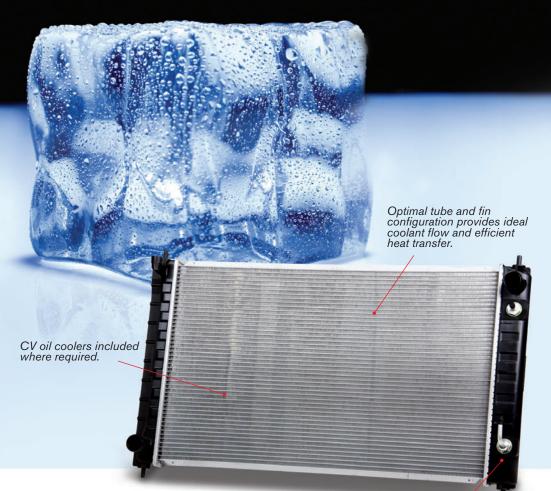




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BY JIM COMPTON

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### GM PRICING PLATFORM LAUNCH PUSHED TO EARLY 2015

After first announcing, then pausing the release of MyPriceLink.com, a new parts pricing tool, GM says it now will reschedule the launch for early 2015.

»» ABRN.COM/GMLAUNCH

### NISSAN INTRODUCES Consumer Referral Program

Nissan has launched a consumer-focused referral initiative for its Nissan Certified Collision Repair Providers. *» ABRN.COM/NISSANREFERRAL* 

### CCC RELEASES PARTS SHOPPING

CCC Information Services has launched Parts Shopping, a new ONE Touch feature that delivers parts pricing transparency and the ability to buy parts during the estimating process. *»» ABRN.COM/CCCSHOPPING* 

#### FAULTY AIRBAG RECALL EXPANDS

Automakers, including Nissan and Honda, announced additional airbag recalls for products from Japanese manufacturer Takata. *»» ABRN.COM/TAKATARECALL* 

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Jason Elliott was gifted a 2010 Ford Escape at the Progressive Service Center in Mayfield Heights, Ohio on Nov. 11.

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### NABC, partners honor veterans with largest single-day giveaway

### BY KRISTA MCNAMARA | MANAGING EDITOR

In the largest single-day car giveaway, the National Auto Body Council (NABC), with partners including Progressive and Enterprise, presented 117 military veterans across the country with refurbished vehicles on Nov. 11 in honor of Veterans Day.

Spearheaded by Progressive Group of Insurance Companies, the second annual Keys to Progress is part of NABC's Recycled Rides, a collision industry collaboration to repair and donate vehicles. The 117 vehicles in this year's Keys to Progress is nearly double the 59 vehicles donated from the program last year. Most of the vehicles were provided by Progressive, Insurance Auto Auctions and Copart.

"It is amazing and humbling to see the sacrifices veterans have made and in our little way be able to give something back that can have a big impact on their lives," said Chris Andreoli, corporate claims process director with Progressive.

NABC member repair facilities repaired the vehicles; Enterprise Rent-A-Car donated six months of insurance for each car; 1-800 Charity Cars handled titling; VFWs nationwide identified recipients and VRC Investigations

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## BREAKING NEWS

### LOW-INCOME REGIONS FIGHT HIGH PREMIUMS

## BY **BRIAN ALBRIGHT**

Low-income families face high insurance premiums, even when they have good driving records, says a recent report from the Consumer Federation of America (CFA). The organization conducted an analysis of premium quotes in low-income ZIP codes across the U.S. and found that major carriers are charging in excess of \$500 annually (in some cases, more than several thousand dollars annually) to provide state-mandated coverage in some of the poorest regions of the country.

According to the report, the five largest auto insur-

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#### >> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

#### NABC, PARTNERS HONOR VETERANS

vetted the candidates.

"These gifts will make a significant impact in the lives of these service men and women who have sacrificed much for our country. This generosity from our members exemplifies the professionalism and integrity of our collision industry," says Nick Notte, NABC president. "As an organization, the NABC wants to focus on initiatives that do a really good job of highlighting our member action to show they are stand-up citizens and businesses that care about their communities and are trying to do the right thing."

Since Recycled Rides began in 2007, NABC has donated more than 1,000 vehicles. NABC estimates close to \$4 million worth of vehicles will be donated in 2014.

NABC thanks the following shops for their participation in the 2014 Keys to Progress giveaway: **AZ**: Bell Collision; Desert Mountain Collision; Superstition Body and Paint; **CA**: York Auto Body; Douglas Auto Body; Duane's Body & Paint; Caliber Collision Sacramento-University; Miller Collision Services; Qualtech Auto Collision; **CO**: Ideal CARSTAR; Young's Auto Body; **CT**: Autoworks Collision; Fedor's Auto Body; Pete's CARSTAR of

South Windsor; FL: Stingray Chevrolet; Cannon Automotive Group Collision Center; Atlantic Collision Center; Moby Paint and Body; Rachel's Collision; Contemporary Collision; Tony's Executive Auto Body; Fender Mender; Atlantic Coast Collision; America Auto Collision; Palm Beach Coachworks; Schumacher Body Shop; GA: Maple Street Collision; Kennesaw Mountain Collision: Hendrick Collision; Rick Hendrick Chevorlet; IL: Owners Choice O'Hare; Collision Damage Experts-Addison; IN: Moorehouse Body Shop; ABRA Auto Body & Glass; Collision Cure Inc.; KS: Don's Body Shop; Cable Dahmer Collision; LA: United Collision; Champs Collision; MA: Centerville Auto Body; MD: Sudden Impact Collision; Bob's Auto Collision; Imperial Auto Body; International Collision; MI: Jack Demmer Ford; Gentile's Collision; MN: Crystal Lake Automotive; Superior Service Center; ABRA Auto Body & Glass; MO: CarCraft CARSTAR; ABRA Auto Body & Glass; Mid-America Collision; NE: Great Plains Auto Body; B Street Collision; NJ: Hart's Auto Body; Britland Auto Body; NV: Automall Auto Body & American Auto Body; Winner's Circle Kustom Auto

Body; NY: Goldstein Auto Group; H&V Collision; West Herr Collision; CARSTAR Eastern Hills; OH: Lenny's Collision; First Impressions Collision; Dave Gill Chevrolet; Voss Collision; VIP Auto Body; Excalibur Collision; Xtreme Auto Body & Detail; Jeff Wyler Chevrolet; Joe Morgan Honda Collision Center; OK: Service King Moore; OKC Autoworks; OR: Tran's Auto Body; PA: Brenner Nissan Collision: Noakers Auto Body; Faulkner Collision of West Chester; Grand Sport Auto Body; Tri County Collision; Faulkner Collision of Oxford Valley; Bill Fix Auto Body; Diehl Automotive Group; RI: Choice Collision; TX: Master Auto Craft; Captial Collision Auto Body, Caliber Collision; Advanced Auto Collision; Streamline Auto Collision; Grand Prairie Ford; Service King-Arlington; Toyota of Irving; LMC Collision; Caliber Collision-Spring; Crossroad Collision; V&V Paint and Body; Unique Collision; Cho's Autobody; Mike's Auto Body; United Collision Center; Platinum Collision; The Body Shop; ProCare Collision; UT: ABRA Auto Body & Glass; VA: Lindsay Collision Center; Starks Autobody; WA: Throughbred Collision; WI: ABRA Auto Body & Glass.

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#### LOW-INCOME REGIONS FIGHT HIGH PREMIUMS

ance companies in the U.S. do not make a basic auto insurance policy available to typical safe drivers for less than \$500 per year in more than 2,300 urban and suburban ZIP codes, including more than a third of the nation's lowest-income ZIP codes.

The CFA analyzed 81,000 premium quotes for State Farm, Allstate, Farmers, Progressive, Geico and their affiliates. In 24 of the 50 urban regions examined, there was at least one lower-income ZIP code where annual premiums exceeded \$500 from every major insurer. In nine of these areas (Miami/ Ft. Lauderdale, Detroit, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Tampa/St. Petersburg, Baltimore, Orlando, Jacksonville, Hartford and New Orleans) prices exceeded \$500 in all lower-income ZIP codes.

"Our research raises important questions as to whether state-mandated auto insurance is priced fairly and is affordable for many lower-income Americans," said Tom Feltner, CFA's Director of Financial Services and principal author of the report. "Drivers need a car to get to work or school. High premiums deny economic opportunity and also help explain why so many lower income Americans drive without insurance."

In other reports over the past several years, CFA found that premiums quoted to typical moderate-income good drivers for required liability coverage in select cities were usually in excess of \$500, and sometimes exceeded \$2,000. The reports also found that insurers use rating factors like education and occupation that disadvantage lower- and moderate-income drivers. For the present study, CFA reviewed January 2014 data on premiums charged to a good driver (30-year-old, unmarried woman with a high school diploma, a clerical job, who is a renter with a "fair" credit score) in all U.S. ZIP codes.

In 484 of the 1,377 lower-income ZIP codes, the driver could not purchase minimum required insurance for less than \$500 per year from any of the major insurers. In 140 of those ZIP codes, she could not find a quote less than \$750. In 87 percent of those ZIP codes, the average premium charged by the five insurers was above \$500; in 26 percent of the ZIP codes, the premium exceeded \$1,000; in nine percent of the ZIP codes, the average exceeded \$2,000. In 14 percent of the ZIP codes, one of the major companies quote basic coverage premium that exceeded \$3,000. The majority of drivers in the lowestincome ZIP codes reviewed earn less than \$21,000 per year, which made a \$500 policy a challenge to afford.

CFA has called on federal and state regulators to "help ensure that mandated auto insurance can be afforded by lower-income Americans with good driving records."

The CFA would like to see a federal program mirror a California program that provides minimal liability coverage that costs between \$226 to \$338 per year for drivers who earn less than \$55,000 annually, have cars worth less than \$20,000, and have driven at least three years with a clean record.

Download the CFA report at ABRN.com/CFAReport.

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THE SHOP OWNER

### **COMMUNITY BUSINESS ISSUES**

BY MIKE LEVASSEUR COLUMNIST

mikel@keenanautobody.com

# All about the people

Tools, cars and technology will change; people are the one constant in this business

ake a look at your company's financial statement, and you'll get a good reminder that this business is all about people.

Fifty percent of your company's revenue is labor sales, and it's people who generate 100 percent of labor sales.

That's why we work hard to be an employee-oriented company. Cars will continue to become more complex. Equipment and tools will change. Technology will evolve. But

you're never going to replace the human element of what we do.

So you have to make sure you take care of the people you have. It's essential to develop the proper culture so you can attract and retain good people.

A philosophy I've learned and used is to treat people as if they're about to give their two-week notice before quitting. Think about it: The last time someone gave you their notice, you probably did one of two things. You might have told them, "Okay, thanks for giving notice, but you don't have to work out the two weeks: ao ahead and leave now, and I wish you well." That's a sign you should have already fired them even before they gave notice.

**"BEING A PEOPLE-ORIENTED BUSINESS INVOLVES MORE** THAN JUST PAY. **EMPLOYEES LOOK** FOR AND APPRECIATE SIGNS OF CONTINUOUS **IMPROVEMENT. EVIDENCE THAT YOU ARE REINVESTING IN** THE COMPANY AND **PROVIDING A CLEAN. SAFE AND PRODUCTIVE** WORK ENVIRONMENT."

Alternatively, your other response to someone giving their notice might be to say, "Look, what's it going to take to keep you here?" In some cases, that might mean you end up giving them more money. But if you develop the philosophy of treating people





as if they're about to give you their two-week notice, you would have already given that deserving employee the raise.

That's a message I preach to all of our managers.

But being a people-oriented business involves more than just pay. Employees look for and appreciate signs of continuous improvement, evidence that you are reinvesting in the company and providing a clean, safe and productive work environment. Whether it's training or new equipment or just upgrades to our shop appearance, we're constantly doing something to help ensure we're always improving.

Being a people-oriented business involves a good benefits package for employees. We offer a 401(k) program with company contributions, supplemental insurance opportunities and, at least through this year, single health care for every employee. That requires really digging into it and making sure you are getting the best possible care with the least amount of expense out of their pocket. Like many of you, we are hearing about significant jumps in health insurance premiums this year; more than a 25 percent increase in your second biggest cost after payroll is a challenge. So we're doing the best we can to battle for good, affordable healthcare for our employees.

Another way to be an employee-oriented company is to hire within. This fall as we prepared to purchase another shop, we already had three good candidates within our company who we could chose from to manage that new shop. We received applications from outside our company, but we never entertained them, knowing we would be hiring from within.

That career path within the company is something employees see and appreciate. I always tell employees to be working to work themselves out of a job. If, as a manager, for example, you work to get someone else trained to do what you do, you're going to move up in the company because that person can take your spot.

I truly believe it's the employee-oriented companies that, no matter what their size, will succeed in our industry.



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

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THE CONSULTANT

### **COMMUNITY BUSINESS ISSUES**

BY TONY PASSWATER | COLUMNIST

Tony.Passwater@aeii.net

# Fear, greed and rock-n-roll

What will drive your business decisions in 2015?

s we enter 2015, the halfway point of this decade, it is time to ask yourself: "What will drive my business decisions this year?" It would seem that sound business decisions should be made with careful analysis and logical approaches, but for the most part they are not, and this seems to be disproportionately a truism of our industry. But why?

Not discounting spiritual convictions and government regulations/requirements, there are three main drivers most business decisions are influenced by: fear, greed and rock-n-roll. Why do analysis and logic take a backseat to these three, and which of these drive you?

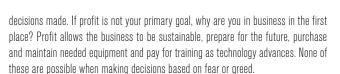
Fear seems the most significant driver for business decisions, and has been for many decades. This includes fear of what happens if you say, "No"; fear of loss; fear of reprisal; fear of steering; fear of not being able to survive, and the list can go on and on. But most fears are simply the fear of the unknown, or the perceived future from the decision. I have talked and worked with shop owners and managers worldwide, and this thinking is as common as a dollar bill in our industry. It is unfortunate, because it is unfounded and based on emotion or flawed logic. But again, why be confused by the facts a logical decision process will provide?

"THERE ARE THREE MAIN DRIVERS MOST BUSINESS DECISIONS ARE INFLUENCED BY: FEAR, GREED AND ROCK-N-ROLL."

The next is greed, and in this case does not mean you are trying to corner the market to put everyone out of business. It means making decisions that affect your financial future, as well as others, only for the short-term gain, while not considering long-term effects, and taking the "I don't care about anyone but myself" approach.

Every business doing the right things has the right to earn a profit. This is not a guaranteed outcome, but based on how the business is managed and the results of the

JUST SCAN IT



So how does rock-n-roll have any affect on your decisions? To start, take a look at the history of rock-n-roll. When it first entered the music scene, it was demonized and many radio stations refused to play it. There was a strong resistance by many status quo organizations and individuals that liked music as it was, and made false claims in an attempt to prevent it. Do you remember there was even censorship of Elvis Presley shaking his hips? However, even with the attempted suppression and false claims, there was a bigger movement that could not be stopped. This eventually changed music forever.

This process of change also can be associated with a concept called herd behavior. When one is doing something that is contrary to the rest, it is easily suppressed and attacked. But when the group continues to grow, the herd grows and many begin to follow and make decisions based on the momentum that is seen.

In the case of rock-n-roll, it was bigger than the entities that attempted to stop it. Those involved in the music believed in this new style of music, and now it is accepted and has influenced music of all types.

Today we are seeing a rock-n-roll change taking place in our industry. The Movement, as it is deemed, is gaining momentum and size, and will change the collision industry as much as rock-n-roll changed music. So many states and shop owners are standing up and working together to take back control of our industry so decisions can be made for the right reasons and the protection of the real customer – the vehicle owners.

In 2015, take a look at The Movement at www.SafeCars.us, and then remove the fear that has driven our decisions for over 25 years. The music will never be the same again.  $\blacksquare$ 



Tony Passwater, president of AEII, has been in the collision industry since 1972.

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THE FUTURIST

### **COMMUNITY BUSINESS ISSUES**

BY GREG HORN COLUMNIST

greg.horn@mitchell.com

# Simplification of manufacturing

Globalization of cars is good news for collision repairers

**"GLOBALIZATION** 

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eneral Motors made the stunning announcement in early October that they would shift over the next 10 years from 26 global vehicle production platforms to just four by the year 2025.

That massive undertaking could eventually save the U.S. automaker many billions of dollars in production costs. Skeptics may see this as the badge engineering GM was famous for - a tactic that culminated in the 1980s with

the Cadillac Cimarron, a re-badged Chevrolet Cavalier that few believed was a true Cadillac. GM tried it again with the Cadillac Catera, a rebadged Opel product that also failed to impress targeted buyers. But this current shift goes beyond simple cosmetic and badge changes. It will be a complete consolidation of GM's unibody and body-on frame offerings around the world.

The goal is to simplify the engineering and manufacturing of GM's future cars and trucks, and should

allow the company to deliver new vehicles more quickly to customers around the world. If they pull it off, GM can save on components, tooling and other manufacturing-related expenses.

GM is not alone in the desire to reduce the number of platforms underpinning their global offerings. Volkswagen, Ford and Toyota have similar goals, and auto industry experts believe that as few as 10 global platforms will be the basis for 30 million vehicles by 2018. Volkswagen's MQB platform, for example, will be the underpinnings for a whopping 41 vehicle models around the globe. MQB is an acronym for Modularer Querbaukasten, which roughly translates to modular transverse matrix. It will be the basic construction platform for small and midsize sedans and crossovers for Volkswagens and Audis. After that, the MSB platform

Modularer Standard Baukasten (modular standard platform) will debut in the next-generation Porsche Panamera, the next-gen Bentley Continental and a planned new VW Phaeton.

### What is the benefit to collision repairers?

When producing world platforms and then in turn maximizing the models derived from those platforms, automakers save money by producing many more of the identical parts to serve multiple models. This approach helps collision shops in two ways. First, OEM-specific repair techniques for high-tech alloys and panels that require unique assembly methods and materials will be consistent across the platform. So it stands to reason that adhesive bonding procedures for a new VW Jetta will be the same as for an Audi. This should increase the familiarity of the OEM repair procedures and reduce the time a technician needs to learn the proper procedure for each model's specific component replacement. The biggest advantage to these shared platforms is the shared structural and mechanical components. When inner structures are shared, the reconstruction processes will be the same as for Porsches and Audis and even Bentleys, which will share the same MSB platform.

The second advantage is that certain parts such as sub-frames, rails and suspension components can be produced in larger numbers. That will allow amortization over a longer lifespan, lowering the per part production costs. Clips, fasteners, airbags and ABS brake components will also benefit from this global platform standardization. Hopefully, this will mean these parts will have reasonable prices. Since parts are such a large part of the cost of an estimate (they account for 45 percent of a repairable estimate according to our most recent study) this will lead to more repairable vehicles.

Clearly, globalization of cars will benefit the collision repairer, eventually. Right now, we have 239 million vehicles on the road, and sell about 16 million new vehicles in a year. So it will take a while before we start to see a large number of these globalized vehicles on the road and in the body shop.



Greg Horn is vice president of industry relations for Mitchell International.

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### **PROFIT MOTIVE:** YOUR COMPASS TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS

# **Finding future technicians**

Know where to find technicians and how to train them to ensure industry longevity

### BY TOM MCGEE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

couldn't tell you how many times I've heard: "I've been doing this for more than 20 years, and I know how to create a damage report, repair plan or perform the repairs." Today we have many highly qualified individuals working in the collision industry.

However, vehicle manufacturing and construction methods, new materials, accessories and safety systems have made it impossible for anyone to remember everything they need to know about how to repair every vehicle. Today, we must provide continuing education and documented repair procedures for technicians doing the repairs and for those preparing the damage reports and repair plans. We also need to be preparing people for careers in the industry.

We look at the financial performance and key performance indicators from many shops across the country every month. As we have discussions with owners and managers, finding staff, technician skills, labor rates and margins and productivity become common themes of the conversations. While all are critical to shop success, let's look at finding technicians.

### **Current staffing**

**OPERATIONS** 

In just about every survey you read about the collision industry, the average age of technicians is increasing. The 2013 Collision Repair Education Foundation survey shows an average age at 38.7 years old, up from 35.5 in 1995. Other statistics in the survey show that almost 20 percent were hired from a non-automotive industry or as their first job. Just less than 8 percent were hired from a related automotive industry. These figures have not changed significantly from previous surveys. Twelve percent were hired directly from a technical school program, up from 7 percent in 2007.

### Technical schools, colleges

Although the survey shows that 12 percent of technicians were hired directly from a career and technical school or college, I find that shop owners are not sure where to look for these new graduates. I direct them to the I-CAR website (ABRN.com/Schools) and show them the list of approximately 250 career and technical schools and colleges that utilize I-CAR curriculum. So not only do their graduates have collision repair training, they may have already earned credits that can help the shop qualify for the I-CAR Gold Class designation.

Another source shop owners may not be familiar with is the National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF). While NATEF utilizes industry experts to maintain a current list of national skills and equipment standards, I encourage shops to utilize the NATEF website to find schools that are ASE certified to NATEF standards (ABRN.com/Accredited). This site allows the user to search for schools at both the secondary and postsecondary levels by state or by a radius around their specific location.

### First jobs

I find the results that almost 20 percent were hired from a non-automotive industry or as

their first job very promising for the future of the industry. We need to continue to bring young adults into this industry. If you have a young adult that has a good attitude, wants to learn and shows up for work on time every day, then spend some time and create a training plan for them.

### **Apprentice training**

When you assign an entry-level technician to a more experienced technician, have a plan that includes specific tasks to be performed. Organize your training plan to include a sequence of learning objectives. For example:

Task identification

• Demonstration. The mentor makes sure the apprentice knows exactly what the learning target looks like (e.g., via modeling, visual supports, etc.).

• Perform with instruction. The mentor invites the apprentice to participate as a collaborator as much as possible.

• Perform with inspections. The apprentice performs specific steps within the task with the mentor having periodic checkpoints to ensure successful completion and provide coaching as necessary.

• Perform with completed inspection. The apprentice performs the task with the mentor having a final inspection to ensure successful completion and provide coaching.

• The apprentice acts independently only when fully ready to do so.

### Task list and tracking

If we develop a specific list of tasks for the apprentice and mentor to complete, we increase the likelihood of success. We have created a worksheet for you to help design a plan for apprentices. Try it free for a limited time by going to www.ationlinetraining.com/abrn1412. It also makes a great communication tool for your staff providing the mentoring.







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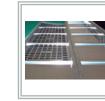
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Pictured (left to right): Marty Westfall, Gary Rice, Tim Busch, Mary Jane Russo, Kalvin Riddle-Lash, Chuck Gentry, Paula McRedmond, Mark Grice, William Mansfield, Chase Dolan, Andrew Meffert, Brad Crow, Lee Bock, Michelle Perren, Scott Rooney, Dave Abrams, Jenn Hildebrand, Adam Kapis, Jeff Utz, Scott Kimmel, Mike Kapis, and our owner Tom Griffin.



### **NEW WAYS OF THINKING AND A FOCUS ON PEOPLE DRIVE SHOP SUCCESS**

### BY TIM SRAMCIK, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

dwin Land, the co-founder of Polaroid, once said that businesses don't need new ideas. They need to "stop having old ones."

Implementing new thinking is a

necessary part of every business's success. Land's point was that discarding old notions also provides significant benefits. In some cases, that means working from a fresh sheet of paper.

This approach sums up the success behind the 2014 Top Shops winner, May-

field Collision Centers. Sitting just south of Lake Erie, with two locations in the Cleveland suburbs of Bedford Heights and South Euclid, the 25-year-old business generates more than \$9.1 million in annual revenue utilizing a combination of cutting-edge technical services





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and a continuous focus on pleasing customers and employees.

While most successful shops use this formula, Mayfield diverted from the business trajectory of a traditional collision shop by putting the latter part of this equation the forefront. From its beginning in 1989, Mayfield focused first on people, then built the rest of its operation — notably, the repairs themselves — on this concept.

Decades later, this strategy has proven itself a game winner. Mayfield continues to sustain remarkable growth and garner both local and national accolades. In just the past year, Mayfield increased revenue, added employees, was recognized by NorthCoast 99 (a professional human resources organization) as one of Ohio's 99 best workplaces, helped lead a Coyote Vision group, assisted at a number of vocational/technical schools, was active in multiple local Chambers of Commerce and looked forward to opening a new facility for certified aluminum repairs on luxury vehicles.

They've got their sights set on a bright future, with a few interesting twists.

### **Fresh beginnings**

Mayfield owner Tom Griffin shares a commonality with many Top Shops winners in that his entry in the collision industry was somewhat accidental. "When I was 13, my stepfather took me to a gas station and said 'you're going to work here pumping gas," Griffin explains.

At 19, after graduating from Castle Heights Military Academy in Lebanon, Tenn., Griffin returned to the industry as a service writer. Over the next 15 years, Griffin served in a range of service and management roles for new vehicle dealers until being named the assistant general manager of a progressively run Honda dealership.

Wanting to own a dealer business,

he invested in an independent dealership (that included mechanical and collision service departments) in the late 1980s with plans to take advantage of the growing auto leasing trend.

Unfortunately, his timing couldn't have been worse. During that same period, many new vehicle dealers dove into leasing as new car sales slumped among rising prices and a sputtering economy. With that part of his business flagging, Griffin looked to build his mechanical and radiator repairs, but the sudden rise in national repair outlets and independent franchises significantly depleted the available repair market.

Griffin's remaining option was building his dealership's collision repair department, which needed to improve if his business was to survive. With experience in customer service and not the repairs themselves, Griffin leveraged those skills to build his business, which became Mayfield Collision Center. He took advantage of his knowledge of CSI and his experience with Honda's customer-centric business model to appeal to customers.

"At one time, most shop owners had been technicians," Griffin explains. "Those skills don't necessarily translate into being an effective owner."

Technical knowledge, Griffin says, was (and is) no longer a "market differentiator." Many shops provide excellent repairs. What makes a collision repair business successful is its ability to please customers, whether they be motorists or insurers.

Using this approach, Griffin had to place significant trust in those who performed the technical work, as he didn't have the knowledge to do it himself. Griffin made a point of hiring capable, trustworthy employees who would fully "buy in" to his business's approach and consistently demonstrate respect to-



Mayfield's new aluminum repair facility, set to open by yearend, makes the business just one of two shops in Ohio to receive Jaguar and Land Rover repair certification.

**SHOP NAME** 

Mayfield Collision Centers

OWNER Tom Griffin

MAIN LOCATION 4182 Mayfield Road South Euclid, Ohio

#### LOCATIONS

2 — Bedford Heights and South Euclid, plus an aluminum repair center

#### BAYS 28, including detail bays and prep areas

ANNUAL REVENUE \$9.1 million

AVERAGE VEHICLES PER WEEK 105

AVERAGE REPAIR TICKET \$1,680

WEBSITE

www.mayfieldcollisioncenter.com

wards customers and other employees. The advantage of this setup was the empowerment given to employees to make decisions on their own that they feel best serve the customer. This helped ensure happy customers and reinforced the importance of employee commitment to business success.

It's worked out so well that Griffin's shop can run without his presence. "I was out for months recovering from surgery," he says. "The business didn't miss a beat. That's how great these folks are."

#### **Employee excellence**

Mayfield faces the same challenges as any shop including finding quality new hires or retaining long-time employees. Griffin hires almost exclusively through referrals, whether from employees or other stakeholders, such as insurers. The shop also places considerable importance on attitude and takes on new employees as they become available, instead of waiting until a position opens.

Once hired, Griffin says employees can — and do — go wherever their abilities take them. Last year, the shop promoted 40 of its top performers.

Mayfield sees to it that its staff has the training and tools needed to meet industry challenges. In the past two







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years, the shop spent \$57,000 on tools and small equipment. Last year, the shop spent an average of \$712 per employee on training, with top performers receiving an average of \$1,790. This year, the shop invested \$38,000 on training and development, becoming I-CAR Gold Class certified at both locations.

Griffin says one his shop's tenets is that its Employee Satisfaction Index (ESI) is of equal importance to its CSI. The business continually looks for more ways to ensure employees are satisfied with their employment.

Those who make extraordinary efforts also have the opportunity to be recognized by other workers as part of Mayfield's Shout Out program. Once nominated, employees receive gift certificates worth \$25-\$50. Recent recipients include three employees (two of whom were managers) who stayed over following 10-hour shifts to repair a ceiling in the aluminum repair center.

Griffin says employees don't take these step looking to gain recognition or prizes, but do so because they want to contribute. He points to a potential future recipient who was praised in a customer's letter for helping her find a way to afford repairs following a job loss.

"I wasn't even aware this happened," says Griffin. "He did everything in his power to help a customer because that's what he does every day."

Mayfield takes similar efforts to empower all customers to make repair decisions for themselves. Griffin says far from attempting to upsell services, his business prefers to arm customers with knowledge. For example, estimators will note work, such as scratch repairs, that can be done, but is upfront with costs and never tries to push sales. The shop's goal is to make Mayfield "easy to do business with."

The same philosophy applies to Mayfield's marketing efforts, particularly its online programs. The shop's website (www.mayfieldcollisioncenter.com) is simply but effectively designed to give customers easy access to information. This includes company information, along with videos, shop news and reviews. The site's Autowatch feature allows customers to log in and view their vehicle being repaired.

Mayfield refuses to purchase online ads, preferring instead to grow web traffic through site content and social media campaigns. "We don't want to be the spam that ends up in someone's email," says Marketing Manager Cheryl Senko.

Senko notes that Autowatch has been particularly effective in increasing traffic due to its popularity. The steady traffic drives up the shop's search engine optimization results. It's also helped differentiate Mayfield from competitors.

In a single 30-day period, these combined measures produced 1,617 site visits by 693 visitors viewing 3,094 pages.

Social media campaigns on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter further highlight shop news and drive traffic to the shop site, while engaging customers and employees. Senko says these efforts also have proven effective in building relationships with Mayfield stakeholders, especially nearby dealers who send the shop a significant portion of its business.

Mayfield also reaches out to its local community with a host of charitable efforts. The business participates in 3M's Hire Our Heroes program, refurbished a Bedford Heights Police K-9 Cruiser and conducted a safe-driving golf-cart obstacle course in conjunction with local police to illustrate



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the dangers of distracted driving.

They remain the only local collision repair shop selected to participate in GuitarMania, a public art project that has raised \$2 million for United Way of Greater Cleveland and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum education programs. Mayfield places clearcoat on these artistic creations, most of which sit in downtown Cleveland near the Hall of Fame, to ensure they last. This past year, employees created two unique guitars for South Euclid and Bedford Heights to honor police and fire workers.

### **Future plans**

When Mayfield completes its aluminum repair facility, the shop will become only the second in Ohio to be certified for aluminum repairs on Jaguar and Land Rover vehicles. Mayfield's investment in the facility has been substantial. Griffin says renovating the facility has cost



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877.934.9230 | www.theInductor.com/promax Patents 6670590, 6563096, others pending \$250,000 with another \$250,000 spent on tools and equipment. He doesn't expect to recoup those costs anytime soon from aluminum work, especially since the pool of applicable models in the area is relatively small.

Other revenue sources will instead cover the investment. Griffin says dealers selling these models also sell more popular vehicles such as BMWs. Being able to service all those vehicles will keep Mayfield an attractive option for referrals from those dealers. "It keeps us easy to do business with," says Griffin.

Aluminum repairs also maintains the shop's popularity with DRPs looking to send work to a repairer that already has earned their trust. The facility looks to play a key role in sustaining Mayfield's continued growth.

Griffin has taken another a significant additional step in securing the business's future. He's started a rigorous six-month strategic business planning course through the Council of Smaller Enterprises (COSE). The course is designed to help owners take their business to its next development stage.

Griffin says this education is important for two reasons. One, he believes in taking advantage of every opportunity to become a better owner, manager and trainer. Even with more than 40 years of experience, Griffin says there's always room to improve.

Second, the education will aid him as he transitions the business into its next stage — when he steps aside. Griffin isn't going to walk away from his business tomorrow but says he's "nearing the goal line." His daughters don't want to pursue a career in the industry, so eventually someone else will have to take the shop's reins. He isn't looking for a big payday from a potential buyer. Rather, Griffin is preparing the business to continue taking care of the people who have cared for it for so long.

"There are 56 people — families counting on this business, " says Griffin. "Some commute from an hour away and pass a number of other shops to work here."

The plan is to keep them and the shop's customers coming back for a long time. Based on Mayfield's track record, look for that plan to be as exceptional as it is successful.  $\mathbf{M}$ 



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# DESERT BLOOM

New Mexico shop grabs market share with unique marketing, investments in technology

### BY TIM SRAMCIK, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

hile much of the collision industry is intent on growth through multiple locations, some shops have found that a single standalone model also offers plenty of potential. Take Car Crafters, an Albuquerque, New Mexico shop and multiple Top Shop finalist that grabs market share every year with its expansive 70,000-sq.-ft. operation. This past year, the shop's 82 employees used 85 bays to repair an average of 135 vehicles a week and earn \$14 million in revenue. With one of industry's most active, unique marketing programs and steady investment in the latest repair technology, Owner Jim Guthrie hopes for an even bigger 2015.

Guthrie entered the industry as a teenager, working on his friends' cars in his parents' garage. He took a short detour to dental school, but after realizing his heart wasn't into filling molars, he opened Car Crafters in a small shop. "I learned to do every job in the shop through reading and good old trial and error," says Guthrie.

Along the way, Guthrie began looking for new ways to improve the management of the shop and its inventory. He paired up with programmer Curt Jingle to design management software called SIMS, which PPG later purchased. That software is now known as Mitchell ABS Enterprise, and Guthrie says it's his shop's biggest contribution to the industry, though he has





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found other ways to give back.

The shop hosts the Skills USA competition every year, with Guthrie and his staff assisting with instructions and judging. Veteran technician Carl Peet teaches I-CAR classes every Tuesday and Thursday at the shop.

Employees are encouraged to attend those classes, along with other training. The shop pays for all training and recently covered costs for two employees' graduate school degrees.

Employees also have access to a range of new tools and equipment. This year Car Crafters purchased aluminum repair tools such as a welding station, rivet gun and MIG welder that also can be used on steel and silicon bronze. Other purchases included new bench racks, two Car-O-Tronic Vision X3 tools and a Tru-Point Diagnostic System, a camera-based measuring tool that helps locate hidden damage and determines if a repair has returned a vehicle to accurate measurable specs.

Car Crafters prides itself on being at the head of the curve for new repair technologies, but these investments come only after very careful considerations. "We purchase new tools whenever we see a benefit to save time or increase quality in the repairs or process," says Guthrie. "We run numbers for every large equipment purchase. If it doesn't add up, then we don't buy it."

To ensure this technology is used, Car Crafters employs a variety of marketing programs to bring in customers. This past year, the shop upgraded its website (www.carcrafters.com) and online marketing efforts to appeal to a larger pool of prospective customers. The website can be seen across all digital platforms — desktop, phone, tablet and laptop — and now features a popular video incorporated on its "Our Story" page to introduce customers to the business. Car Crafters frequently updates its blog content and also regularly makes changes to the appearance and information on the site to keep it fresh and search engine optimization friendly.

To further drive Web traffic, Car Crafters uses a Google+ page to draw attention to its online reviews, which Guthrie says have helped bring in new clients. The shop's social media collateral create additional interest in the site. Posts on Facebook and Twitter high-



The shop purchased a welding station, rivet gun and MIG welder for its aluminum repair program.

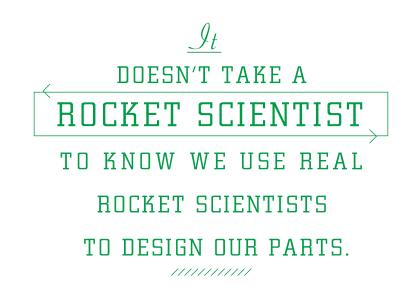
light shop news, while an Instagram page features new photos of the shop and company events. The shop's You-Tube page hosts all of its television commercials and the drift footage it shoots.

Drifting has become the unofficial face of much of Car Crafter's marketing and its community outreach. Every shop television commercial features Guthrie driving his drift cars.

The shop hosts community drifting events where attendees have an opportunity to ride along. This fall it sponsored a Pantera car show benefitting breast cancer awareness. Along with NAPA Auto Care Centers, Car Crafters coordinated a Poker Run to benefit the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund. Other charitable efforts included a silent auction for Paws and Stripes, which provides service dogs for military veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. The shop also donated an all-expenses paid trip to Mexico for two to a silent auction benefiting the Albuquerque Children's Home.

Looking to the future, Guthrie recently announced plans to open a second location in Albuquerque. Early estimates point to a summer 2015 grand opening. This detour from Car Crafter's 32-year-old business model isn't a sign that Guthrie is looking to create the next dynamic MSO. He's mulled over the idea of adding another location for years — if and when the right opportunity presented itself. SHOP NAME **Car Crafters** OWNER Jim Guthrie MAIN LOCATION 600 Montano Road NE Albuquerque NM **NO. OF LOCATIONS NO. OF BAYS** 85 **AVERAGE VEHICLES PER WEEK** 135 AVERAGE REPAIR TICKET \$2,075 ANNUAL REVENUE \$14.5 million WEBSITE www.carcrafters.com

He's also continuing work on a succession plan that will transition Car Crafter's into a second generation shop. Some of his employees already have children now working for the business. Guthrie's wife, who handles accounting and other duties, is training her replacement. He's preparing his son to run the shop, leading the way for a new team of trendsetters when Guthrie someday steps away from the shop. That should keep the eyes of the industry on Albuquerque for a while longer. **M** 





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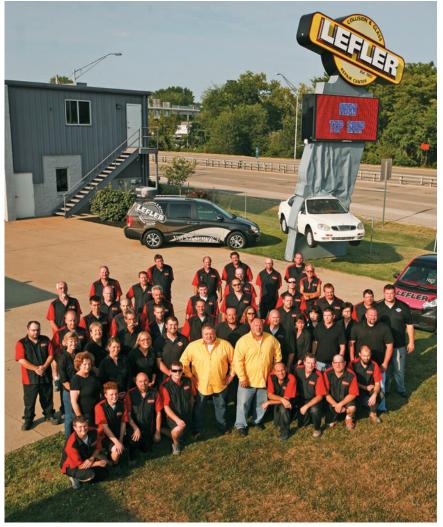
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**TOP SHOPS 2014** 



The entire Lefler Collision and Glass Centers team at the Evansville, Ind., location.

### BY **TIM SRAMCIK**, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

hen ABRN named Mayfield Collision Centers its 2014 Top Shops winner, two things happened. Mayfield posted the good news on its Facebook page. Soon after, last year's Top Shops winner Lefler's Collision and Glass posted its congratulations. Readers and customers familiar with the Evansville, Ind. shop weren't surprised. Lefler's has made a reputation for itself as one of the good guys in the industry — a shop that strives to uphold strong values in quality repairs and caring for its community.

Founded in 1952 by Leroy Lefler and named Leroy's Paint and Fender Repair, the shop was incorporated in 1976 as Lefler Body Shop Inc. by son James. Jimmy grew up working in every position — detailing, parts, repair, paint and management. In 2006, he purchased the remaining stock in the shop to become its sole owner. He then began assembling his own team and putting in place the operation he wanted.

Today, Lefler's Collision and Glass Centers features four locations with 67 employees working in two cities. Its glass business includes Glass Doctor sites in Southern Indiana and Western Kentucky, along with a local glass shop. The collision part of the business repairs an average of 222 vehicles a week, generating more than \$13 million in annual revenue. Lefler's has been





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named a Top Shop every year it has entered the contest, finishing at the top of the industry twice.

The business has gained much notoriety from homegrown operational solutions such as its Claims Processing Unit (CPU). The CPU is manned by employees who process all the paperwork involved with a repair, allowing customer service reps to devote their energy to other customer concerns.

The business also employs lean processes that have effectively cut cycle time by three days and significantly reduced re-dos. Not content with that achievement, Lefler's managers continually hone and update these processes to create more efficiency. In the past two years, Lefler hired a Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) to handle the business's day-to-day activities to give himself the time to focus on big ideas that will transform his operation.

As noteworthy as these accomplishments may be, Lefler's is arguably even better known for the extraordinary efforts it takes to reach out to its community, both locally and around the world. Jimmy and COO Ed Dietz regularly speak to groups — including local companies, schools and civic organizations — on vehicle safety, maintenance and other automotive topics.

Lefler also takes part in the annual "100 Men Who Cook," a community fundraiser that benefits a local charity each year. This year he and other local celebrity personalities and businessmen raised \$104,000 in a single night for the Albion Fellows Bacon Center, which helps abused and battered families.

The shop offers educational outreach seminars, including Meeting Crashers, a corporate speaking seminar, and a Teen Driving Crash Course where the shop partners with the local sheriff's office, a trauma center and an insurance rep. Young drivers learn what to expect on the road and begin a dialogue with their parents on driving.

The business's most popular seminar is its Ladies Night Out event, voted best consumer education program by SHOP NAME Lefler's Collision and Glass Centers

OWNER Jimmy Lefler

MAIN LOCATION 1325 Maxwell Avenue Evansville, Indiana

LOCATIONS 4, plus multiple glass repair sites

YEARS IN BUSINESS

61 BAYS

<mark>92</mark>

AVERAGE REPAIR TICKET \$1.147

AVERAGE VEHICLES PER WEEK
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ANNUAL REVENUE \$13.2 million

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the Car Care Council Women's Board in 2013. This seminar is held 2-3 times per year and regularly attracts over 150 women who learn about vehicle safety, what to do in an accident and the importance of vehicle maintenance.

This month, as part of the non-profit organization Uncharted International, Lefler and several employees will travel to the country of Myanmar to take part in Project Restore. They will help renovate a building that provides medical care and life skill training for children rescued from human trafficking around the world and returned to their homeland. This will be Lefler's ninth trip.

Even with this busy schedule, Lefler found time this year to improve his buisness. He invested over \$500,000 in new paint booths, aluminum welders, aluminum work stations, computer scanners, upgraded compression spot welders, two post lifts and training.

As part of ongoing environmental efforts, they added plastic repairs, expanded their recycling program, converted all stores to waterborne paint systems and replaced their two oldest paint booths with high efficiency models.

Over the past year, Lefler and Dietz worked with Axalta to develop a new continuing education curriculum for the insurance industry. The two traveled to Chicago and Orlando to iron out the wrinkles and have since provided classes to many local agents.

The shop also unveiled a program it believes will take its customer service to the next level. Lefler's Valet Service will pick up and deliver damaged customer vehicles to the shop while a customer service representative drops off the rental vehicle, along with necessary paperwork and contracts. When the work is complete, Lefler's returns the repaired vehicle and picks up the rental, eliminating many of the inconveniences customers face when juggling work, life and a repair.

As for the future, son Josh Lefler has joined the staff. He is the fourth generation of the family to work in the business. Jimmy says having his son there means the shop can continue as



Technician Shawn Powlowski servicing a vehicle at Lefler's Mechanic and Diagnostics shop.

a family business for some time, which should mean more attention-grabbing innovations down the road. It should also make the future competition for Top Shops more interesting as well.





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OWNER: Joe Maslanka MAIN LOCATION: Chicago, Ill. NO. OF SHOPS: 2 NO. OF EMPLOYEES: 47 SQUARE FOOTAGE OF SHOPS: 15,950 VEHICLES PER WEEK (ALL LOCATIONS): 52 AVERAGE REPAIR TICKET: \$1,900 ANNUAL REVENUE: \$5 million WEBSITES: www.a1carstar.com; www.elgincarstar.com

### **CENTRAL COLLISION CENTER**

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OWNERS: Mike and Nancy Caruso MAIN LOCATION: Mokena, Ill. NO. OF SHOPS: 7 NO. OF EMPLOYEES: 89 SQUARE FOOTAGE OF SHOPS: 112,000 VEHICLES PER WEEK (ALL LOCATIONS): 200-225 AVERAGE REPAIR TICKET: \$1,924 ANNUAL REVENUE: \$19 million WEBSITE: www.centralcollision.com

### **CONNER BROTHERS BODY SHOPS**

Virginia's Conner family combines religious beliefs, humor and high standards to provide exceptional customer service. Giving back to the community is also a key business focus.



OWNERS: Douglas G. Conner, Jr.; Kevin Conner, Alan Conner MAIN LOCATION: Midlothian, Va. NO. OF SHOPS: 4 YEARS IN BUSINESS: 38 NO. OF EMPLOYEES: 25 SQUARE FOOTAGE OF SHOPS: 60,000 VEHICLES PER WEEK (ALL LOCATIONS): 350-500 AVERAGE CYCLE TIME: 4.5 days WEBSITE: www.connerbrothers.com





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D-Patrick hosts monthly new customer events to build trust and the service experience. The shop's OE relationships enhace its technology and technique know-how.



OWNERS: Michael O'Daniel and Ray Farabaugh MAIN LOCATION: Evansville, Ind. NO. OF SHOPS: 4 NO. OF EMPLOYEES: 36 SQUARE FOOTAGE OF SHOPS: 51,000 VEHICLES PER WEEK: 75 AVERAGE REPAIR TICKET: \$2,125 ANNUAL REVENUE: \$8.3 million WEBSITE: www.autobodyevansville.com

**TOP SHOPS 2014** 



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### **G&C AUTO BODY**

G&C works in partnership with insurers to bring the customer the best experience possible. Creative marketing measures, like feeding parking meters, boost shop recognition and customer traffic. The shop prioritizes education with two in-house trainers. Teamwork, partnership and customer service are the main goals within G&C, which strives to not only please its customers, but keep its employees happy and secure. Truly a family business, G&C is run by Gene and Teri Crozat and their five children.



**OWNERS:** Gene and Teri Crozat, Shawn Crozat, Joshua Crozat, Jamie Crozat and Patrick Crozat MAIN LOCATION: Santa Rosa, Calif. **NO. OF SHOPS: 10** NO. OF EMPLOYEES: 210 SQUARE FOOTAGE OF SHOPS: 51.000 **VEHICLES PER WEEK** (ALL LOCATIONS): 300 AVERAGE REPAIR TICKET: \$2,500 **ANNUAL REVENUE:** \$39 million WEBSITE: www.gandcautobody.com



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OWNER: Audra Fordin MAIN LOCATION: Flushing, Queens, NY NO. OF SHOPS: 1 YEARS IN BUSINESS: 80 NO. OF EMPLOYEES: 5 SQUARE FOOTAGE: 500 AVERAGE CYCLE TIME: 2.5 days AVERAGE WEEKLY VOLUME: \$5,000 WEBSITE: www.greatbearautoshop.com

**TOP SHOPS 2014** 



### JAKE'S AUTO BODY & TOWING, INC.

Jake's embraces lean production strategies and processes and is committed to getting it right the first time, every time. Personal attention, honesty and quality repairs drive repeat business. Owners John and Karen Hoover lead by example through their focus on customer service, charitable and civic involvement, a team approach and encouraging employees to work with them, not for them, toward success.



**OWNERS:** John and Karen Hoover LOCATION: High Falls, NY NO. OF SHOPS: 1 YEARS IN BUSINESS: 23 **NO. OF EMPLOYEES:** 8 NO. OF BAYS: 12 SQUARE FOOTAGE OF **SHOP:** 9.000 **AVERAGE REPAIR TICKET:** \$2,050 WEBSITE: www.jakesautobody.com





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NABC Executive Director Chuck Sulkala presents Body Shop Image Award plaques to representatives from Caliber Collision in Frisco, Texas (left), and CARSTAR Collision and CARSTAR Fort Collins North, in Dyersburg, Tenn., and Fort Collins, Colo., respectively (right), both runners up in the contest.

#### NABC AWARDS

## NABC RECOGNIZES SHOP, INDIVIDUAL EXCELLENCE

NABC recognizes efforts that exemplify professionalism and integrity within the collision repair industry

#### BY NABC STAFF

our repair facilities and two industry professionals whose efforts and actions in 2014 best illustrate the vision and mission of the National Auto Body Council were recognized with NABC's Body Shop Image Award and the Award of Distinction.

The awards recognize shops and individuals that exemplify profession-

alism and integrity in the collision industry. The Body Shop Image Award highlights facilities that positively impact their communities through building and design improvements. The Award of Distinction celebrates selfless acts by collision industry professionals that benefit others.

Winner of the Body Shop Image Award was 1st Avenue Auto Body in Great Falls, Mont. Two individuals were named co-winners of the Award of Distinction: Mike Startz with Albert Kemperle, Inc., in Rhode Island, and Chet Bourdeau with Insurance Auto Auctions, Inc., in Boston.

"It is gratifying to hear the many examples of how our body shops and industry professionals are making a positive difference in local communities across the country,"said NABC Executive Director Chuck Sulkala. ज

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## We look forward to future business from the following Top Shops!

- Mayfield Collision Centers, South Euclid, Ohio
- Accurate Auto CARSTAR, Hy-Tech CARSTAR, Chicago, III.
- Car Crafters, Albuquerque, N.M.
- Central Collision Center, Mokena, III.
- Conner Brothers Body Shop, Midlothian, Va.
- D-Patrick Body and Glass, Evansville, Ind.
- G&C Auto Body, Santa Rosa, Calif.
- Great Bear Auto Repair & Auto Body, Queens, N.Y.
- Jake's Auto Body & Towing, Inc., High Falls, N.Y.
- Lefler Collision & Glass, Evansville, Ind.

## **BODY SHOP IMAGE AWARD**

### WINNER **1ST AVENUE AUTO BODY** GREAT FALLS, MONTANA

he National Auto Body Council congratulates 1st Avenue Auto Body in Great Falls, Mont., and owners Evelyn and Ken LaMott, on winning the 2014 Body Shop Image Award.

The remodel of 1st Avenue Auto Body was an extended family affair, a joint effort by all employees working to create a larger, appealing area for customers. Employees did the majority of the physical work, from installing flooring and plumbing to the refinishing of furniture pieces. The décor also became an extended family project – an aluminum art piece above the fireplace was created by the LaMott's grandchildren.



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## **BODY SHOP IMAGE AWARD**

### RUNNER UP CARSTAR COLLISION DYERSBURG, TENNESSEE

rad Russom's CARSTAR Collision in Dyersburg, Tenn., has a great history. The 9,000-sq.-ft. building previously housed a Christian Television station, which Russom transformed into a modern collision repair cen-

ter. He left the office space as is, but the remaining 7,500 sq. ft. was completely gutted and morphed into a state-of-the-art production area. Much of the work was done by the Russoms themselves, including painting, running air lines and refinishing floors in the shop area.





### RUNNER UP CARSTAR FORT COLLINS NORTH FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

oug Kaltenberger's collision repair shop, CARSTAR Fort Collins North, in Fort Collins, Colo., which he has owned since 1989, was flooded on

Sept. 13, 2013. The entire front office was virtually destroyed and essentially gutted and redone. The business stayed open throughout the remodel, with front staff working off of card tables in the back. Customer focus played a role in many of the remodel upgrades, aimed at maintaining a clean, presentable shop that looks more like a lawyer's office.





### RUNNER UP CALIBER COLLISION FRISCO, TEXAS

aliber Collision Centers opened a 26,000-sq.-ft., stateof-the-art facility, one of the largest collision repair centers in the U.S. today, in Frisco, Texas. The facility was designed to provide customers with the most advanced technology in collision repair and a first-class customer service experience. The latest innovations include side-load paint system technology for faster painting and cycle time and a new lobby layout with a rebranded pod design for a more intimate and informative customer experience. The facility has 21 service bays, four heated paint booths and 158 parking spaces for Caliber's customers and partners.



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## AWARD OF DISTINCTION

## ALBERT KEMPERLE, INC.

ike Startz of Albert Kemperle, Inc., a paint, body and equipment supplier in Rhode Island, was on his way home when he came upon a terrifying sight on the interstate – a burning vehicle with a woman and two small children still inside. Without hesitation, he rushed to the car and pulled out the



hysterical mother. When he returned for the children, the back doors were locked, forcing him to climb over the front seat. "There were two boys, about 2 and 3 years old, strapped in car seats. By the time I got the last child out, the fire had reached the driver's side door. It just spread so fast," Startz said. Before rescue crews arrived, the entire car was engulfed in flames. "I am just so glad I was in the right place at the right time," he said.

### CHET BOURDEAU INSURANCE AUTO AUCTIONS, INC.

arlier this year, IAA agreed to collaborate with Boston's Mass General to offer handson opportunities to young adults with autism. Bourdeau was the first to raise his hand and offer the first-of-its-



kind young adult internship opportunity at IAA in Boston. Over the course of the 7-week program this past summer, Bourdeau and his team welcomed Michael McElerney, a 23-year-old with autism. Michael quickly grew confident in his abilities and felt more comfortable around the IAA branch teammates. Bourdeau also coaches baseball for children with physical and mental disabilities. His own three children, wife and father-in-law help scoop up the balls during practice and hand them to the kids to throw and catch and encourage their play.





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#### **BY JIM COMPTON** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**RUNNING A LEAN** 

### USE LEAN MATERIAL MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY AND REDUCE COSTS IN YOUR PAINT DEPARTMENT.

**WONDER WHAT** lean material management is in collision repair? Simply stated, it is the application of lean management principles to paint and material usage for body shops. With the advent of lean processes as applied to body repair, there seems to be one area left out of many, if not most, body shops' lean initiatives or programs — paint and material management.

With paint and materials (P&M) making up about 10 percent of the average repair order (RO) sale, the effective use of material, and therefore P&M profitability, can have a significant effect on the bottom line. To be truly lean, every area of the business needs to be lean or working toward lean.

Let's take a look at the six steps to lean material management

- 1. Establish SOPs
- 2. Less materials authorized list
- 3. Ongoing management involvement
- 4. Training and input from all employees
- 5. Measure and share the results
- 6. Repeat as needed

Most of these steps may look familiar as those taken with other lean evaluations and implementations. Let's take a look at these steps in a little more detail.

#### Standard operating procedures

SOPs are more than just a method of doing repairs. They establish a set of rules that enable a shop to have a firm grasp on quality and costs. For example, when all work is finished with the same grit as it moves from body shop to paint shop, the paint shop can apply the appropriate amount of primer surfacer. Material usage becomes a more defined quantity (two coats vs. four coats). Establishing who is responsible for each procedure and quality control during the repair process helps eliminate re-work. While every repair is slightly different, the significant steps in a repair can be standardized. There are many sources for SOPs, such as jobbers and paint manufacturers, for body shops that can be modified to suit each shop's practices.

#### Less materials

Using less material starts with an authorized stock list and preprinted order form. Employees, management and the supplier can create a list with the understanding that only the products needed on a regular, ongoing basis can be purchased and shipped by the supplier. Anything not on this list needs shop management approval. A write-in area on the form with a place for the manager to sign can keep this from becoming cumbersome.

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There needs to be a well organized and labeled stock area and work carts. Not all carts are created equal. Many times a new so-called innovative product is better, and some even save the money or labor time they claim. Sometimes it may not be a great benefit for the shop. Does this product fit into our established SOPs? Do we have a method to analyze and review its impact on quality and production?

Sometimes this analysis is a matter of perception and opinion, but we should make changes for the right reasons. If we have good measurement tools in place, we should be able to measure the impact of significant changes in material. If the claim is that a new product will reduce your per-RO material cost by \$2, then you should be able to see those results after implementing the new product into the shop system.

#### Management involvement

All too often we find ourselves working with shops on lean material management (LMM) only to find the shop manager or production manager is too busy to be involved or make material management a priority. This process doesn't have to be an added burden for management. There will be an initial demand for added time and effort, but this will become less over time.

If all levels of shop management are not involved and committed to achieving a leaner material, processes will suffer. For example, as a manager walks through the shop, if they comment on or recognize a particular process or part number with employees, they reinforce the commitment to LMM. Most employees want to win; they want the approval of their boss. This does not need to be difficult. A simple comment or question about material from a manager alerts the employee that it is still an important issue.

#### **Training and input**

This starts with the formation of SOPs and the authorized stock list. Reinforcing that employees are part of the solution, not part of the problem. Employee training stops with a certain level of employees. Even tasks performed by entrylevel employees can have a big impact on material usage and quality. Let everyone have a voice and everyone can be part of the team.

#### Measure and share results

Again we are reminded of several implementations of LMM where the tools and reports we create to help with the process never make it out of the manager's inbox. The employees are left in the dark as to results of their efforts; this is the quickest way to slow down LMM progress.

Imagine going to a basketball game with no scoreboard. Keeping score in your head is no easy task, nor is it in the work environment with dozens of cars in production and hundreds of parts and materials involved. People want to know the score. Withholding the score is one of the quickest ways to have employees lose focus, which derails progress.

So what do you need to measure material performance? Well, you can't manage what you don't measure. Accessible, timely actionable reports are critical to both management and staff in order to best manage results and make corrections where needed. Several jobbers across the country have embraced LMM, either with internally created or third party reports. The advantage of third party reports is in comparative data the sharing of ideas, results and methods can more comfortably be done with other shops that are not your direct competitors, but are your peers.

Several body shop 20 Groups have added LMM to their reporting programs. A quick note on these reports: They need to contain actionable information, and it needs to be broken down so that both management and the technicians can understand and use the information to make improvements. While management may be content to look at a larger picture, technicians thrive on productivity and margins to get a more detailed view of what they do or contribute, often down to the specific part number level.

Properly formatted reports can provide a snapshot or overview for management while still providing more specific details for the production leaders and technicians. This can be through multiple presentation or sorting options, or allowing viewers to drill down to the details of figures and information. Be sure to work with a report format that provides actionable information to all levels.

Some KPIs are great to look at but have little value to helping the technician make improvements. An example is clear usage — refinish hours per gallon of clear. This might be a benchmark that shop owners can compare and talk about, but it provides little in the way of actionable information for the technician. Turning this calculation around slightly and measuring ounces of clear per refinish hour provides a benchmark that the technician can use to make improvements.

#### **Repeat as needed**

This is an ongoing, evolving process, and as new materials move into the shop, we need to adjust SOPs and material needs. Change is hard; however, only through continuous repetition and adjustment can any improvement process succeed long term.

As for reports, they need to be simple. Graphs, tables and charts are great, but don't get carried away with too many KPIs or calculations, especially when you first embark on the LMM quest. A good suggestion is to start with three to five calculations. For example, calculate total liquid material cost per refinish hour with total non-liquid costs per refinish hour. How does your total material cost compare to your material door rate, or better yet your actual material rate? Other breakdowns that can help with easily controllable costs lie in the non-liquid supply areas such as masking materials, comparing tape cost per hour vs. other masking products.

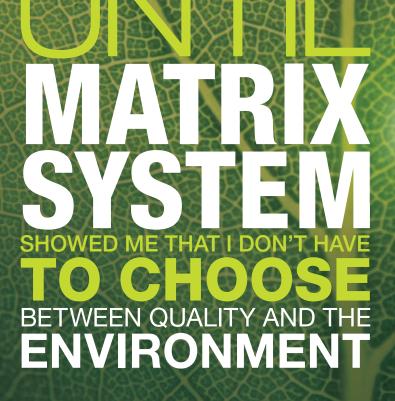
When it comes to body technicians, the simplest calculation is total material cost per body tech divided by flagged hours for the same period. This takes a little setup to get started, with separate cabinets/stock for each tech, replenished separately and of course the taking of flagged hours for the same period. Many jobber systems can provide individual technician tracking as sub-accounts, while still providing good, simple overall statements and reports.



Jim Compton, owner and general manager of J. Hunter & Associates, has worked in the auto body industry for over 30 years. He has a special interest in the areas of lean material management, environmental protection and work place safety.

 $\equiv$  E-mail Jim at jhcompton@att.net

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#### BY **ALFRED THOMAS** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

I know you are grumbling, and you are right — there is no such thing as a completely clean paint job **(FIG 1)**. Still, we cannot surrender to dirt; we must do everything possible to keep dirt from getting in prior to painting.

If you were to look up paint defects from dirt, you would find that some consider it a paint preparation problem. Though dirt can be introduced during the paint and dry process, those things that cause dirt to be left on the paint job or deposited on the paint are many — and some of the routine steps to prevent contamination can be very easy to forget or skip when you are in a hurry. In fact, while I do my best to list as many tips as possible, surely someone reading will think, "He forgot..."

Dirt in the finish can come from dirt in the sealer, basecoat or clear. It could appear as dirt throughout the paint job, or in distinct areas, or random and scattered nibs. Though dirt is often easily identified, sometimes solvent popping, fine fisheye or pot-life shock can be mistaken for dirt. So let's look at these three and how to distinguish between them.

#### Solvent popping

Solvent popping **(FIG 2)** is blistering in the paint caused by solvents not allowed to escape from the undercoat, basecoat or clear before the next coat is applied. The condition can be aggravated by forced drying or uneven heating of the surface. Solvent popping can be distinguished from general dirt because it typically occurs on a complete panel. Dirt is less general, confined to a specific area or appearing as random nibs.

#### Fine fisheye

General fisheye are craters and easily identified, but sometimes small fisheye **(FIG 3)** can be mistaken for dirt or even solvent popping. A close look at the defect will reveal a crater where the coating has not flowed over the surface. The difference between this

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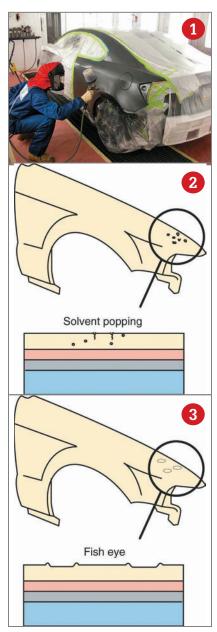




and dirt is that the dirt will often be in certain areas and not generally over the surface of the panel. Also, the crater is an identifying aspect of fisheye. Painters should use tools such as a magnifying glass to look at the paint surface closely.

#### **Pot-life shock**

The condition is caused by using paint that has exceeded its pot life. New painters may believe that once the pot life has been exceeded, paint quickly turns into a densely catalyzed glob, like what you might see with primer when you come back after lunch and realize you haven't cleaned the primer gun.



Paint catalyzes much more slowly, and the first step is some of the paint hardening while a vast amount remains liquid. If sprayed in this condition, the paint can look like dirt.

There are four times in the paint process when a painter must consider dirt contamination:

• Mixing or when preparing the paint for application;

• Vehicle preparation (sanding and cleaning of the vehicle);

• Application, when the sealer, basecoat and clearcoat are being applied; and

Drying, when either air amplifiers or flash time is allowed between coats

#### Mixing

Mixing is more critical than many think. Notice in **FIG 4** that paper has been used to cover the workbench and back wall. This aids in cleanliness during mixing and reducing, and it is also easy to replace if or when a spill occurs. Also note that the scale surface is clean, which is necessary for accurate mixing/reducing weight.

Before pouring, technicians should clean the tops of the toner cans so nothing drops into the mix. Also, all paint should be strained before application. With the popularity of disposable paint cups, the strainer is built into the cup; but if disposables are not used, all paint must be strained before applied. It is advisable to keep the mixing room as clean as possible, and the person mixing paint should wear a paint uniform to keep any dirt that might be on the body surface out of the paint.

#### Preparation

Preparation includes sanding, cleaning, masking, bagging and preparing the booth and painter for paint application. This is a very critical step. Sanding the undercoating and preparing it for painting, one could say, is the biggest and most important part of painting. We all like pulling the trigger and watching the paint flow on, but if the surface is not clean, free of debris and smooth, the paint job won't look good.

One of the key parts of all these jobs is inspection before you go to the next step. Is the surface sanded to the manufacturer's recommended grit, and have you checked that no spots have been missed? Here is where a guide coat can come in handy **(FIG 5)**. It not only shows scratches, but any other defects are seen as well.

Then the surface should be cleaned with a wax and grease remover. Don't forget to clean inside the jams, where dirt may have migrated **(FIG 6)**. Once the vehicle is completely cleaned, it is ready for masking. Vehicles should be masked from the inside out, and the tape should be rubbed down. Try taking a piece of tape and putting it down on glass; then take another and firmly rub



it down. You can see through the glass that the tape that has not been rubbed down will not have the edges pressed firmly against the glass (**FIG 7**), and paint may migrate through the edges. The car should be masked outside the booth with the booth doors closed, so any dust that may be in the shop won't get into the booth and, later, onto the vehicle.

Preparation of the booth is another often neglected area. The paint booth should be the cleanest place in the shop. The outer doors should be closed at all times, only opened to take a vehicle in and out. Before spraying, the walls should be blown off, with the fans on, so any dust is drawn into the filters. The filters should be changed often, and the floors swept (with a fine broom used in the booth only) and mopped before each paint job.

An old-school method is to wet the floor before painting a vehicle. There are some problems with this, however. Water that splashes onto the vehicle and the high humidity in the booth can cause problems with both waterborne and solvent; but most of all, repeated wetting tends to rust the bottom of the booth prematurely.

Some painters choose to cover the floor for easy cleaning **(FIG 8)**. There are coverings for the walls, as well, which will trap the dirt and prevent it from spreading onto the vehicle **(FIG 9)**. When the coverings become loaded with dirt they are removed and new are applied. This speeds up the booth maintenance greatly.

Masking should likewise be done outside the booth so that dirt will not be allowed into the clean area. Then the vehicle should be blown off; the technician should pay special attention to areas that may trap dirt, such as in door gaps and wheel wells. With the vehicle in the booth, any final masking, such as finishing the driver's door or bagging the vehicle with plastic wrap, should be done. Then the surface to be painted should get its final clean with the recommended wax and grease remover. The last dirt prevention detail before painting is to tack off, using the two-tack cloth method. (Many painters consider this tacking to be the first part of dirt prevention during application.)

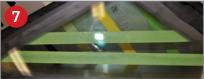
During application, one of the most important tools used to keep a paint

hy dust that get into the hicle. It is another paint booth in the shop. Blosed at all a vehicle in the walls he fans on, the filters.

5

job clean is the painters' suit. Yes, the suit is necessary to protect the operator from dangerous paint chemicals, but it is also extremely useful in keeping the job clean. Some speculate that upwards of 80 percent to 90 percent of the dirt that finds its way into paint work comes from the operator. Though this estimate may be high, it is safe to say that caution should be taken. If the suit is not new, it should be blown off (outside the booth) before being put on. If it is reusable or washable, it should be laundered often. Painters should blow themselves off as well before the suit is put on. Once the operator is covered, it is time to balance the booth.

Each time the booth door is opened, dirt can get into the booth and onto the vehicle. To make sure that this potential for contamination is kept to a minimum, the booth should be balanced. Most current booths have two air movement systems, one to blow clean air into the booth and another to move air out of the booth. If the booth is set so that there is a negative pressure inside the booth each time the door is opened, air from the shop will be drawn into the booth. Because air that is brought into the booth by its fan system is filtered, shop air can and will bring dirt in with it. To combat this, set the booth in a slightly positive mode as measured by a meter. The air being drawn out is slightly less than the air being pushed in, so when the door is opened, no dirty shop air is drawn in. Most clean painters make as few trips into the booth as possible and deny or limit others from coming in while painting is in progress. Some painters even mix the sealer,



basecoat and clear, taking them in at the same time to keep the paint environment cleaner.

Once in, the painter will tack the vehicle, again using two tack cloths. A new one is used to tack off the area to be painted, wiping in one direction as if you are brushing off crumbs. This is an excellent time to do a final inspection of the prepped areas for anything that may have been missed. The second cloth (a used one is often used here) will tack off the remaining parts of the vehicle, including all the masked areas. Wipe in one direction as before, but away from the area to be painted. The last thing to be tacked is the paint hose. After all is set and the painter is about to start the job, use the second tack cloth to wipe the paint hose, so any dirt that may have been picked up by the hose as it was not in use will be removed. Remember that if the hose is disconnected and dropped to the floor for any reason, it should be tacked again.

#### Nibbing out defects

Though this is a during-application step, it warrants special discussion. Though not all paint companies recommend denibbing, you should check with their recommendations. If a dirt nib or any imperfection is found at either the sealer or basecoat level, it should be removed before going on to the next layer of coat-

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ing. Dirt nibs in sealer, if not removed before base is applied, will show as spots when detailed. Also, if the basecoat has dirt or other imperfections, they should be corrected now. Follow the paint maker's recommendation, such as sanding lightly with P1000 and re-applying the coating; or some may recommend that the coating be washed off and reapplied. The defect must be corrected before another layer is applied. If all the precautions mentioned earlier have been observed, defects and nibs can be eliminated or at least kept to a minimum.

Most of the dangers of getting dirt into

**During drying** 



the paint job have been addressed, though during drying the paint is still vulnerable. Take everything out of the booth before baking, and keep the doors shut. Do not allow anyone, especially someone not wearing a paint suit, into the booth until the paint surface is completely cured. When the bake cycle is over, the paint is no longer in jeopardy of dirt being deposited in the clearcoat.

#### Conclusion

I'm sure some of you are thinking that this is a long list of tasks that will surely slow you down. And when these tasks are laid out in an operating procedure, it may seem that way. But when put into practice and everything is in its place, very little time is added to the painting process. If many, most, or all the dirt nibs are eliminated, think of the time savings to be gained when less buffing is needed.

I once attended a buffing training session where the instructor said that if there are more than 8 to 10 nibs in a panel, the complete panel should be cut and buffed to avoid nib craters or texture differences! So shouldn't we strive to keep them to a minimum? As we determined earlier, we may not be able to have a perfectly clean paint job, but we should still strive for it. **M** 



Alfred Thomas is associate professor and department head of Collision Repair at Pennsylvania College of Technology. He spent 15 years in the collision industry as a technician and shop manager.

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TRAINING IN FOCUS

VIEW ON

Adding glass repairs involves a relatively modest investment in money, shop space and other resources.

#### ANOTHER LOOK AT GLASS REPAIRS MIGHT CONVINCE YOU TO ADD THESE SERVICES TO YOUR SHOP

#### BY **TIM SRAMCIK** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

If you're considering adding new revenue sources to your business, odds are you've already dismissed glass repair. There are some pretty good reasons for that. Profit margins for this work aren't great, and shops typically don't need to look far to find businesses — namely mobile glass technicians — to take on these services. Glass repairers perform their work on site, in little time and with limited tools and equipment.

These same factors also are good reasons for you to take on this work. With a modest investment of time and money, glass repairs can put revenue in your pocket instead of someone else's. Offering these popular services provides a great marketing opportunity because they will keep your shop in the minds of customers who need glass repaired today and collision work done somewhere down the line.

Let's look at the factors you'll need to consider before adding these services, along with the latest information, tips and steps for performing this work.

#### **Training and certification**

If you're going to enter the glass game, the first thing you need to do is decide which of your employees will be doing the work. Unless your business typically handles a high volume of vehicles requiring glass repairs, you probably don't want to dedicate an employee solely to these tasks.

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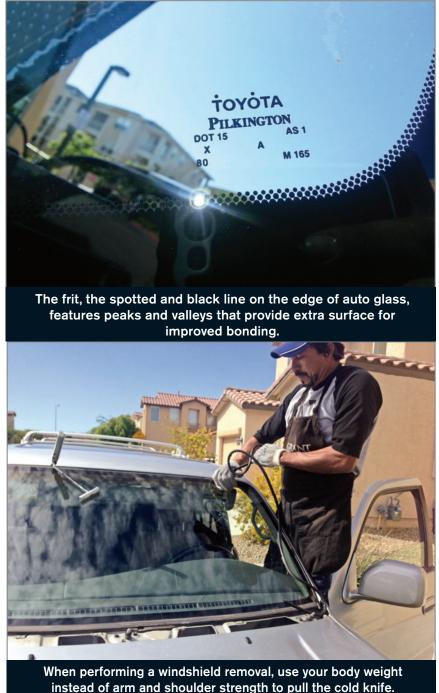


#### TECHNICAL 🖶 TRAINING IN FOCUS

your operation efficient, utilize an employee who can perform this work along with his/her other duties. If you can't spare a tech, consider paintless dent removers, detailers, apprentices and prep workers who possess an aptitude for technical work and can keep current with training and certifications.

Training should be hands on. There are plenty of glass repair courses available online, but there is no substitute for learning by doing the work with a professional, certified repairer. Installing glass involves the use of powerful adhesives that, if not applied properly, result in an unsafe repair that could compromise the vehicle's safety and leave you liable. Don't compromise the safety of your customers or the future of your business by training on your own.

One other benefit of working with a training professional is that you'll



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have a resource who can advise you on future training and certification. Certification typically is conducted through the Auto Glass Safety Council (AGSC) or the National Windshield Repair Association (NWRA). Certifications are vital because insurers frequently demand them and states use them as part of their licensing for glass repairers. On that note, you'll need to become familiar with state requirements for glass repairers.

#### **Chemistry class**

At the heart of glass repair is the proper use of urethane adhesives to bond glass to a vehicle. Trainer and industry consultant Bob Beranek stresses that installers need to understand the chemistry of these urethanes to produce the strongest possible bond.

This means knowing the three levels of urethane bonding: hydroxyl, mechanical and entanglement.

Hydroxyl is the initial bonding produced when the urethane is applied and the windshield is put in place, creating a kind of sandwich with the windshield and vehicle functioning as the bread and the urethane as the filling. The longer this initial bond lasts and the more evenly it is produced, the stronger the bond.

Mechanical bonding is the creation or utilization of bonding surfaces. Adhesives work best when they have more surface to bond to. On the glass, some of the surface preparation has already been done by the glass manufacturer. The paint band around the bonding edge of the glass, known as the frit, features peaks and valleys that add surface and thus promote bonding.

Technicians prime and abrade the vehicle surface for a similar effect. Techs should trim back the existing bead of urethane, leaving 1-2 millimeters, to create another peak and valley surface. Your paint department should assist here by taping off the pinchweld after applying the primer coat to build a perfect bonding surface.

Entanglement bonding occurs when the molecules of the urethane, glass and vehicle metal intertwine to become stronger. Urethanes are engineered so their molecules are similar to those in glass and vehicle metal. This enables them to intertwine. (Their molecules aren't similar to those in plastic and rubber, which explains why these urethanes don't bond well, if at all, to these materials.)

The more similar the molecules are to each other, the better they intertwine. This explains why it's critical to retain the existing urethane bead. The fresh urethane intertwines with it more completely, creating the strongest possible bond.

#### Proper prep

Effective prep work begins with sticking to all of the urethane manufacturer's instructions and recommendations. Urethanes are engineered to work with specific primers and other products. When you ignore the manufacturer's instructions, you risk creating a weak bond. (On a related note, always use a urethane manufactured by a reputable company with vendors who can offer technical support. Using the cheapest option will cost you money and customers in the long run due to low quality and failed repairs.) Beranek stresses avoiding products with harsh chemicals that can contaminate the bonding area. Do not use glass cleaners containing ammonia, excessive alcohols, anti-static properties, scented oils, silicones or petroleum byproducts.

Use disposable wipes instead of shop towels to wash glass. Shop towels are laundered by towel services with other towels that may contain contaminants that are passed from one towel to another. These services frequently use harsh cleaners that remain in towels and, therefore, may end up on the glass.



Always go with a urethane whose manufacturer offers technical support.



#### Modern removals

While installers should pay more attention to prepping, Beranek says they can use less time and energy performing the most difficult part of a windshield repair, removing the glass, by following these steps:

• When using hand tools, begin with the shortest blade in the cold knife and work up to the longer blades. This provides more control and makes the cut easier. Opt for blades that are serrated and thin as possible to protect the paint.

• Use body weight rather than your upper body strength to pull the cold knife. You'll work more comfortably and reduce the risk of muscle pulls and strains.

• For parts with a rigid or metal-coated molding system, apply a plastic stick vertically to the pinchweld to break the molding from the glass surface. Force the cold knife blade between the glass edge and the broken molding flap and under the edge of the glass. Pull the cold knife normally. This cuts out the glass and leaves the molding in place, eliminating the need to pull the rigid molding out to access the glass edge.

• Consider replacing manual tools with power versions. Always lubricate them by spraying clear water on the blade and the adhesive to be cut. Keep the flat side of the blade to the glass surface and the cutting edge towards the power source to improve the cutting torque. Use the shortest blade available that can cut the material while protecting the interior trim.

• Never disconnect the electrical components from the

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rear view mirror with the ignition. This could damage the vehicle computer or erase its pre-programmed memory. Instead, disconnect the wiring harnesses and place the mirror in the back seat. Or, remove the mirror from its pad and leave it hanging from its wiring harness.

• Pull the cowl panel to allow for the best bottom seal. The passenger-side airbag, in most cases, relies on the adhesion of the bottom seal of the windshield to position it properly. It also supports and solidifies the firewall. If the cowl is not pulled, the bottom seal cannot be assured and the airbag may not deploy properly.

• Keep a collection of replacement clips, especially for the vehicle models you most frequently see.

• Similarly, keep replacement moldings available. You'll need them to replace bent or stretched original moldings.

#### **Cracks and chips**

Repairing cracks and chips will comprise much of your work. There are a number of DIY repair kits on the consumer market, and some are proving their worth. Stick with professional products. Your job is performing a repair better than what a customer could do at home. Professional tools and techniques provide a superior repair you can guarantee and that insurers will pay for.

#### **Phenomenal finishes**

Some adhesives are now promising 30-minute bonding times. Don't let these fast finishes convince you the job is done when the bond is complete. The final step of any repair is thoroughly cleaning the glass.

Beranek says the most important area to clean is the bonding edge, not the transparent center, since the edges are more likely to have attracted contaminants. He recommends the following steps:

1. Clean the edges first, using a foaming glass cleaner. If the foam begins to break up, scrub those areas with a clean lint-free paper towel. Re-spray the area again to test.

2. If the foam continues to break up or you notice other residue, use the cleaning product or procedure recommended by the adhesive manufacturer. You may need to apply an abrasive cleaner or wet scrub the area, or both.

3. Once the edges are free from contaminants, wash the remainder of the interior glass surface from the edges to the center.

If more than several hours will pass before the customer

picks up the vehicle, clean the glass one more time before delivery. You don't want a dusty windshield to mar an otherwise terrific job.

Attending to details like this not only will make your business stand out, it's also the core of glass repairs.



Tim Sramcik has written for *ABRN*, *Motor Age* and *Aftermarket Business World* for more than a decade. He has produced numerous news, technical and feature articles covering every aspect of the collision repair market. In 2004, he was recognized for his work by the American Society of Business Publication Editors.

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#### BY **ALFRED THOMAS** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

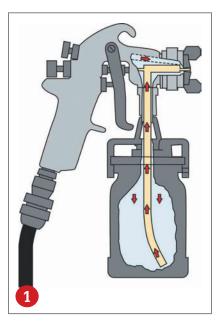
Spray gun set up and adjustment are both misunderstood and often argued over by painters. To start, gun set up is different than adjustment — though they are both important steps toward a great paint job. Gun set up has to do with the tip size (needle and nasal) and the viscosity of the paint when reduced, as well as the amount of air supplied to the gun so it can operate at its proper capacity. Gun adjustment is the fine tuning at the fluid tip, the fan and the air pressure supplied to the gun.

We will examine gun types, how they work and their set up and adjustment.

#### Spray equipment

Automotive spray equipment comes in many different forms, depending upon the type of application: **Suction feed:** This type of gun has the cup at the bottom and uses high pressure to operate it **(FIG 1)**. The air that passes over venturi stem, which extends into the paint cups, creates a vacuum, pulling paint up to the gun for atomization. This gun atomizes the paint well, but its high pressure (50-70 psi) causes enormous amounts of overspray and waste. These guns have only a 25 percent to 30 percent transfer efficiency, wasting as much as 75 percent of the finish.

**Gravity feed:** This style also uses a venturi tube to create suction to draw the paint to the gun's air cap, but because the cup is mounted above the gun *(FIG 2),* it requires less pressure and produces less overspray and waste. Both suction and gravity feed guns are among the most common in shops today.



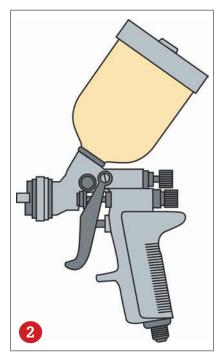
**Pressure feed:** Not often seen in a collision shop, a pressure feed gun is used in manufacturing applications or when large amounts of paint are required. Pressure-feed guns speed the paint process because large amounts of paint can be prepared and then sent to the gun through the pressurized fluid hose (**FIG 3**). Pressure-feed guns are remarkably efficient because they do not have the added weight of the paint attached to them.

#### Guns today

Many painters use a gravity feed gun that is either a high volume low pressure (HVLP) or compliant gun.

To help control volatile organic compounds (VOCs), laws were passed mandating the use of HVLP guns. These guns reduce both the amount of VOCs and material used, but because they required different techniques for use, some painters found them difficult to operate. At nearly the same time as their introduction, the solids content of paint coatings changed also. The results were different solvents and hardeners that required different paint techniques.

Painters often didn't fully understand the adjustments they needed to fully take advantage of VOC/material reduction. Often when painters applied high solids clear with fast hardeners (to increase production) using an HVLP



gun, the texture was unacceptable. To combat the problem, paint gun companies developed "compliant" guns and petitioned to have them accepted in areas that restricted the use of non-HVLP. Though these guns have a transfer efficiency of 65 percent, they aren't as efficienct as HVLP guns.

Painters using an HVLP gun who choose the proper solvent and hardeners for the spraying condition and adjust their gun correctly can produce excellent invisible repairs without needing to polish in order to reduce texture.

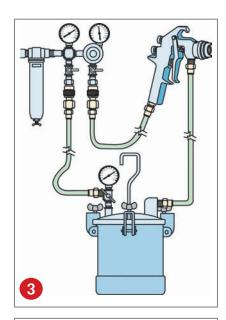
#### Gun set up

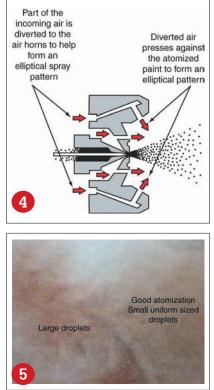
Both HVLP and compliant guns are external mix guns, meaning the paint and air combine to atomize outside the gun. While some air is used to create a vacuum to pull paint to the tip, atomization does not occur until the air from the cap and airhorns (see arrows in FIG 4) hit the paint coming out of the needle outside the gun. For a gun to be an HVLP, the air pressure at the cap cannot exceed 10 psi. With conventional and compliant guns, the pressure can be and often is much higher. This causes paint to hit the object at a higher speed, causing more paint to bounce off, creating more overspray and a lower transfer efficiency.

Another difference with HVLP spray equipment is the volume of air they need in cubic feet per minute (CFM). An HVLP gun requires more airflow, or volume of cubic feet per minute of air, than a conventional gun. If airflow is restricted, such as by the regulator, size of hose or the quick disconnect (QD) fitting, the needed CFM may not be available to operate an HVLP gun properly. Air hoses should have an inside diameter of 3/8-inch, with the regulator capable of supplying more volume than the gun requires; and the quick disconnect fitting should be large capacity.

#### Atomization

Atomization takes place as the air comes through the air cap and horns, and hits the stream of paint coming out through the needle and seat. Because of higher solids and more viscous (thicker) paint, the set up has become critical. Choice of the proper needle and nozzle size must be precise. Because gun companies do not make guns for





specific paint systems, they give a range of sizes, such as 1.2 to 1.6. A more precise recommendation is often available from the paint manufacturer.

#### Gun adjustment

Spray guns are designed to operate with the fluid adjustment knob set at fully open. However, that is under ideal conditions, which rarely exist. Knowing this, gun manufacturers provide adjustment controls such as the fluid needle, which regulates how far back the needle travels and can be adjusted to match the spraying conditions. Air adjustment should be set correctly before spraying. Last is the fan adjustment that can limit the size of the spray pattern. It should be adjusted to match the area of the object being painted to avoid excess overspray.

#### Air pressure adjustment

For years painters have been adjusting the air pressure at the wall regulator. If the recommendation was 45-50 psi, they would set it at the wall, hook up the gun and spray. Often with conventional guns this was sufficient, but with an HVLP gun, depending on how long the air hose is, the method would starve the gun for air. If a painter adjusts his gun to its recommended 20 psi at the wall with a 50 foot hose, by the time the air gets to the gun's nozzle, so much would have been lost that the gun would be lucky to have 5 psi to work with. It is best to adjust a gun at the wall, but pressure should be read at the inlet, with the trigger pulled to air only while adjusting to compensate for the air lost. Many guns today come with a pressure gauge at the inlet. If your gun does not have a gauge, one can be purchased.

#### Fluid adjustment

To adjust an HVLP gun for maximum atomization, the fluid adjustment cannot always be set to full open — especially with more viscous coatings. A painter should adjust the gun to a set point such as two turns out from fully closed, then test by spraying on masking paper at the proper distance. While viewing the droplet size **(FIG 5)**, the painter should adjust until the smallest droplet atomization is reached.

#### Fan adjustment

While fan adjustment does not affect the appearance as much as fluid does, it should be adjusted to the proper size for the object being sprayed. Most guns have the fluid adjustment in the same location as the fan adjustment. These may be in different locations from gun to gun; the most common place is above the fluid knob, but on some guns it may be on the body of the gun. Though painters want to get things covered as fast as possible, if the spray pattern is wider than the object being sprayed, the paint loss becomes significant, cutting into profits.

After all the adjustments have been made, they should be checked again. As one is adjusted, it will slightly affect the others. A quick final check will confirm that they are all in proper adjustment.

It would be nice if once the adjustments are set for each of your guns you never need to adjust them again; however, this is not the case. They need to be checked before each use. Many factors affect gun adjustments, including air use, humidity, temperature and even wear of the gun. It is good practice to check the gun adjustment each time you use it.

Spray technique also affects the quality of the finished paint. Technique includes things such as distance, rate of travel and angle; but without having the proper set up and adjustment, it takes a lot of technique to compensate for a properly adjusted gun. Gun cleanliness, maintenance and proper paint reduction are also critical, and the gun and paint manufacturer recommendations should be strictly followed.

#### Adjustment, set up effects

Though a spray gun is a big investment and painters often invest in more than one gun, your gun or guns could last your entire career. Having the proper set up for the paint being sprayed and adjusting the gun for its optimum operation is critical. Look up the correct needle and nozzle set up for the gun brand being used and the paint being sprayed. This is best found through your jobber or paint manufacturer's recommendation, often at their website. Each gun make and model has a different set up for different paints, and most manufacturers list the correct ones for your gun.

Reduce your paint exactly the way the manufacturer recommends; the most accurate way is to use a scale. It is the most accurate way

and prevents overusing materials.

Painting is a skilled trade.It takes a long time to get good and fast. And paints continue to evolve, which means painters must learn to adapt to new equipment and techniques.



Alfred Thomas is associate professor and department head of Collision Repair at Pennsylvania College of Technology. He spent 15 years in the collision industry as a technician and shop manager.

 $\overline{z} = \overline{z}$  E-mail AI at athomas902@hughes.net



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#### . .

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#### 

hen I talk to shops, most have seen an increase in recent years in the amount of customer-paid work they are doing. It's estimated to now total about \$3 billion a year nationally, almost 10 percent of the total collision repair market.

There are a number of reasons for that, but much of it has to do with the type of insurance vehicle owners

are carrying. As the average age of vehicles on the road has grown over the past decade, more customers have chosen to carry only liability coverage on their older vehicles. And there are far fewer people with \$100 or \$250 deductibles, and far more with \$750 and \$1,000 deductibles. Those two trends result in a lot more work being paid for by the customer rather than an insurer.

A lot of shops are seeing this customer-paid work as a way to thrive, not just survive. So how are they capturing it? I see them using three primary tools.

The first is customer financing. Companies like Wells Fargo and GE Capital allow shops to have a customer submit a brief credit application and get a response within minutes. Approved applicants

get 90 days same as cash financing; in some cases, 6 month or even 12 month no-interest financing may be available. The shop gets its money in a couple days.

The fees the shop pays vary by program, but can be similar to the fees for accepting a credit card payment. Trade association members can often get a discount on these fees.

A second tool some shops are using to capture more customer-paid work is gap insurance. Covering deductibles is unethical and even illegal in some states. But a dealership, for example, can buy gap insurance (4ubenefits.com is one provider) for a customer buying a new car that will reimburse the customer for their deductible (up to a designated amount) if like having some options and say so, and it helps them see you as a trusted advisor, not just an estimator or salesperson. 9 9

they bring their car back to the dealership for collision repair within, say, the next three years. Gap insurance such as this generally averages about \$75 for three years.

Independent shops may do the same as part of a "customer for life" program. Clearly a customer is going to remember your shop offers them that deductible reimbursement if they have another accident within the period covered by the gap insurance. It also gives you the opportunity at the end of that period to contact the customer to see if they want to buy continued gap coverage.

A third option I see shops doing to capture more customer-paid work is offering what I call good-better-best options. Think about

## OPTIONS KEEP CUSTOMERS HAPPY

Capture more customer-paid work by offering them some things other shops aren't

when you buy almost anything, from a TV to wiper blades to a meal at a restaurant; you had options, right? We like having options as a consumer. But how often do we just give a customer an estimate and say, "That's it," without giving them some options?

Customers paying for work themselves may especially appreciate options. I would never suggest doing an unsafe repair. But say the plastic tab is broken on a headlight. A "good" option you could offer might be to plastic weld the tab. It's safe and functional, though it won't look perfect. A "better" option for a little more money might be a used headlight; it may be slightly faded or have some minor stone chips, but it's safe and functional. The "best" option, if they want to spend the money, is a new headlamp.

Similarly, you might offer an option of just touching up the corner of their bumper, or an option of blending it but limiting the warranty, or a complete repair and refinish of the bumper with your full warranty – a "good-better-best" set of options.

One word of caution: Such options require setting clear expectations with the customer. Saying you'll just touch up the bumper might not be sufficient; they may show up expecting it to look perfect. So consider, for example, cutting the end off a bumper you are discarding, then touch up the paint on it so you have a sales prop you can use to set clear customer expectations.

Customers like having some options and say so, and it helps them see you as a trusted advisor, not just an estimator or salesperson. And all these tools can help you capture more of the growing pool of customer-paid work.  $\overline{\mathbf{M}}$ 





**Mike Anderson**, a former shop owner, currently operates CollisionAdvice.com, a training and consulting firm.

If you have an business issue or question you'd like Mike to address, email him. mike@CollisionAdvice.com

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