class action lawsuits against insurers.



"Any shop that does so is doing it as an individual," Hanks said in a post-meeting e-mail to attendees. "We will, however, work on changing Louisiana's collision industry for the best through support and education together."

Hanks says Louisiana repairers are primarily concerned with getting paid for their work by insurance companies. She would also like to see the association focus on training. "Knowledge is power," she says. "Taking those training classes over the summer really inspired me. The more I learn, the more I want to do for this industry."

Hanks will work with the association's attorney

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BEST OF THE BLOGS are articles written by bloggers on ABRN's community pages

From the Blogosphere: Don't argue, educate

BY ARTHUR HARRIS

I am an estimator at heart. No matter what position I held with a company, I have always felt a strong passion for estimating, and thought I did a good job at it — "thought" being the key



word in that sentence. I knew my P-Pages and how the estimating system calculated labor, so when challenged I could "argue" my point with facts when dealing with an adjuster.

Many years ago, I worked with a manager who would say, "Don't argue, just educate them." I never really understood what he was saying because in my mind, I was educating people by throwing pages after pages of procedures and P-Pages at them.

At the DEG, I get the pleasure of speaking with shops all around the U.S. and Canada, and it seems that some of the same problems pop up. An adjuster won't pay for this or an adjuster "doesn't pay that anywhere else but here." Recently,

I was talking with a shop because they were denied the labor for creating a backing plate when replacing a quarter panel. The adjuster said it was "included." I referenced the estimating guide in CCC and showed the shop that it in fact is not included. The person I was speaking with yelled, "I know, I threw a copy at him!"

Before I could control myself, I said, "You have to educate them and not argue with them." WHAT? I stopped for a second, and shook my head in disbelief. I said that?

The person I was speaking with was as shocked as I was. It's not our job to educate them — is it?

I think sometimes we expect the worst, and arguing only creates a barrier that P-Pages or procedures

can't fix. So, is it our job to educate an adjuster or estimator? Maybe, maybe not — but I am confident that if we try and show our side of the issue, then back it up with documentation in a positive manner, it will yield a better response.

Of course, there is always the hard-headed adjuster or estimator (like myself) who may need a printed copy of the P-Pages knocked up against their head before they can be educated. Maybe we need an addition to Larry Montanez's *Collisionpedia*: "estacate," defined as "the form of educating another person in the correct way of estimating."

Key Metrics for Running Your MSO

Registration will open soon for this training session aimed at multi-shop operators.



PAGE

20



THE SHOP OWNER

MIKE LEVASSEUR

Don't make them sink or swim

PAGE

28



PROFIT MOTIVE

TOM MCGEE

The Power of Two

PAGE

54



MIKE ANDERSON

Annual wish list

ney to finalize the necessary paperwork. Members will then establish a board of directors and elect a president. "We've already had more shops that weren't at the meeting call and request to be on the e-mail list," Hanks says. "They are interested in joining and coming to future meetings."

Hanks has also been contacted by the Louisiana Automobile Dealers Association and the Society of Collision Repair Special-

ists (SCRS). Both groups offered support of the new association. The Mississippi association has also provided guidance.

"There's a lot to be done," Hanks says. "There's a lot of negativity out there, and there are forces against our industry. We're not asking for anything except to be paid for the work we do."

Continue reading about the new group at ABRN.com/SeLaCRA.

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Visit: www.abrn.com/ICARSteel



Noteworthy

READER FEEDBACK TO ONLINE ARTICLES

On our LinkedIn page (www.linkedin.com/groups/ABRN-Magazine-5065507), our social media coordinator, Nancy Bishop, asks: "How can a body shop use social media?"

Alexandros Aslamazis: Body shop owners could and should use social media for building their customer base, to engage with customers, and simply to advertise.

James R. Noe: We have been using social media for a few years now, and it has come a long way for us. The biggest things are: people want to see pictures; they don't want to see ads. And give them some way of interacting. I'm not even close to being an expert in this field, but those are the cores we have tried to stick to — and it's working.

Facebook is our main one, Twitter we are still trying to get nailed down, but Instagram seems to be the next "big one."

Nancy Bishop: James, do you believe that Instagram is becoming more and more popular for body shops?

James R. Noe: Nancy, we actually do. Every age level has their preferred method of social media. We get the Facebookers being around 30s to 50s (where most people who pay for their collision repairs are). But Instagram gets the younger crowd. Our marketing director is great with photography, so that's her wheelhouse. For a body shop, the customers could care less about all your plaques on the wall and about your SpotWelder3000. They want to see the taboo of the repairs: Cars cut up, cars being painted, welded on, etc.



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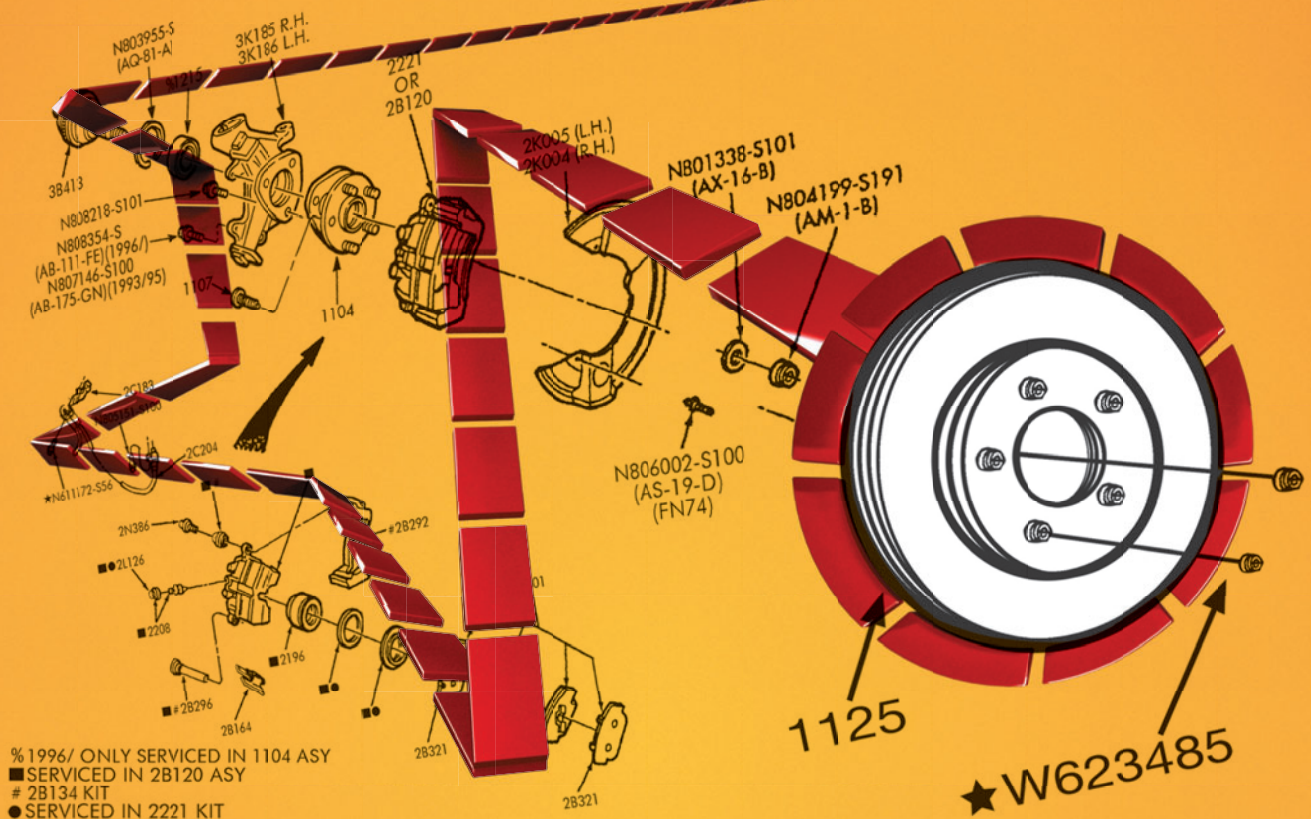
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Q+A WITH THOMAS HOERNER

BUSINESS SOLUTIONS LEADER, **BASF**



Tom Hoerner is responsible for the development and deployment of BASF's Advanced Process Solutions program. He has been in the automotive collision industry for more than 30 years, and specializes in process improvement and performance-based management.

ABRN: What are the principles of Advanced Process Solutions (APS)?

TH: The "what" of APS is simple: It is designed to eliminate anything that stops or interferes with a continuous work flow. Our goal is to eliminate supplements, parts issues and work interruptions — typical body shop chaos — to drastically improve cycle times and touch times.

But the "why" of APS is more important. APS delivers a competitive advantage, improves business control and market/insurance appeal, and "drives cars to the door."

ABRN: What are the requirements to getting started with APS?

TH: First, the owner must understand that his or her current repair model must improve to be successful. A sense of urgency is key to making a lasting change. Then we look for a VisionPLUS Excellence Member demonstrating high repair and business standards. We also require use of a management system and connecting to our VisionPLUS Dashboard. Without this level of business control, we cannot measure, coach and motivate. The shop must also be able and willing to make program investments for equipment, and have a current BASF purchase commitment.

ABRN: How long does shop implementation take?

TH: The entire APS process takes about six to nine months. This includes time to prepare for a three-day planning session, completing the pre-deployment work (5S, equipment needs, site changes, etc.) and creating the right employee culture for onsite APS deployment. The implementation itself is actually the shortest part of the process — lasting just a week. But this is just the beginning; the real work is the sustainability and continual improvement going forward. APS never stops.

ABRN: How is the process customized to each individual shop?

TH: *Customized* is a strong word. "Tailor" is better suited. In APS, we have non-negotiables. For example: "We will disable the vehicle completely and write a thorough repair plan." Who does the disassembly? Who writes the repair plan? Where the work is done can be tailored to meet the shop's desires, expectations and capabilities.

ABRN: Please explain the two different implementation options.

TH: We have BASF-assisted, or what we call "full deployment" and "self

deployment." Both begin by attending a planning session where we present the best practices for APS. Every process that requires a decision is carefully thought out, planned and documented. When the session is over, the shop's APS plan is completed.

From there, "full deployment" includes coaching throughout the process. An onsite deployment team puts the APS processes in place and follows up/audits to create sustainability. This is a sweeping change across the entire business, and the transformation is immediate.

For shops electing "self deployment," they will be self-paced and responsible for making the changes on their own.

ABRN: What technologies do shops need to implement the process?

TH: Along with following approved insurance and industry repair guidelines — and the technologies that support them — we require that the shop uses a management system and connect to our VisionPLUS Dashboard. Measuring and showing improvement, essentially celebrating the wins, is an important part to making a sustainable change. ☺



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Don't make them sink or swim

An employee orientation process sets the stage for a positive culture and employee success

Are you just throwing people into their positions within your business? Too many of our company's employees tell me that at their last job, they were shown which desk or stalls in the shop were theirs... and told to go to work. We do things a little bit differently.

Since 1997, I personally give every new hire an orientation that has grown over the years to a three-hour process. There isn't a single employee at any of our 11 shops who hasn't had this orientation. This approach automatically inspires a positive culture in a number of ways. First, it gives them a chance to get to know me, and some of the other leaders of our business. I talk briefly about the history of the company, about our philosophy, our path and where we're going. That's not something they are likely to know coming into our organization.

Second, it helps them understand what sets us apart from other shops. I talk about our involvement in the community, for example, our annual charity golf outing, the family we adopt at the holidays, the cooking we do for families staying at the Ronald McDonald House, etc. I talk about the value we place on being engaged in the community.

I also talk about the career paths we can offer them, including sharing some of the success stories in our company. For example, the manager of one of our locations started with us 12 years ago as a part-time janitor. We have several career path

stories like that. Our goal is to hire them for life. We want them to spend the rest of their career with us. All of that helps generate a feeling of stability and comfort.

We talk about safety in the shops and our quality checks (we use VeriFacts) because they can't arrive knowing what our expectations are.

The personal touch

I believe video orientations are less effective. Having the president of the company conduct orientations ensures that we're all on the same page. It sends a message that we all work as a team. After all, that's the basis for creating a consistent, positive culture.

Here are a few more details about our new employee orientation process:

- Since we opened a corporate office about four years ago, all of the orientations are done there, no matter at which location they will end up working.
- We do orientations two, three or four times a month, depending on when we have new hires. We try to schedule them on or before a new employee's first day, although occasionally they will have started a day or two prior.
- All new hires in a given period go through the orientation together, whether they are a technician, an estimator, a detailer or a customer service rep. The message is that we all have the same job: fix cars and satisfy customers. No matter what our job title, we're all part of that process.
- We cover some of the mandated items, like right-to-know training and the respirator test fit, in the orientation.
- There are some negatives discussed, because they have to understand the rules and what happens if they violate a policy. I explain what they need to understand about fraud and diminished value. But we also talk about some of the benefits they enjoy, including our bonus and incentive plans and the five personal days a year they receive. Our comptroller comes in during the orientation to walk them through what they need to know about our health insurance plan.

In addition to building a good foundation and a positive culture from the start, our goal with employee orientation is to make sure we never hear, "I didn't know..." You're more likely to hear that – and to have to deal with the negative consequences of that – if you're just throwing people into their position. 📶

“HAVING THE PRESIDENT OF THE COMPANY CONDUCT ORIENTATIONS ENSURES THAT WE'RE ALL ON THE SAME PAGE. IT SENDS A MESSAGE THAT WE ALL WORK AS A TEAM. AFTER ALL, THAT'S THE BASIS FOR CREATING A CONSISTENT, POSITIVE CULTURE.”

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Mike LeVasseur is president and COO of Keenan Auto Body, which has 11 shops in Pennsylvania and Delaware.

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28 The Profit Motive

30 The Shop Profile

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2014

ABRN HIGHLIGHTS WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR THE COLLISION INDUSTRY THIS YEAR

BY JOHN YOSWICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

TEXAS SHOP owner Bobby Johnson wasn't pulling any punches. "Many of the people who keep telling us how we can improve the claims process, parts ordering, productivity (and) turn-around time... don't know the first thing about how our shops operate or half the steps required to properly repair a damaged vehicle," Johnson wrote. "It seems that many insurance companies — and some shops — have bought into the premise that one or another computer system will solve many or all problems. There is always one direct repair program or another telling shop owners that something will greatly expedite the claims handling process.

"All these promises sound great on paper or in panel discussions," he added, "but they don't do the repair work."

You might think Johnson wrote this last week, perhaps related to any one of the insurance companies now requiring direct repair shops to use a particular online parts procurement system. But Johnson actually wrote that in 1993, 20 years ago. Reading that may make it feel like very little changes in the industry. But in fact, there are many shifts and evolutions each year. As 2014 begins, here's our annual preview of what to look for in the coming year.

The PartsTrader rollout

State Farm's mandated use of PartsTrader will arrive on the East Coast for the first time in 2014, starting with Flor-

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ida and Georgia. The insurer has said the rollout will be nationwide by the end of the year.

In addition to at least one lawsuit and other forms of push-back from repairers, PartsTrader in 2014 also will have to see what response it receives from parts vendors who at some point this year will be told what participating in the program will cost them.

PartsTrader is currently free to shops, and the company's Dale Sailer says he doesn't "expect to ever charge a shop to use the system."



Dale Sailer

Sometime in 2014, however, suppliers will be given 60 days' notice ahead of the start of a monthly fee for their participation; Sailer has said only that the fee would be "modest" and "less than you're used to paying today for comparable products."

The supplier also will pay a yet-to-be-determined fee per transaction, Sailer says. But because there will be no transaction fee charged on State Farm jobs, PartsTrader is counting on shops ordering parts through PartsTrader for all its jobs.

"Our success is dependent on shops finding value in using PartsTrader beyond State Farm," Sailer says. "That is an absolute must for us."

No relief on total losses

The percentage of wrecked vehicles declared to be total losses was trending up slightly as the end of 2013 approached — and, assuming there's no major market disruptions, that will likely continue in 2014, according to Susanna Gotsch, lead analyst for CCC Information Services.

The biggest cause: the continued aging of the U.S. vehicle population. The average vehicle age is now 11.4 years, according to R.L. Polk. A decade ago, Gotsch said, 27 percent of all repairable appraisals were for vehicles aged 7 years or more; by mid-2013, this grew to 44.2 percent.

The rebound in new car sales will help slow the aging of the fleet. And high demand and prices for used vehicles have meant repair costs could

be higher before a vehicle passed the total loss threshold. But those used car values were dropping through much of 2013, and until the inventory of older vehicles declines — which isn't expected to happen in the next 12 to 18 months — don't look for the percentage of vehicles being declared a total loss to decline.

The first 500-shop MSO

As reported in *ABRN* last fall, at least one investment banking firm representative is confident there were at least one multi-shop operator (MSO) with more than 1,000 shops within five years. But could one reach the halfway mark to that in 2014?

Clearly, the closest to that milestone are two franchise operations, Maaco and Carstar, each with about 450 shops. Other chains are growing faster, but of those, only The Boyd Group (which also operates shops under the names True2Form and Gerber) is more than halfway to 500 shops. The next four biggest chains combined have about 500 shops.

But these large MSOs each added at least two to four dozen shops last year, with the pace of growth accelerating. And rumors of mergers between some of the Top 10 MSOs abound, which could catapult at least one of them much closer to that 500-shop mark.

The rebirth of NACE

Organizers of the International Autobody Congress and Exposition (NACE) are clearly looking at the 2014 event to put the show back into growth mode. They've shaken up the schedule by shifting the event to summer and to a location it's never been held: Detroit.

Dan Risley, executive director of the Automotive Service Association (ASA), which sponsors NACE, says the Motor City location will mean the OEMs will play a pivotal part in what he called the "Rebirth of NACE," with more car companies exhibiting at the event and hosting factory tours.



Dan Risley

Also helping draw attendees, Risley says, will be the Collision Industry Conference (CIC) and I-CAR annual conference, being held the two days prior to NACE in the same location.

"We think that's a win for the industry," Risley says. "One of the things ASA did a couple years ago was a split from some things. It caused a divide in the industry. It hurt us. It hurt the show. We recognize that. So we're going in the opposite direction and doing everything we can to promote industry unity. We think it's best for the industry and for the show as well."

Risley says Detroit offers a refurbished convention center with a new headquarters hotel a block away. More so than in Las Vegas and New Orleans (the site of NACE in 2012), there is a large population of shops within an easy drive of Detroit. And Risley points to ancillary attractions like the Henry Ford Museum, Yankees vs. Tigers baseball games and tunnel access to the casinos and other attractions of Windsor, Canada, as added benefits.

"We want to make this show a different experience," Risley says. "When we go to Detroit, we're going to give you that. We're going to give you something in Detroit that you will not be able to get anywhere else in this country."

More on mandates

Shops and their associations really took aim at insurance company mandates in 2013, and the petition drives, lawsuits and calls for regulator or legislative involvement will likely continue in 2014.

Perhaps of particular interest for 2014 will be seeing what response ASA gets to its letter to state insurance regulators and attorneys general around the country, asking whether State Farm's mandate to use PartsTrader violates state law.

"We believe this mandatory parts procurement program stifles competition and harms both the consumer and the small businessperson," ASA's Risley says.

States crack down on uninsured motorists

Insured cars are more likely to be re-

paired after an accident, so recent efforts in several states to crack down on drivers not carrying mandatory coverage could be good news for shops in 2014.

Missouri lawmakers, for example, overrode a veto by its governor to make that state the 11th in the country to enact a “no pay, no play” law, preventing uninsured drivers from collecting non-economic damages resulting from an accident, even if the accident wasn’t their fault.

Indiana lawmakers are considering several ways to go after the 321,000 drivers who owe the state \$130 million in insurance-related fees they were charged over the last four years when they were cited for driving without insurance. The state is considering using liens or even confiscation of license plates, as was recently launched in Oklahoma.

The Michigan Department of Motor Vehicles recently conducted a one-day study in which it sought to verify every paper insurance document brought to the department that day by motorists renewing their vehicle registration. It found that 16 percent of all those documents were forged or fraudulent. In three counties, more than 46 percent of the documents were bogus. To crack down on the problem, insurers can now electronically notify the state when a motorist renews, and those found to have phony insurance documents can have their vehicle registration canceled as well.

Insurers may expand no-touch claim handling

The prevalence of smartphones has insurers trying out “self-service” or “no-touch” auto claims handling. Allstate, for example, now offers its “QuickFoto Claim” app in a number of states. On a case-by-case basis, customers reporting a minor claim (“dings, scratches, dents, fender benders”) are given the option of using the app to upload images of the vehicle to Allstate. An Allstate spokesman reports that turnaround time on these claims averages four hours.

If experiments like these pay off, look for more insurers to find ways

to settle more claims before a vehicle ever enters a shop.

Will predictive estimating gain traction?

Toyota’s planned “predictive estimating” system made *ABRN*’s “what to watch for in 2013” preview a year ago, but perhaps 2014 is the year it will take off.

The system requires the user only to select the damaged portions of the vehicle (left front fender, for example), and all items related to that section of the vehicle are automatically listed, including all necessary parts and Toyota-recommended procedures, along with links to all related Toyota bulletins and published documentation.



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"Everything you need to fix our cars correctly and to our standards is there," Toyota's Rick Leos says.



Rick Leos

Many in the industry are looking forward to an update in 2014 on Toyota's progress on the system. It is being incorporated in Mitchell International's new mobile and online estimating tool this year, and it will be interesting to see whether other automakers will follow suit.

I-CAR's portal to OEM info

Just getting its start as 2014 kicks off is I-CAR's new "technical knowledge portal," part of that organization's effort to increase the accessibility of OEM repair information to the industry. Available via I-CAR's website (www.i-car.com), the portal each week will offer new articles with OEM repair information, and a searchable database of technical inquiries I-CAR has received and an-

swered using OEM resources.

It remains to be seen as to what I-CAR's work with the automakers will mean for the industry — and to what degree repairers will use this new source of OEM information that many have said they want.

Stop chasing signatures

After a non-drivable car gets towed into your shop, how long do you generally have to wait to get a signed authorization from the customer to tear down or begin work on their vehicle? Would that customer be more apt to sign the form more quickly if they didn't have to come to your shop to do so?

That's the goal of a new system, recently tested by Pennsylvania-based MSO CollisionMax (which has 11 shops). It seems likely to get adopted by other repairers this year.

CollisionMax allows customers to authorize repairs by collecting an e-signature via the customer's phone, computer or tablet. Over a three-

month period and more than 300 non-drivable claims, CollisionMax compared the traditional method of obtaining customer signatures to the e-signature method. Using the traditional method, 62 percent of the needed signatures were obtained the same day, and 18 percent were obtained the next day. The balance took three days or more (in the longest case, nine days) and the overall average was 1.94 days.

By using e-signatures, however, CollisionMax obtained 97 percent of the signatures the same day and the other 3 percent the next day. The longest amount of time it took to obtain the authorization was just 26 hours, and the overall average length of time was just over one hour.

At an industry technology conference last fall, several attendees expressed surprise that an e-signature system hadn't been integrated into the estimating or shop management systems. Perhaps 2014 will be the year that happens. ■

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PROFIT MOTIVE: YOUR COMPASS TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS

The power of two

BY TOM MCGEE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

How many times have you watched your son's or daughter's game, or even your favorite college or professional team lose with a final score of 1-0? With a score of 1-0, most likely the game was competitive and the game was exciting.

When you look back at the game, it is rare that you could say your team played a bad game. What you would find, however, is that there were a small number of plays or situations that could have been improved upon to prevent one point from being scored, or for your team to a score a winning point of its own.

If you were watching a hockey game and broke it down, the team didn't play three bad periods of hockey. They probably didn't even play one or two periods of bad hockey. Most likely they took an unnecessary penalty, didn't get the puck out of their zone as effectively as possible, made a mistake that resulted in a turnover or some other small error that resulted in that one goal being scored.

At the next practice, the coach works with the team to improve in that area of their game. It could be additional training and coaching on their power play, penalty kill, passing, face-offs or shooting. They focus on the one small area where they could do better.

A collision repair business is no different from that hockey team. If we find that we have an area that needs improvement, we most likely don't need to start over. We just need to determine where the opportunity is, and focus our efforts on one or more

minor improvements in that area to make a positive impact on the business.

Case in point

In most collision repair businesses, you can find additional profits simply by making a small improvement in a particular operation.

Let's say you wanted to improve your profits on paint and materials. You could focus on the purchase price of the materials, on increasing the revenue generated or on cost control. How much improvement could you make if you were able to:

- Reduce your paint waste by 2 oz. per vehicle?
- Increase the refinish labor time by 0.2 hours per vehicle?
- Increase your paint and materials sales by 2%?
- Reduce your paint and materials costs by 2%?

Once you have made an improvement in the paint and materials area of your business, move on to another segment needing your attention. This may be labor, parts, average repair order or something totally different. Work through each one in a similar manner. What would you gain if you were able to:

- Increase the average repair order by 2%?

- Increase your labor margin by 2%?
- Increase your parts margin by 2%?
- Increase your gross profit margin by 2%?
- Improve your CSI (Customer Satisfaction Index) score by 2%?

Involve your team

When looking to make a change or improvement, don't overlook communicating with your team. It can be very beneficial to let your team know the area you are trying to improve and the impact that the improvement would have on the business — and ultimately, on them. Once you have identified your goal, get their opinions and feedback. They know what is working and what is not, and can help you make the corrections necessary to improve the operation. If the team is involved, they begin to share your vision and goals and take ownership in the process.

IMPROVEMENT WORKSHEET

Visit www.atonlinetraining.com/abrn1401 to download a worksheet that you can use as a model to determine the financial improvements your business would gain through the power of two.

Most shop operators will find that there is an opportunity for improvement in several areas of their business. Just like the hockey team, we are not playing three bad periods of the game. We can make improvements by focusing on our power play to score some goals — and win the next game 2-1! 🏒

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SHOP PROFILE

A snapshot of one of the industry's leading shops

**GREAT BEAR AUTO REPAIR & AUTO BODY /
FLUSHING, QUEENS, N.Y.**



Laying it on the line

Great Bear roars ahead with 'telling, not selling' education campaign to draw in customers

BY **JAMES E. GUYETTE** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Audra Fordin is hot on the trail toward taming the beast of negative reactions experienced by drivers who endure the fears and stresses associated with being in a wreck. As the fourth-generation owner of the 80-year-old Great Bear Auto Repair & Auto Body — still at the same lean and compact location in Flushing, Queens, N.Y. — accolades for Fordin and the forthright honesty, friendliness and competence delivered by the shop keep pouring in.

Capturing an overall 4.8-star satisfaction rating on a scale of five, a constant string of enthusiastic online customer service reviews are augmented by industry and media praise for her professionalism and efforts at bringing practical and plain-spoken vehicle knowhow to the public.

In addition to being recognized as the first Female Service Shop Owner of the Year in 2011 by the Car Care Council's Woman's Board, honored as a Standard Motor Products Tech of the Year and named New York City's Small Business of the Year by Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Fordin consistently receives positive local and national publicity for her "Women Auto Know" consumer education program. Her long list of high-profile appearances includes conversing with host JJ Ramberg on MSNBC's "Your Business," along with numerous other media accounts.

Fordin's advice-based customer service philosophy comes from the concept of "telling, not selling." Although it may seem counterintuitive (the shop does no advertising, but does post a strong social media presence), this lack of a sales push has proven to be a roaring success at drawing people in. And the performance of Fordin and her crew keeps them coming back while spurring glowing word-of-mouth recommendations to friends and family. Another frequently cited plus from the multi-cultural Queens neighborhood is the staff's ability to speak jargon-free in Greek, Spanish and Korean.

"I teach people about their cars," Fordin explains. "I'm not seeking them; they are seeking me. It's easy by practicing good service. We are in a service business, not a sales business. It's the relationships that we survive and thrive on."

AT A GLANCE

Great Bear Auto Repair & Auto Body

Name of shop

Flushing, Queens, N.Y.

Location

Audra Fordin

Owner

1

Number of shops

80

Years in business

5

Number of employees

None

Number of DRPs

2-3 days

Average cycle time

\$5,000

Average weekly volume

BASF

Paint supplier

Big-bed fast track; Mid-bed

Grand Prix

Frame machines used

CCC

Estimating system used

www.greatbearautoshop.com,

www.whatwomenautoknow.com

Internet sites



Monthly Women Auto Know workshops, in which women (and men) visit the full-service shop for fun and informative instructional sessions, remain hugely popular.

"It's caused quite a stir," says Fordin, who is taking the campaign on a national rollout. "Through education, community feedback and peer-to-peer support, we provide women everywhere with the confidence needed to save money and increase automobile performance."

Memberships are free for consumers, and other shops are invited to take part in exchange for a modest annual stipend. Training videos have been produced, and there is a line of "Women Auto Know" merchandise to help offset costs.

"We comprehensively understand the fact that for most people, a vehicle is their second-biggest investment next to a home. It makes sense to take the time to select an auto repair facility that will take the best care of your investment. Meeting the needs of the majority 65 percent of the market is good for business," says Fordin, referring to the growing buying power of female vehicle decision-makers. "It's good for the people, and it's good for the industry. That's a win-win-win — all based on a pledge organically created by listening to and hearing what our customers so desperately ask for. The message is transparent education."

The theme is further carried forward by the shop's non-participation in any direct repair program affiliations. "People are often skeptical when it comes to having their car repaired," she says. "It's easier to explain that they are my boss. I am here to take care of them. I work for them."

According to Fordin, it is especially important for customers "not to think that I am cutting corners, not fixing something or using a specific-brand part because I work for the insurance company. If we touch it, we guarantee it."

Cordial relations with insurers are facilitated by Great Bear's assortment of lean production strategies, which include paying close attention to details, precise bookkeeping and thorough preparation. Discounted car rentals are arranged in-house, and the vehicles and estimates are available and fully ready for the next step in the process when the adjuster arrives.

"The way we check a car is systematic, like a clock. It's always the same way each time to prevent error or oversight," Fordin says. "We have weekly meetings to talk

about how we can be better. We try. It is an ongoing process."

Customers can view damaged components both before and after the repairs are made, and emailed communications are sent out with updates on the progress of each job: "If you are going to pay for it, we will educate you about it."

Family atmosphere

Free coffee and Wi-Fi are provided at Great Bear, along with a children's play area in the waiting room. A family atmosphere is fostered among the staff to encourage direct communication and a cooperative spirit.

"They buy into the philosophy of 'tell, not sell — service, not sales,'" Fordin says. "It's a feel-good system that instills pride, and that's directly related to quality."

The technicians pursue ongoing ASE certification levels, and longevity is encouraged via a sense of close-knit camaraderie. When an opening does occur, motivated interns with a positive, friendly attitude are recruited from local trade schools — "and then I retrain them," she quips.

Fordin eagerly embraces new technology, and is gearing up to host a charging station for hybrid and electric cars. Switching to waterborne paint is another forthcoming initiative.

Active in the Girl Scouts, Fordin encourages young women in foster care who are aging out of the system and considering a career in the repair industry.

A clear path

Great Bear was born in 1933, established by Fordin's great-grandfather, Oscar Fordin, and his four sons: Herbie, Sidney, Jerry and Larry. Larry Fordin was Audra's grandfather; her father, Bill, later assumed ownership of the operation, and Audra began her auto repair career at a young age.

"I went into the shop and worked with my grandpa and dad during vacations and on Saturdays. It was fun," Fordin recalls, adding that her own children, ages 13, 11 and 6, are displaying a similar affinity for the business — which has remained at the same "off the main drag" Sanford Avenue location since it was founded.

"My dad didn't take it easy on me," Fordin admits. "He gave me opportunity and made me be accountable. Nothing was just handed over. I had to work very hard to prove myself, and earn respect in the industry."

Read more at ABRN.COM/GREATBEAR. 📄


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IN THIS SECTION

38 OSHA compliance

45 Mechanical Repair

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 TRAINING  IN FOCUS



THE FINER POINTS OF METAL FINISHING

BY AL THOMAS | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

CONSIDER THIS YOUR REFRESHER COURSE ON THE ART OF DENT REPAIR

Dent repair is a highly skilled task that, when done correctly, may exceed the cost of replacing a part. Unfortunately, this means that precise and efficient metal repair may not be the most economical repair procedure. Metal finishing — restoring damaged metal to its pre-accident condition with little or no filler — has become a less-practiced art, and some would argue it may soon become a lost art entirely.

Some say that the thinner, stronger metals do not metal finish as easily as the older, softer and thicker ones do... and they would be correct. Try to bump a high-strength steel compared to, say, an older 1960s fender. The way the older metal moves is much different than the newer, but it does not mean the repair can't be done on high-strength surfaces. In fact, in many areas outside of North America, repair is the method preferred over replacement.

One critical decision when restoring a vehicle to its pre-accident condition is determining what method best fits

the cycle time and customer needs, which may mean that replacement is the best choice. Metal finishing, though, is a valuable skill that new and old technicians alike should be capable of performing efficiently. Keeping a few tips in mind will help you to be confident and successful when you choose metal finishing.

Assess the damage

If both sides of the damage are accessible, methods such as hammer and dolly repair can be used (Fig. 1), or the use of a pick bar can help raise the low spots. If both sides cannot be accessed, stud welds (Fig. 2), wiggle wire, and progressive pulling are other methods that can be used. In fact, there are numerous single-side repair methods such as glue-on pulling, suction cups, and heat shrinking, just to name a few. What a technician must do is evaluate the repair to come up with the plan that will be the most efficient and profitable.

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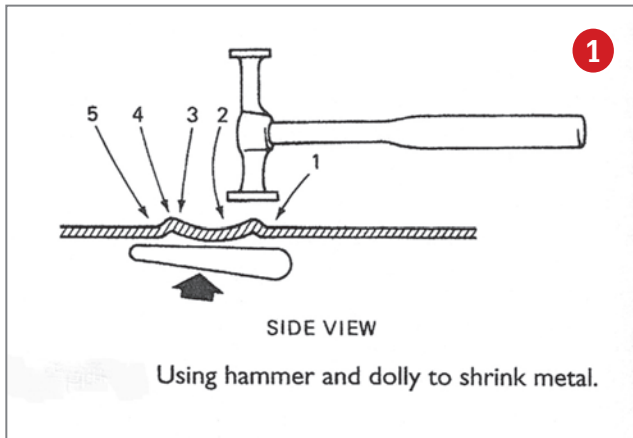


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Make a repair plan

Like most repair processes, metal finishing should start with a plan. First, inspect the damaged area. Determine what part is direct damage — the damage caused by the impact — and which part of the damage is indirect damage. Indirect damage is caused not by the object that struck the vehicle, but by the deforming of the panel from the impact. In Fig. 3, the impact in front of the vehicle shortened the vehicle, causing the indirect (sometimes called secondary) damage in the roof.

Indirect damage is often larger in area than the direct damage, and if the repair is started in the wrong area, more damage can be caused than initially existed. As an example, in the damage in Fig. 3, if the repair is started in the roof area, it would be nearly impossible to repair until the direct damage is repaired. However, if the repair is started by returning the vehicle to its original length, the indirect damage may return to its original position. Metal has memory, and if it is not bent past its elastic point, it will return to its original position — similar to trees in a windstorm. However, if the metal is bent past this elastic point, the molecules in the metal become deformed and a permanent bend occurs. At this bend, the metal also becomes stronger or harder from what is called “work hardening,” causing this area to resist straightening. When the direct and indirect damage are assessed, then access to the damaged areas will determine the repair technique that will be used.

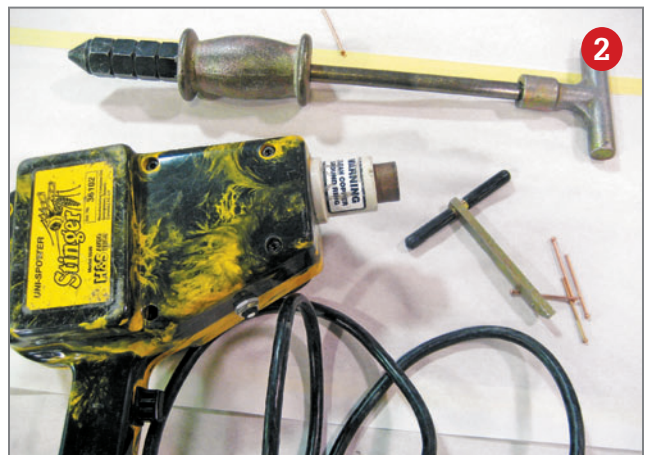
Dent definition

Once the available access is confirmed, the size and definition of the dent should be determined. Some outer areas of the dent may be subtle, and determining the extent of the dented area is critical.

The dent around a gas filler door, for example, can be determined by a technique called buff grinding. Buff grinding entails using a grinder (with open coat 50 grit, or no coarser than 80 grit if it is aluminum) to remove the paint by holding it at a slight angle, about 1 in. above the surface in areas where the metal is either high or level. The paint that remains in the dent is low, and must be moved up or back to its original contour. This method is used for both single-side access and double-side access repairs.

Repair technique

Several techniques can be used to repair dents. One method is hammer and dolly, where a dolly (a heavy steel tool with varied shapes, Fig. 1) is chosen that has a shape that closely matches the shape of the part being repaired. The dolly is held on one side — usually the inside — and the hammer is used on the opposite side of the part. Sometimes the hammer blows are placed directly over the stretched metal (hammer-



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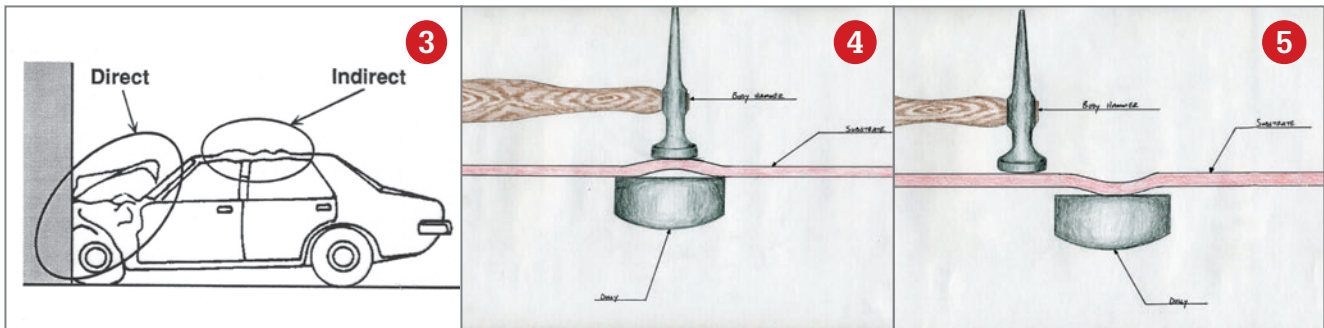
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on-dolly, Fig. 4) where the hammer hits a high spot with the dolly's support, thus shrinking or lowering the high spot. In other situations, the hammer blows are placed off to the side of the dolly (hammer-off-dolly, Fig. 5) to raise low areas. As the hammer blows impact the part, the dolly is forced to bounce against the low area, thus raising it.

Pick hammers without dollies are also often used to raise low areas (Fig. 6), as are an assortment of other specialty hammers. The head of each is designed in a specific shape to perform specialty tasks, such as a shrinking hammer (Fig. 7), which is used to shrink stretched metal without the use of heat.

Being able to place the pick blow precisely where it will have the most effect is a skill that will take some practice. Often, the hammer is held with the index finger on the handle so the blow will be more precise (Fig. 8).

Another, even more accurate tool to raise or lower steel is a spring-loaded center punch (see photo page 32). In the last stages of metal finishing, when only small areas need to be raised and

a very precise point of impact is needed, the spring-loaded center punch is very helpful.

The sequence and placement of hammer and dolly work is also critical, as seen in Fig. 9. The first four hammer and dolly placements are intended to correct the non-elastic, or work-hardened, damage. After this procedure is done, the remaining five blows will correct the elastic metal. If this sequence

is not followed, a "tin can" dent can occur, because the metal has been stretched. Shrinking, whether cold or hot, is more difficult, and should be avoided if possible.

Pick bars such as those used by "Paintless Dent Repair" technicians are also excellent tools with which to raise dents in areas where two-sided access is not available. Though many manufacturers do not recommend drilling holes

CORROSION PROTECTION

Anytime a panel is repaired so that both sides are hammered and a dolly is used, a stud welder is used, or heat shrinking has been done, the corrosion protection on both sides will be disturbed — and must be replaced. Follow the manufacturer's recommendation for corrosion protection application following repair on both sides of the panel. Additionally, restore corrosion protection, even on the access hold if a pick bar was used.

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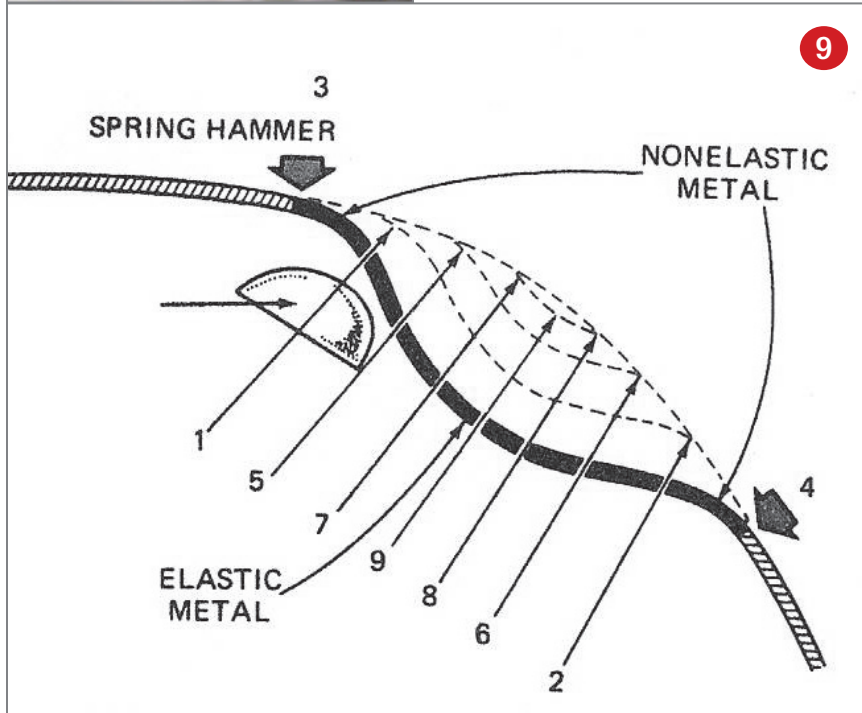
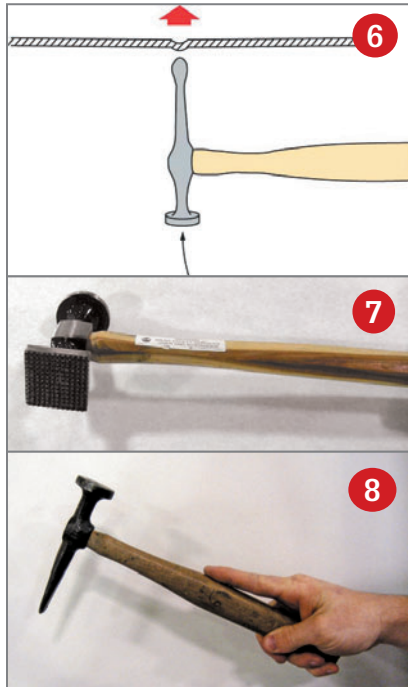
INNOVATIVE BODY SHOP TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

for access, often a pre-existing access hole can be found, and if so, using a pick bar (Fig. 10) can be very helpful.

Shrinking is often necessary because of the damage from the collision or from incorrect repair techniques. If the damage area is small, it can often be corrected using the cold method, as

seen in Fig. 1, in which the dolly is held underneath and light spring hammer blows are used on the surface. For more severely stretched metal, heat shrinking must be used. In the past, heat was applied by using a torch; the metal was heated to red-hot, and then spring hammering was done.

The use of a torch is no longer recommended, because the “heat-affect zone” is too large. The best way to apply heat is with an electric stud welder with a shrinking tip (Fig. 11). In this way, the heat can be controlled to reach only the metal that is stretched. Once the stretched area is heated, use of the hammer-on-dolly with spring hammering blows, working from the outside inward, will shrink the metal. Quenching with compressed air will cool the area that has been heat shrunk.




Finishing

To finish the metal so no high or low spots exist requires some finessing with light hammer blows — and also by careful feeling of the surface. When imperfections (minor by this time, hopefully) are found (Fig. 12), they can be tapped down using light spring hammering (Fig. 13). Slapping spoons or slapping files are also helpful during

the finishing period. The slapping tools can be used with a dolly underneath to smooth the surface of the metal.

When finishing, the face of each tool being used must be flat and smooth. If these tools have dents, gouges or imperfections on them, the unevenness will transfer to the metal that is being finished. Therefore, if a hammer, as an example, has nicks, it should be filed smooth, and the edge should be beveled and then sanded smooth so it will not transfer any damage to the finish area.

Should all dents be repaired by metal finishing? Probably not. Are there times when metal finishing is the correct choice? Definitely yes. It is a procedure that should be part of good technician’s skill set. The tools needed should be available in the collision shop and should be kept in good repair. With a little practice, technicians can maintain their metal finishing skills and apply them when needed with confidence and success. 

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TECHNIQUES  INFOCUS

Keys to compliance

Meet OSHA requirements with these five steps



Creating an organized shop with a focus on compliance is a large part of being on board with OSHA rules.

IMAGE / LEFLER COLLISION CENTERS

BY **TIM SRAMCIK** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

You've probably heard about the Connecticut shop that recently was investigated and fined by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The name of that shop and the specifics surrounding the case won't be mentioned here, since they're not the focus of this article. More important to you is the fact that OSHA investigations do happen, and shops do get fined — often thousands of dollars.

Beyond the monetary loss, there's plenty of other fallout you'll probably experience should you ever be fined. Customers and neighbors can come to believe you aren't running a particularly clean operation. Blame runs throughout your shop as employees, management and ownership point at one another. Fortunately, you can avoid these problems with the right approach to your work.

The key to OSHA compliance is organization. Get your act together and make your shop the safest, most compliant business possible with these steps:

Step 1. Choose a compliance manager.

While everyone on your team plays an important part in compliance, you still need to name one person who will lead your efforts. This person will be responsible for knowing all OSHA, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and local safety and environment regulations.

Putting one person in charge offers several significant advantages. For one, this person can focus on compliance and be the resource for your and others' questions. If this responsibility is placed on several employees, there's a great-

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er chance the duties required might get passed around — and ignored or dismissed.

You'll want to make sure your compliance manager already has a significant role in your operation. This employee needs to have the power to enforce rules and correct employees who make mistakes.

What skill set should your compliance manager have? Find someone with impeccable organizational skills, who already has an interest in compliance and has the time to manage this important part of your business. Don't take it on yourself if you don't have the time, nor should you pass it onto a production manager who already is drowning in work. Assistant managers, a shop foreman and others can be well suited for this position.

Step 2: Make everyone responsible.

Every one of your employees potentially can violate an OSHA regulation. Therefore, everyone plays a vital role in compliance. Your job, and one of your compliance manager's duties, is to drive home the importance of compliance to each of your employees.

Tony Wise, owner of Wise's Expert Auto in Charlotte, N.C., faced just this dilemma when he was reorganizing his shop three years ago. *ABRN* recently covered Wise's efforts to squeeze more work out of his shop by increasing its interior space.

While making these changes, Wise

brought on board a new production manager, Paul Martino, to help him hone his lean operation. Wise was shocked when Martino's first contribution during a shop meeting took what seemed at first to be a path well away from lean production.

"Paul held up a \$20 bill and said it went to the first employee who could locate a fire extinguisher within 20 seconds," Wise recalls.

Employees were so shocked that it took a full minute before anyone could locate an extinguisher. Martino then offered to buy dinner to the first person who could locate a first aid kit within the next 30 seconds. Again, everyone failed.

"That was Paul's way of demonstrating his take on lean and safe operations," says Wise. "They're one and the same. Whether you're working lean or have another production theory, you need to be safe and compliant."

From that meeting, Wise knew Martino would be his compliance manager, a duty that Martino took to heart. Martino immediately put together a program to ensure every employee had the knowledge and inclination to stay compliant.

Wise calls the program "Test, train and drill." He explains that Martino started by identifying all the compliance issues employees face in their work areas — electrical, waste disposal, chemical handling and storage, etc.

He then tested employees to determine what they needed to know. From there, the shop started weekly train-

ing sessions. Martino made a point of cross-training employees so that everyone — including estimators and administrative workers — knew the regulations by which the shop had to abide. He also made a point during each day's production meeting to discuss any problems and new rules for the shop.

Wise says compliance quickly became a large part of the shop's business culture. That was important, because Wise was resetting his shop and employees were relearning how and where to store and source materials and equipment. He eventually made a yearly test that employees had to score 100 percent on as part of their annual goals needed to hit bonus pay.

Step 3: Put everything in its place.

Wise says another lesson he learned was that the best way to comply with OSHA standards is to run an orderly business.

As part of his efforts to reset his shop and create space, Wise discovered one of the best paths was to map out his shop and ensure every inch of his business's space was dedicated to a specific purpose. This is just as important for storage as it is for work.

Wise notes that while his shop looked neat and organized, it really wasn't. Every available bit of storage was being used, and equipment was spread out throughout the shop. His compliance manager pointed out that most of the OSHA compliance viola-



Note that the paint mixing room (left photo) is clean, orderly and every product is properly stored. Items like tires (right photo) should be stacked neatly in a designated place.

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THE RED HAT SOCIETY



Wise's Expert Auto, Charlotte, N.C., has an unusual way to deal with employees who violate an U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulation or otherwise work unsafely.

"We had an old red work hat that had been left here by the previous owner," says shop owner Tony Wise. "It was kind of a running joke, since employees used to leave it in each other's lockers."

Wise began requesting employees who made a mistake to wear the red hat for a day. While it may sound juvenile, Wise explains that it was an effective teaching tool.

"We discovered that making a compliance mistake most often was a matter of an employee working too quickly or just being sloppy," he says. "When your work actions result in embarrassment, you'll take an extra moment to think before making a mistake that could result in an injury or an OSHA fine."

Wise himself wasn't immune to this lesson. While speaking to a group of vocational students, he left a respirator on a desk instead of in a designated storage area. One of the students pointed out the violation. Wise immediately found the hat and spent the rest of the day wearing it, after explaining to the student's the shop's violation policy. Not a bad learning tool for himself and his visitors.

"I had the respirator out to show them how to properly wear it and intended to put it back at the end of the tour," says Wise. "I was wrong. I learned my lesson, and I hope they did, too."

tions he was able to review were related to unsafe storage — equipment blocking fire extinguishers, flammable materials not properly stored, dangerous clutter, etc.

Wise says these violations occur because shops don't plan out the use of their space and stick to that plan. By strictly maintaining his plan, Wise not only created valuable work space, but made his shop safer.

"You don't end up with problems if you've instilled in your employees that everything goes in a specific place," says Wise.

Step 4: Invest in supplies that are compliant.

One key area of OSHA compliance aimed at auto repair shops is safety equipment — specifically gloves, respirators, safety glasses, ear protection, clothes and shoes. OSHA lists the requirements for these supplies in its material safety data sheet (MSDS).

Because these requirements change, your compliance manager will need to look for updates, then update your shop's stock and/or its training for their use. For example, safety glasses must meet American National Standard Institute (ANSI) standards. Gloves must meet other standards based on how they're being used and their composition.

"Once one of these rules changes, you have to change your inventory," says Wise. "Vendors are really good at notifying you, but this is where you need your compliance leader to take control and swap out old supplies for compliant ones."

Step 5: Be as green as possible.

Moving to waterborne paints and adopting other green policies means far more than protecting your employees and the environment. By reducing the toxins in your shop, you cut down on the possibility of violating OSHA rules: Fewer toxins typically translate into fewer spills, less toxic material to manage and fewer opportunities for employees to mishandle these materials and fall victim to potentially harmful effects.

Mike Bilderbury, owner of WC Automasters in Sacramento, Calif., says




To be OSHA-compliant, you must utilize the right respirators for a job, train your employees on their use, and care for and store them properly.



Safety glasses must meet ANSI standards.

making these moves has saved him money and headaches. "Being in California, we strive to be as green as possible, and promote ourselves as such," he says. "Each change we made to control anything flammable or dangerous had real results. My workers said they felt better, and our disposal costs really dropped."

Ultimately, that sense of truly improving your business and protecting your employees is what OSHA compliance is about. OSHA regulations have a very necessary place in any work space. Abiding by them is a matter of accepting this point and taking the necessary steps to ensure these rules play a part in your operation. 

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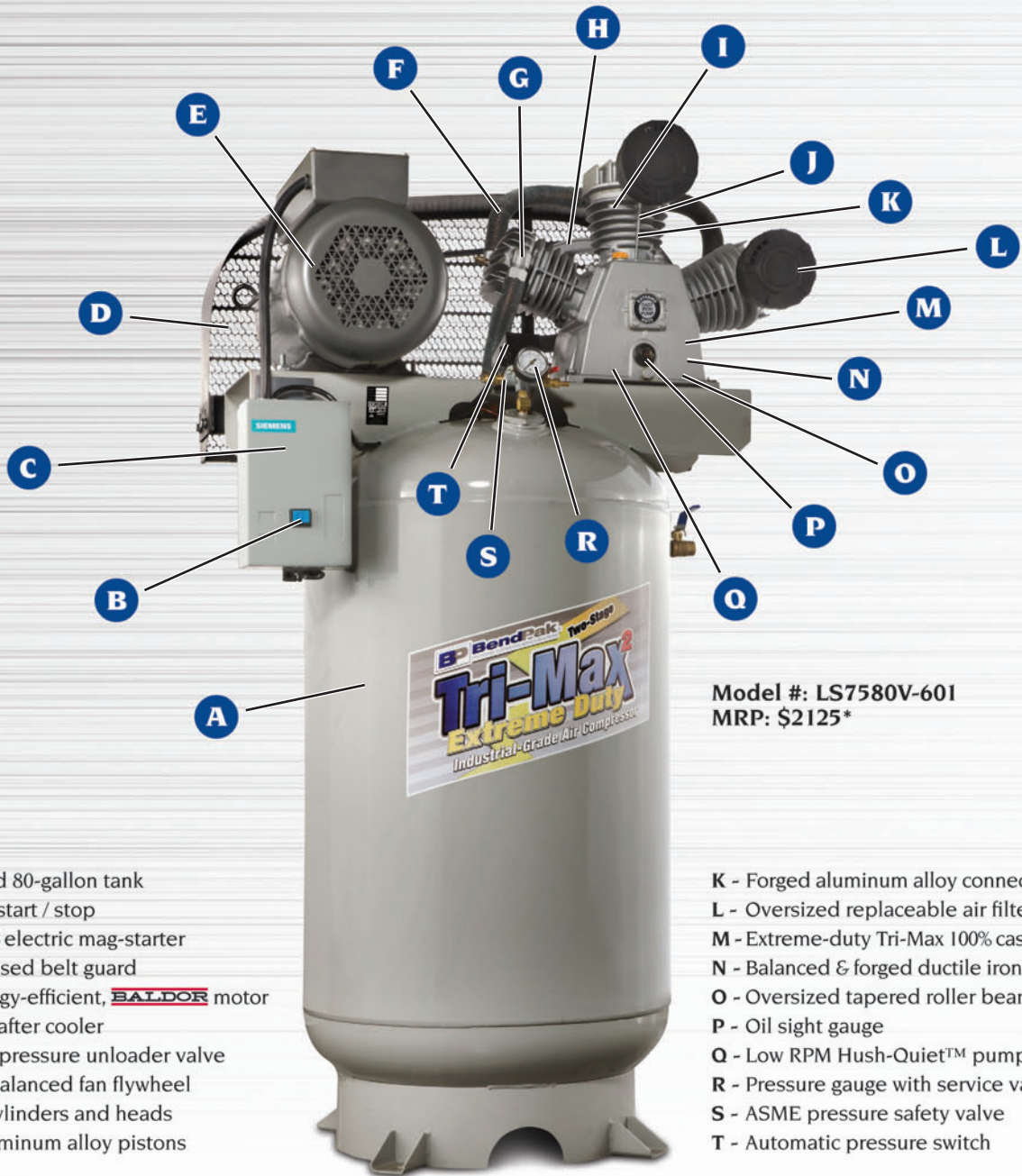
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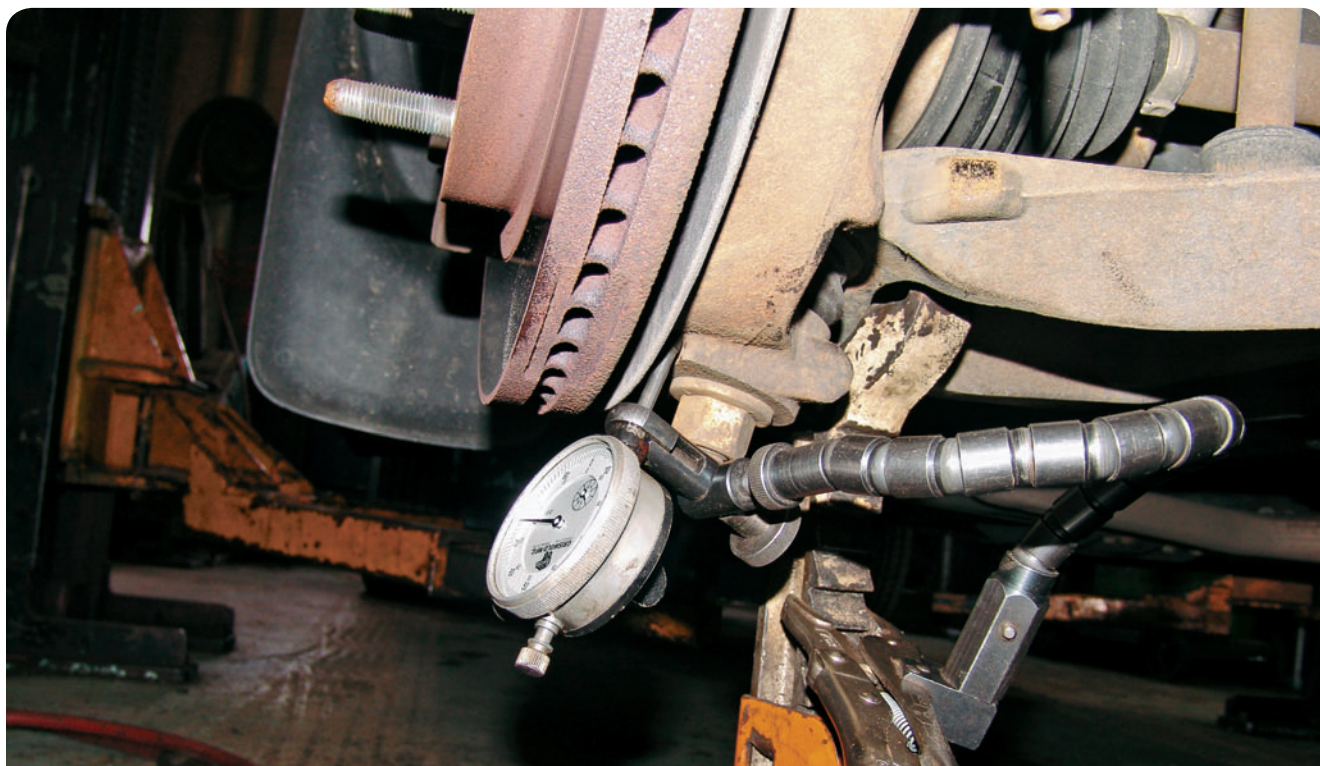
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MECHANICAL  IN FOCUS

Bent into Shape

Old Man Winter brings plenty of front-end damage into your shop. Here are some tips for improving efficiency and revenue with these vehicles.



Using the proper technique for measuring ball joints is critical to find hidden damage and wear.

IMAGE: ALEIN MOORE

BY **DONNY SEYFER** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Drivers across this nation's Snow Belt are using curbs to slow themselves down when bald tires or last-second brake mashing does not. These repairs can be nice for improving cycle time averages and revenue — if you catch all the damage early on in the repair.

My preference on this type of damage is to get the car on an alignment rack and inspect for obviously bent parts. If there is nothing visible beyond a damaged wheel and poor steering, the alignment machine gives you a perfect opportunity to take a few measurements and pick up items that are not so easy to see.

Let's look into some measurements that will help you spot problems before going to the trouble to set up your frame machine. (Keep in mind that I am a mechanical guy who does quite a bit of work for collision shops.)

The front-end inspection

Starting with the vehicle on its tires, have an assistant move just the freeplay in the steering system and identify anything moving before the wheels begin to turn. Don't forget to look at the steering coupler as a possible place for movement when you are inspecting tie rods, center links, idler arms, Pitman arms and steering gear. You may identify some customer pay work beyond the accident, but you have to note and address everything or you will not get good results from your final alignment.

BRINGING THE NOISE

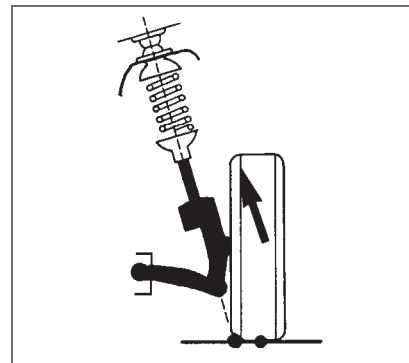
I want to offer a couple of other items that make my collision friends crazy: vibration and noises.

Vibration: Often in a curb hit, you have 1,000 lbs. of drivetrain with a lot of inertia sitting on rubber mounts. If a suspension cradle can move, doesn't it make sense that drivetrain mounts can, too? Be sure to inspect the mounts for damage, and if you have to move a cradle or replace a mount, don't be surprised if there is a buzz or vibration afterward on front wheel drive cars. Many carmakers have procedures for loosening up the mounts and settling the whole drivetrain to resolve these problems. You will find that Honda, Ford and Saturn all have a procedure when you replace mounts to remove bind in them. Vibrations can also be caused by missed wheel weights that came off, broken cords in tires that have hit curbs or potholes, or hidden damage to wheel bearings.

Noise: Let's face it, we work in a noisy world and most of our

customers don't — so we have to be extra aware of noises when we are doing suspension repair. Those clunks, knocks and rattles can really irritate customers, but can be hard to track down.

Noises that are of the "rattle" variety generally are not caused by a loaded part like a control arm, steering component or ball joint, where clunks and knocks are more common. Suspension rattles are generally from a component like a sway bar link (particularly the type that bolt to the strut, and then the sway bar) and inside the strut itself. We have found that many of the strut type sway bar links will rattle if they are installed with an impact — and are another item that happens to be overlooked or damaged during service. Using a hex key to hold the stud while hand tightening the nut is the right way to address the issue. Those upper strut mounts can also contribute to turning noises if they are damaged.




erally indicated by being close to correct total camber — but both sides are off by a similar amount, with one side being more negative and the other more positive. Many alignment machines have K member procedures to dial this back in for you.

This is where it is important to inspect each of the suspension pick-up points for damage or bent mounts prior to going through the procedure. We see this problem often, and even if the car is "in the green," it will not track as well as it should or have good tire wear if this is not addressed. This problem also can occur on the rear of some cars where bolt-in cross-members are used.

Using SAI

Alignment equipment has a useful additional angle that can be used as a diagnostic angle, known as Steering Axis Inclination, or SAI (see image above). Many vehicles do not have specs for SAI, but we can still use it to compare side-to-side measurements and locate problems with steering knuckles or damaged parts we might not have seen.

SAI is the measurement of the angle of the steering pivot line. Simply put, SAI causes some lift in the front of the vehicle when the wheels are turned and uses the weight of the vehicle to return the wheels to center. If a vehicle is sluggish returning and all of the other angles look good, you'd better measure SAI. In fact, check it whenever you have a wheel contact something.

By now, you have done a thorough inspection of the front steering and most of the suspension components. In major accidents, there are other things to inspect, but I am guessing you will have to address other damage before you employ my alignment machine approach. 

Once you have the freeplay wear identified, have your assistant move the steering so that the wheels are turning a little each way. Carefully inspect steering components that looked good before to make sure they are OK with the additional load of turning the tires. Keep in mind we are doing this with the vehicle on the wheels.

Inspect all of the control arm bushings, strut mounts and connecting hardware. If you identify any noises or squeaks, use a stethoscope to pinpoint the noisy component.

Ball joints are a very important part of an inspection, but you have to inspect and test them according to manufacturer's procedure. It is no longer viable to tilt the tire at the 6 and 12 o'clock positions and call that a ball joint inspection: Many late-model vehicles have deflection specs less than 1mm on lower joints, and even less on upper joints.

One common problem with curb hits or objects striking a wheel is damage to the hub or hub bearing. It may be

necessary to remove the wheel and measure runout on the hub with a magnetic or clamp-on micrometer. Again, don't guess — there are specs for these items.

On strut cars, unless there is a significant change in the static camber it may be hard to visually inspect them. The most common damage occurs to the shaft or strut mount. Sometimes moving the wheel through its turning arc will show you a bent strut as the strut binds or makes an unnatural arc through the travel, but the best way to catch a bent strut is with the alignment machine. What we are looking for is that the camber on each side is pretty close to equal. If you have a radical difference side to side, you may have strut damage.

This condition is certainly not exclusive to bent struts. If you see that the total camber is pretty close to spec, but both sides are not equal, look for a possible problem with a bolt in X or K member having moved under the car on impact. This type of problem is gen-

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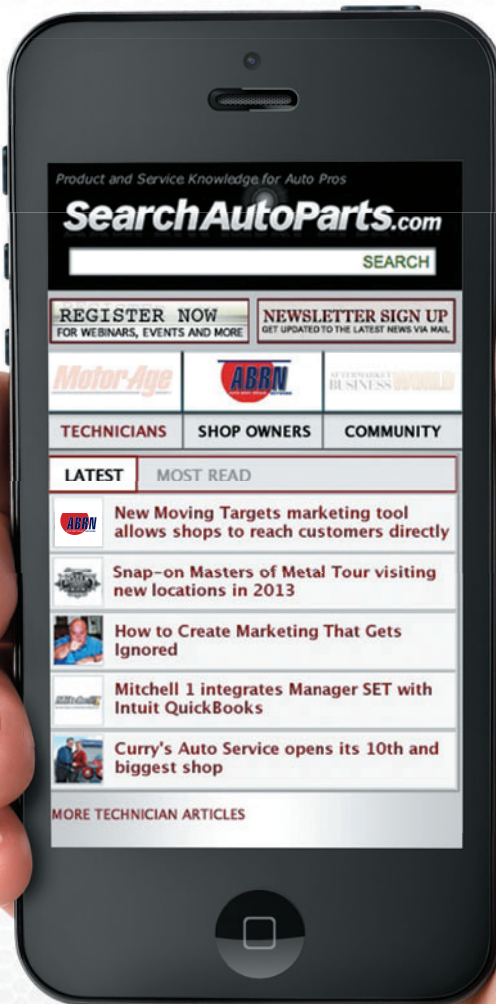
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<input type="checkbox"/> BENDPAK INC.	13-14, 43-44	<input type="checkbox"/> KIA	5, 23	<input type="checkbox"/> SOUTHERN POLYURETHENES INC.	37
<input type="checkbox"/> BLOWTHERM USA	29	<input type="checkbox"/> MAXZONE	33	<input type="checkbox"/> STECK MANUFACTURING CO.	35
<input type="checkbox"/> CERTIFIED AUTO PARTS ASSOCIATION	9	<input type="checkbox"/> NAPA	CV4	<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. CHEMICAL & PLASTICS	27
<input type="checkbox"/> CHEMSPEC USA	49	<input type="checkbox"/> NISSAN MOTOR CORP. USA	CV3	<input type="checkbox"/> VALSPAR AUTOMOTIVE GROUP	39

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MANUFACTURER • Product	Page #	MANUFACTURER • Product	Page #
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T H E L A S T D E T A I L [✓]



he new year is here, and with it comes a good chance to make some changes — in some cases, long-awaited changes — in our industry. Here's my wish list for what I'd like to see happen in the coming 12 months.

1 We need everyone involved in this industry to agree that safe and proper repair of every vehicle is more important than cycle time or severity. As I said at my keynote address at NACE, a study following the 1986 Space Shuttle Challenger disaster found that a culture at NASA of "relaxing safety standards to meet financial and time constraints" set the stage for that failure. In some ways, insurer pressures to improve cycle time and reduce severity have forced repairers to be better business people (regardless of whether that was the intention). But too much emphasis on cycle time and severity can lead to more important things being compromised. Some procedures, like zero-point calibrations on many newer import vehicles, have to be done regardless of what effect it has on cycle time or severity. If we forego necessary procedures because we're being graded based on cycle time, severity or the number of lines on the estimate, we're going to have a catastrophic event just like NASA did.

2 We need an interface that will allow the vendors that sell us parts (the OEM dealers, primarily) to export their invoices directly into our shop management systems. This system would update all invoice data, including the correct parts numbers and prices. That would save us countless hours keying in or posting that information.

3 I'd like to see Toyota's "predictive estimating" become a reality in 2014, with other automakers offering something similar for their vehicles. Toyota's system (showcased with Mitchell at SEMA) requires the user only to select the damaged portions of the vehicle (left front fender, for example), and all items related to that section of the vehicle are automatically listed — including one-time-use fasteners, necessary information labels, and procedures such as color sand and polish (with a link to the related Toyota published documentation). The system helps ensure estimates are complete based on the automakers' prescribed procedures. That reinforces the first item on my list: safe and proper repair of every vehicle.

4 I'd like U.S. insurers to follow the lead of some Canadian insurers by allowing I-CAR Gold Class shops with highly

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ANNUAL WISH LIST

Here's what we should all resolve to make happen in 2014

trained technicians to include a flat dollar amount as a line item on estimates for training. If insurers are serious about wanting shops to get training, that's something they should embrace.

5 Those fixing cars and light trucks have much of the OEM information they need to do so, but I'd like to see a mandate requiring that RV and heavy-duty truck manufacturers share repair information with the shops working on those vehicles.

6 It's time for more automakers with shop certification programs to work together. Let's avoid a shop having to buy, for example, four different welders to meet the requirements of various programs. Just give us the specs the welder has to meet and let us find the welder we prefer that meets those specs.

7 I'd like the estimating system providers to implement a formula for feather, prime and block. It's not as variable as they claim, and could be a consistent labor time based on square footage or a percentage of the repair time. We need this to happen, and for insurers to consistently pay for it and quit trying to tell us no one else charges for it. We've been having this discussion far too long.

8 Speaking of the above, could 2014 please mark the end of insurers using the tired old refrain of "You're the only one who..."? If nothing else, insurance companies, please come up with some new excuse. You've sounded like a broken record for 30 years, and no one believes it anymore.

9 Perhaps most of all in 2014, I'd like to see all collision repairers (and their associations) work together on some of these items. These are not DRP vs. non-DRP issues. There are DRP shops that do great work and some that don't, just as there are some non-DRP shops that do great work and some that don't. At the end of the day, safety and proper repairs should trump everything.

That alone would make 2014 the best year yet for our industry. 📶

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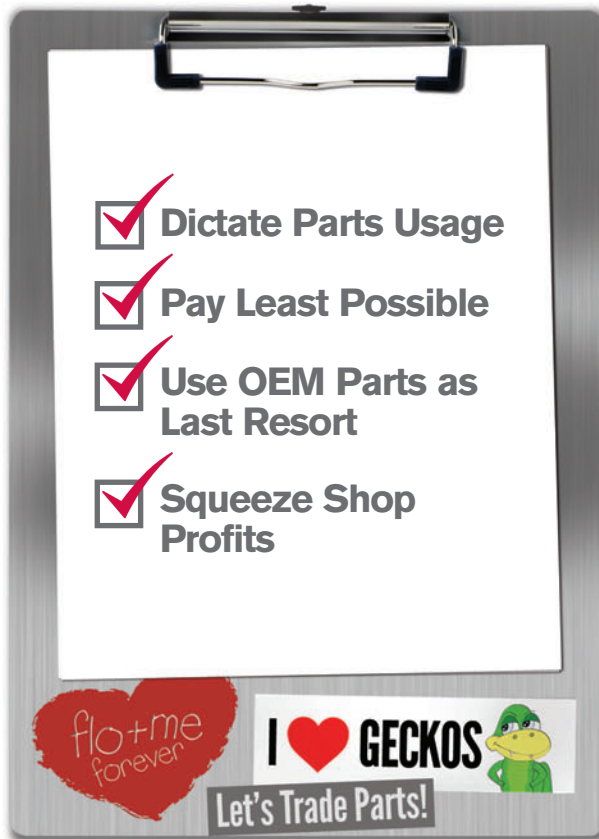
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