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December 2014

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Vol. 133, No. 12

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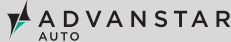
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## TOP SHOPS 2014 WINNER



Service advisor Jessica Machuca, owner Doug Whiteman and service manager Heather Stanton.

### THE 2014 TOP SHOP WORKS TOGETHER, MEETING MARKS AND SETTING HIGHER STANDARDS FOR THE REPAIR SHOP OF TODAY.

BY **TSCHANEN BRANDYBERRY** | MANAGING EDITOR

**W**hat goals did your shop accomplish in the last year? Did you increase sales? Up your marketing budget and reach? How about try a new community service project. Exceed training goals, including going beyond technical knowledge? Renovate and add on to your location?

Check, check, check, check and check.

The staff at George's Sierra Shell collectively did all of that and more, as it climbed into the overall winner's place in the 2014 Top Shops Contest.

"We are also very lucky to have an incredible team of advisors and technicians at George's Shell; therefore, all the goals we set are team-related," says Doug Whiteman, owner of the Fontana, Calif., shop, which illustrates how family, team and goals combine for a winning effort.

Over the last 42 years, Whiteman has maintained the shop's presence, which his father, George, purchased in 1972. The elder Whiteman passed away in 1995, leaving Doug to move the business forward. After taking on an initial remodel, Whiteman joined the Automotive Training Institute in helping him realize his first set of goals, including moving sales above the \$1 million mark for the first time in 2005. The goal setting never stopped, and Whiteman notes that the company will realize more than a 20 percent increase in sales in 2014 over 2013.

Photos: George's Sierra Shell

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**GOALS**  
**ONE ITEM AT A TIME**

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**Calling Out to Reach Goals**

One big boost in realizing the goal of increased sales was implementing a phone room at the office. The management developed six call scripts (thank you, 3,000 mile service reminder, smog check reminder, warranty expiring, where have you been and a one-year we miss you call), and charged the call center personnel with making 100 calls per day. They work from new lists daily, and earn a \$5 per appointment incentive beyond their regular pay.

"I got the idea from a 20 Group in Baltimore. We developed it a little more," Whiteman explains. "We still do email and text reminders, but the phone call is more personal. We build the relationship with these people,

and have two female service writers who are great at building the relationships and drawing in customers. It's a lot more personal for them."

The shop then tied in its direct mail program, making sure tracking is in place for both marketing vehicles. "We've been here forever and tried every marketing piece," Whiteman muses. "You still have to do marketing, but we wanted a higher retention rate."

Tony Odom, general manager, adds that the staff drafted the scripts to make sure they are in the employees' own voices and sound natural. Also, they set up timelines for each call type, ranging from 48 hours after a visit for the "Thank you" call to two and a half months for the oil change and two years for smog checks.

"We're calling customers at 20 months letting them know that their warranty is going to expire to make sure the vehicle looks great instead of disappointing the customer that they've just come out of warranty," he says. "That has really seen a great response."

In addition to the phone room, the shop teamed up with a firm to manage its website and help with phone conversion rates. Since March, George's Shell's phone conversion percentages jumped 15 percent, while the website traffic conversions also have climbed.



**GEORGE'S SIERRA SHELL**

**DOUG WHITEMAN**

Owner

**FONTANA, CALIF.**

Location

**1**  
Number of locations

**42**  
Years in business

**6**  
Number of technicians

**7**  
Total number of employees

**1,200 SQ. FEET / 200 SQ. FEET**  
Shop size / office size

**3**  
Number of bays

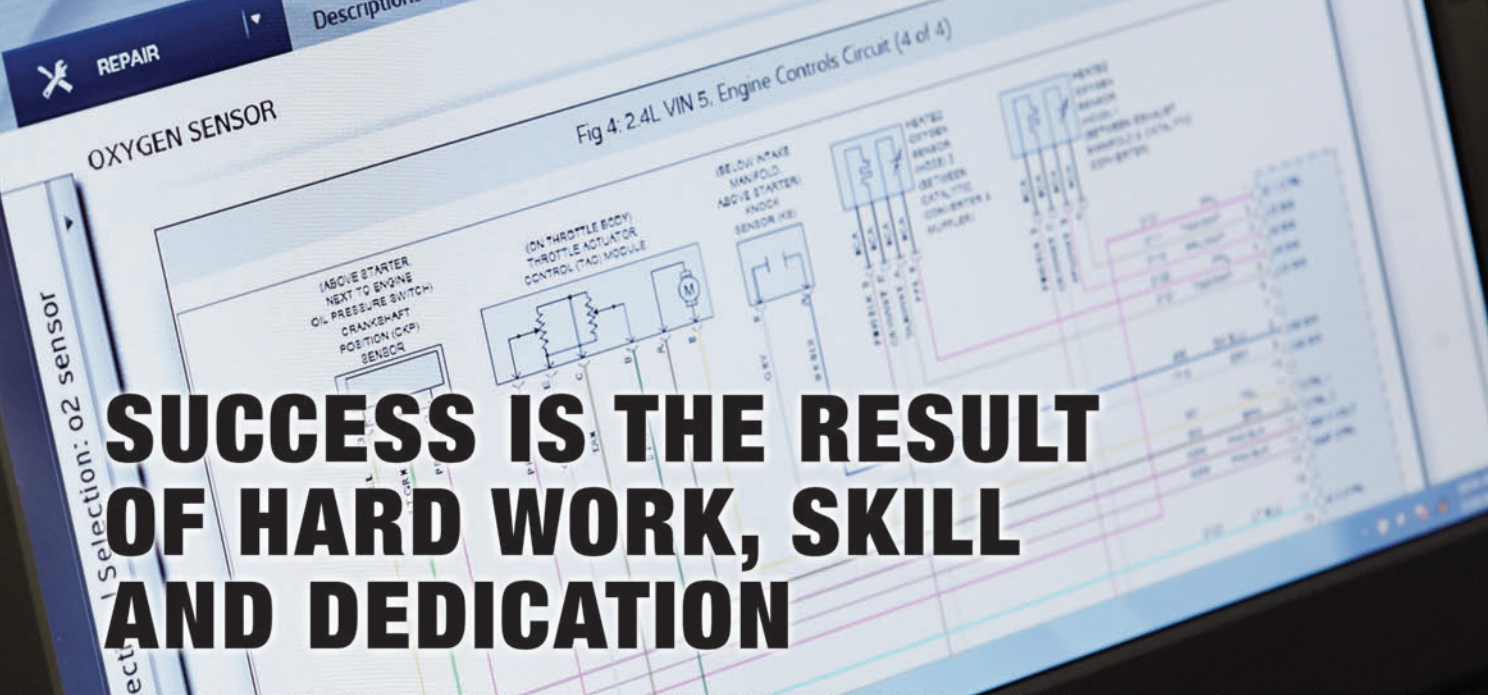
**58**  
Average vehicles per week

**AAA, BBB, ATI, NAPA AUTOCARE**  
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Staff are (top, from left) Tony Odom, Jessica Machuca, Heather Stanton, Linda and Doug Whiteman; (bottom) Edgar Covarrubias, Daniel Wibert, Erik Gonzalez and Ray Delcampo.





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"Review Us" calls to action on hand-outs at the end of service also helps drive interaction with customers.

It's not just the phone calls that helped build the increased sales. George's Sierra Shell also this year focused on pictures, automotive articles and a "Fan of the Week" in its social media efforts, which they utilize as a way to build rapport.

"We recognized our strengths, and our strengths are customer service

and auto repair. To us, it's better to employ a service to manage that so we can take care of our customers," Odom says. "It's easy to dabble in all these things that are out there, but then I think it's easy to take your eye off the ball."

### Training to Reach Goals

Whiteman instills in his employees that they keep their eye on the ball and reach their own goals. Meanwhile,

he serves almost as a coach in making sure they hit their training and productivity marks.

"We've raised all of our employees through the ranks," Whiteman says. "Each employee is in a different stage; we have some entry level people that if we go too deep (in training topics), we'll bury them and it's boring. So we kind of just develop training for each person for where they are in their career, and they can focus on their individual strengths."

Shop management meets with employees individually at the start of each year to set individual goals. While most center around ASE certification and technical training, the employees incorporate other life-based training. The entire team attended Financial Peace University this year.

"It kind of goes back to family is more important than your job. It's just a balance in all areas," Whiteman states. "Financial training through Financial Peace has been really beneficial. If you

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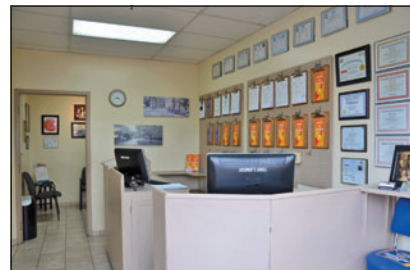
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The customer service counter, shown here, always has at least two advisors staffed, ready to greet customers. The clipboards on the rear wall are split between completed vehicles and vehicles currently being serviced. On the rear wall each row indicates a different stage of the repair process (awaiting inspection, awaiting approval and being repaired). The customer waiting room is located through the doorway on the rear wall. ASE Certifications and BAR Licenses are displayed above. The office is cleaned every night and refreshed before opening.



An elevated view of the shop floor.



don't know how to spend your money and make a budget, you always want more money and are looking more places. It goes back to caring for all areas of their lives."

In addition to the life-based training, mentors and teams conduct the technical training, which boosts how employees view the management. Both Odom and Whiteman quickly note that owners cannot be afraid of investing in their employees in this way, fearing the employees will leave once the investment in them is made.

"When they see you are helping them increase their values, their worth, their knowledge, that ties them closer to you," Odom says. "This was the first year Doug asked where they wanted to be in a year, five years, 10 years. We looked at roadblocks and how we can get past them, and we've seen additional buy-in."

"They see we care about them and that builds loyalty both ways," Whiteman adds. "While some of these guys probably could go make more money somewhere else. (But) it's such a great work environment, a great place to be, they don't want to go anywhere else."

Some of the training takes place in the upstairs area of the two-story shop. The 1996 renovation featured the additional level, and the office space morphed into a training area with web and teleconference capabilities. It serves as a place to get away from ringing phones, vehicles coming in for repair and other shop duties to focus on meetings and training, says Whiteman.

## Remodeling the Business

Touching back on the 1996 remodel, that was just one of two renovations Whiteman has overseen since taking over operations. New gas tanks were added then, because, yes, the location still is an operable gas station.

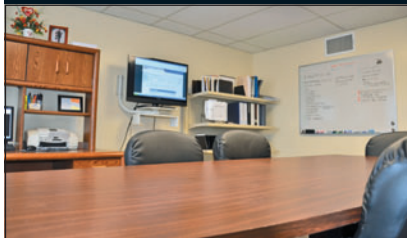
The last year has brought a new valet entrance and customer parking area to the location, and 2015 will feature two new bays being added.

"We need some space," Whiteman says. "We spend some time moving cars around and we're landlocked."

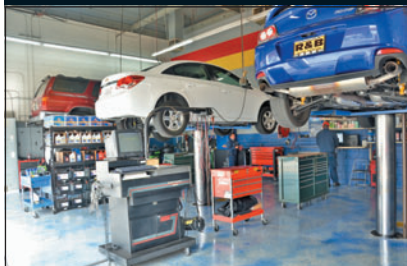
Odom is looking beyond just the two new bays to expanding locations, which is on the table for the coming year. A lot of it starts with getting the



This year the shop remodeled an unused office to be a training center for employees. All of the ASE study guides and ATI references can be found and checked out from here. The monitor is paired with the computer so online webinars can be viewed easily. This office also provides a quiet area with NAPA Tracs so advisors can call customers without interruption or background noise.



Another view of the training room, showing the ATI reference binders, ASE study guides and white board with marketing plans and goals.



While these bays are being used, after the shop closes, the floor is scrubbed, shelves are wiped down and trash is dumped. Returned parts and cores are stored in a back room.

right staff in place, though, as remodeling the business goes beyond the physical building. There are renovations to business plans, processes and programs that have been completed in efforts to reach these goals.

Help in all of these areas, including remodeling, training and operations within the shop, comes from its NAPA AutoCare Center affiliation. The shop also is an AAA Approved Auto Repair shop, and are members of ATI's Peak Performers and West Coast 20 Groups.

Whiteman says his coaching from

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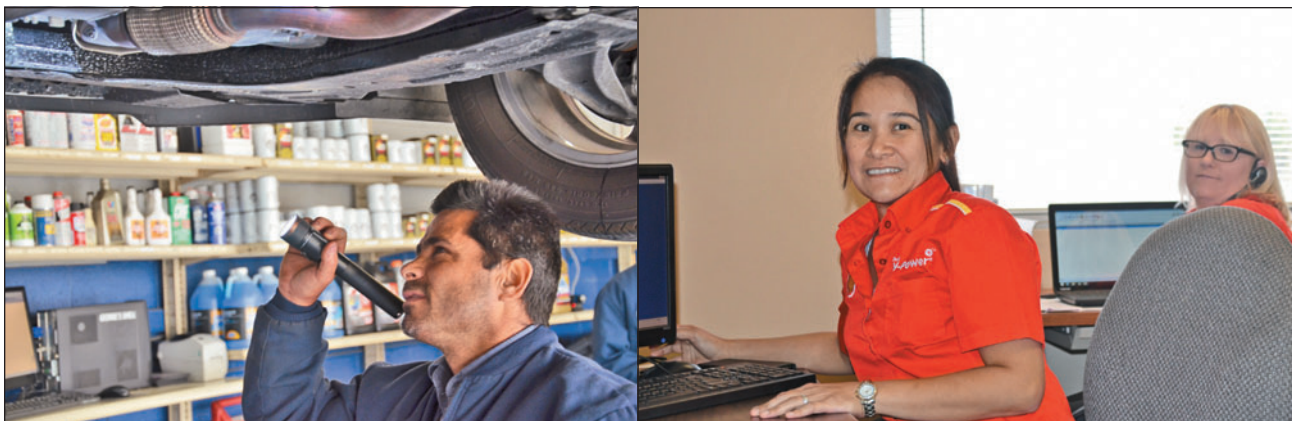


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(Left) Technician Raymundo Del Campo performs a courtesy inspection. (Right) The shop's phone room staff is charged with making customer retention calls. A new addition this year, the phone room makes more than 500 calls per week.

ATI helped him transition from technician to owner.

"I started here in 1972 as a kid. When my dad passed away, I ran it for 10 years roughly and I didn't have a clue how to run a business. I didn't have any idea what made the business tick or work," he says. "The coaching weekly, it is a very big part of (getting on track). If it's with ATI or whomever, it benefits everyone ... knowing that someone is going to call you and hold your feet to the fire and make you do it."

In their eighth year of the partnership, Odom says certainly there are people out there who can do the business management themselves, but the assistance they received made a noticeable impact.

"It's easy to get lost in the minutia and be overwhelmed by the business itself," he says. "It's good to have someone there to redirect you weekly or whenever, to keep your eye on the ball and focused on all the KPIs and to take a step back and look at your business."

The shop has reached so many of its

goals that it now opens itself to other owners for visits, training and guidance. Whiteman says the program started more than two years ago, again, based on an idea heard in a 20 Group.

"(Guests) see that all the things they're learning in class can work if they put them to use," he notes. "Every shop is different and every area is different, but the core doesn't change. We've had people from Oregon, Sacramento, San Diego come to visit; the core of taking care of people is the same."

### The Goal of Giving Back

And while yes, the ultimate shop goal is to take care of customers, one other to-do item that ranks high is giving back to the community. While there are many sponsorships and events the staff gives to, two stand out. The first is the shop's "Christmas Truck," which, like many other shops, it fixes up and gives to a family in need.

Truly unique to the shop is a partnership this year with a major home improvement retailer to provide goods to those in need. The shop takes pos-

session of goods the retailer has written off of inventory and stores them on site. The items, which are new and range from sinks, showers, toilets and tie to smaller maintenance items, are distributed through local churches and the organization Good360, Whiteman says.

"We get an email of what needs picked up, and we send trucks with employees to the store," he says. "They're happy to do it. It gets them away from work for an hour."

And seeing the help they're providing families doesn't hurt, either. In fact, it's that familial atmosphere that helps the shop hit one final goal that might not be written on paper – working together as a team.


"I think the big thing is we're a family. We genuinely enjoy each other," says Odom. "We do team building things, have fun together, are philanthropic as a family.... We really have a great time. Doug sets the tone for that. He always says we spend more time here than with our families, so we need to love it. You talk about loyalty, all of the buy-in here, we get that."

Goal accomplished. 

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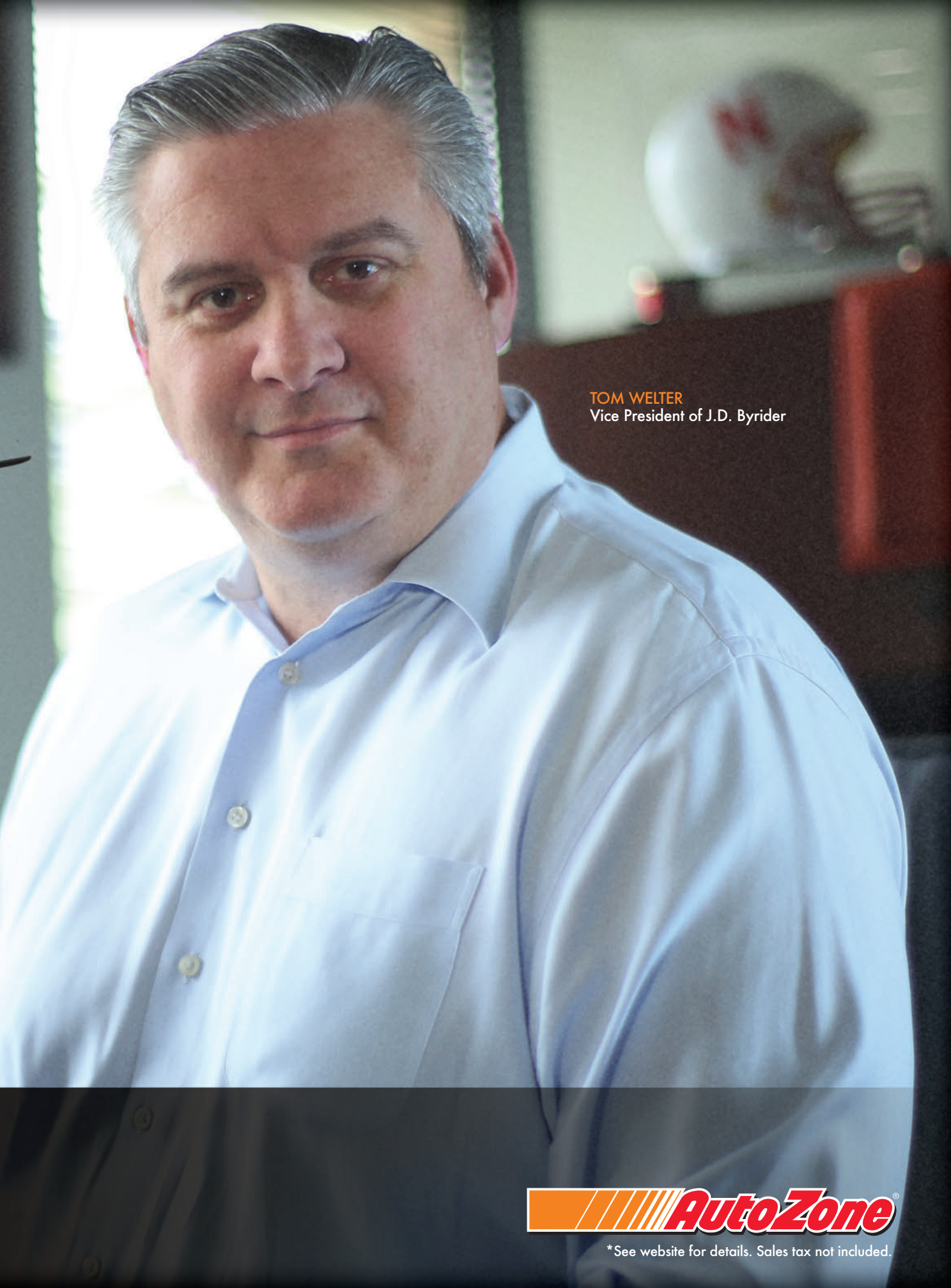
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## TOP SHOPS 2014

# COMPLETING A TOUCHDOWN

FORMER GRIDIRON STAR ACHIEVES GOALS, SCORES BY FIELDING A TOP SHOP.

BY JAMES E. GUYETTE | NEWS CORRESPONDENT

Having reached the pinnacle of success in the Arena Football League as a wide receiver and kick returner for the world-champion Chicago Rush, Brian Sump has again scored a game-changing goal upon retiring from the gridiron and returning home to Denver. As a *Motor Age* Top Shop, his award-win-

ning Avalon Motorsports rivals dealership quality for its professionalism, customer service and overall excellence in keeping German-engineered vehicles on the road and running at peak performance.

“Our No. 1 criterion in hiring is the desire to be great,” says Sump, who credits his employees for their ability to deliver the absolute best when conducting top-notch specialized repairs and custom aftermarket upgrades.



## AVALON MOTORSPORTS

### BRIAN SUMP

Owner

### DENVER

Location

1

Number of locations

13

Years in business

4

Number of technicians

8

Total number of employees

6,040 SQUARE FEET

Shop size

8

Number of bays

42

Average vehicles per week

**BLUE SEAL, BBB, ASA, BOSCH**

Affiliations



The Avalon Motorsports team is (from left) Norman Aragon, Brian Peterman, Jamie Williams, Steve Reinhardt, Brian Sump, Drew Costin, Adam Keyser and Phil Carpenter.

“I hire the highest-level technicians I can find.” During the recruiting process Sump searches for candidates who display “a passion for people and cars” along with an aptitude and attitude for seeking ongoing education and master-level certifications.

Photos: Avalon Motorsports

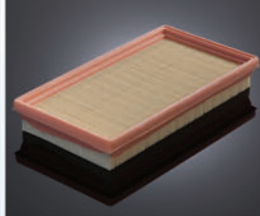
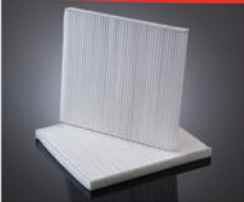
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“They have to be able to take our training because it’s at such a high level. Our competition is of the dealership caliber,” he asserts, noting that his emphasis on master quality service “was inspired by my lack of knowledge of cars.”

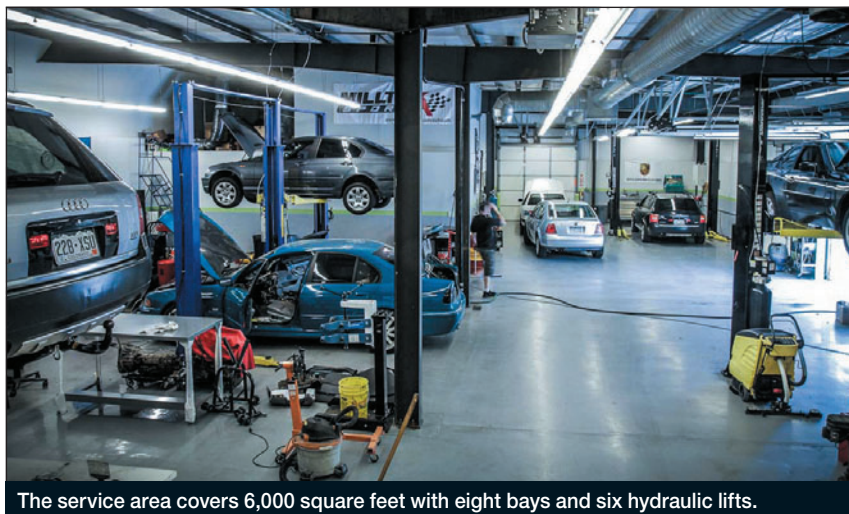
Sump says his continuing love for German nameplates dates back to his high school years when he souped-up a treasured Volkswagen. The tinkering was set aside as Sump spent four years studying civil engineering and business at the Colorado School of Mines. Football took precedence, however, when he tackled training camps with the San Diego Chargers and St. Louis Rams before moving on to a four-year arena football career.

When his playing days ended, Sump sought a business opportunity. He purchased the Avalon name, website and limited assets from an owner who solely sold performance parts online. Initially working via the Internet out of a rented 10-by-10-foot office in the back of a small repair shop, Sump soon aspired to open his own bricks and mortar enterprise; the first location was a small industrial garage in an office park. In 2011, he moved to the current location, a steel-framed building that had previously served as a jet ski repair facility. “We did a pretty extensive remodel. We did not have an architect — I pretty much did it myself.”

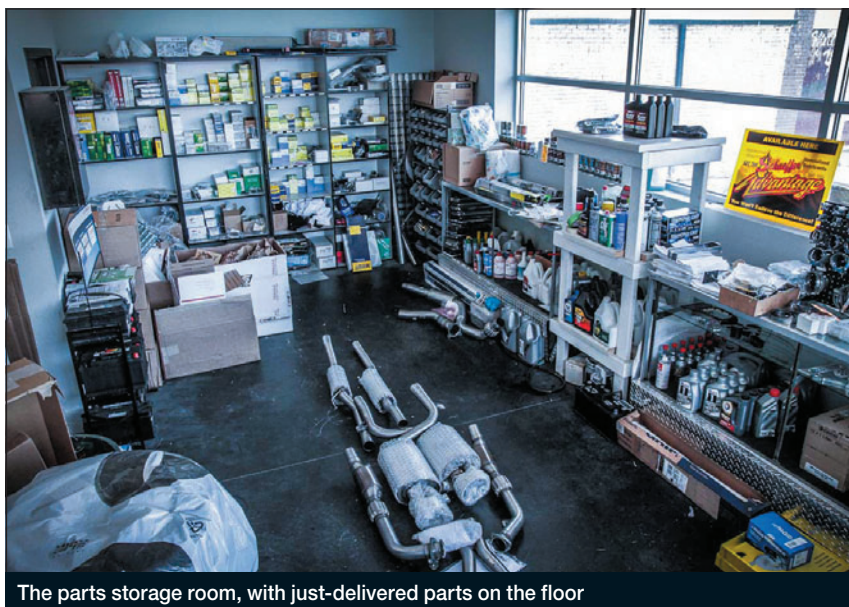
Sump’s admitted paucity of professional auto repair experience turned out to be beneficial in that it presented “a lack of bad habits and pre-conceived expectations,” he says, resulting in an “out-of-the-box approach to differentiation.” These experiences evolved into his strategy of surrounding himself with the best technicians and the pursuit of never-ending education, augmented by a set of strong religious beliefs. (In his spare time, Sump leads a youth ministry in Westminster, Colo.)

### Embracing Elite Technicians

“Our mission is to transform the automotive industry by setting new standards. We will bless clients by meeting their needs and exceeding expectations with integrity, innovation and excellence,” he says. “The quality-of-work environment and shop reputation are the driving forces behind our approach to excellence.”



The service area covers 6,000 square feet with eight bays and six hydraulic lifts.



The parts storage room, with just-delivered parts on the floor

The shop’s repairers “are considered elite in their field,” according to Sump. “A unique quality of Avalon’s technicians is that three of the four each has specialized dealership training in one or two vehicle makes and are master certified by the manufacturers. Subsequently, they are constantly seeking new training and further understanding of technical advancements while they also cross-train each other to become more experienced on other makes.

“Service advisors and managers train every other Tuesday evening while we discuss key elements of customer care and critique recorded phone calls. Our company mandates ongoing training for our technicians as well as our service consultants, and we provide open

access” to an ever-increasing array of educational opportunities. The shop pays all of the costs.

To discourage “a self-focused attitude” and reduce disappointment during the slower off-season months, the primary technicians are guaranteed a monthly set of paid hours, which also aids in promoting their willingness to spend time with the clients. “The employees understand that ongoing training is an assumed responsibility, and their salary base includes time required to attend classes. Each primary technician is given an escalator, which is significant in sustaining high levels of individual productivity and proficiency,” Sump reports.

“Our service staff and managers both are paid a salary base. They work

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set hours each week and are incentivized as well based on performance. Service staff and managers also receive additional monthly gross sales bonuses as a percentage of total sales when adequate margins and total sales goals are met. They are taught that the more training events they attend, the more opportunity there is for increased revenues and, in turn, greater bonuses.”

### Maintaining a ‘Yes’ Mentality

“In addition to providing superior repair and maintenance service on your Audi, BMW, Volkswagen, Porsche, or MINI,” says Sump, the shop’s personnel “are experts in performance upgrades such as engine tuning to increase horsepower, exhaust upgrades to enhance your vehicle’s sound, suspension to improve handling or other performance and styling upgrades you desire.”

Customizations account for 5 percent to 10 percent of the annual sales, which have gained substantial year-over-year growth in both revenues and profits ever since the shop opened.

Avalon’s targeted marketing radius is about eight miles amid a varied demographic pattern. East Colfax Avenue, where the shop is located, is billed as “The Longest Main Street in America.” A dense population pool

resides in homes costing up to \$2 million along with more modest abodes.

Aiming to attract patrons who have grown “tired of dealership drama,” a three-year/36,000-mile warranty is provided on parts and labor.

“It is vital that we supply only the highest quality parts. Our primary suppliers are WORLD PAC and local Audi, BMW, VW and Porsche dealerships,” Sump says. “We have been able to maintain great relationships with the dealership suppliers that allow us to obtain pricing at the deepest level. Our sublet relationships are also very important to us. We have specialists that perform window tint, alignment, body repair, tire mounting, towing, etc. at high levels.”

An in-house fleet of rental vehicles, which also is marketed to the general public, is available at no-charge and without any time limits for the customers. “It’s just a cost of doing business for us — it’s a marketing cost,” he says, adding that it is built into the fee structure.

“We know that the quality of technical work will speak for itself, and so we focus on unique ways to ‘wow’ our clients in very tangible ways,” Sump notes.

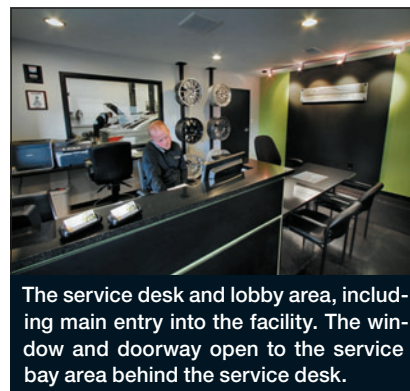
When repairs are completed, the vehicles are washed and vacuumed prior to pick up; small gifts such as company-branded chap sticks, coffee mugs, mouse pads and other items are placed in the cabin. Hand-written thank you cards also are mailed out.

Three staff members are assigned to answer the telephone throughout the business day. “We utilize a series of phone scripts to ensure the best chance of getting clients in the door, including how to address phone estimate requests, diagnostic concerns, value building, etc. Our service staff each makes follow-up phone calls to their personal clients within one week of service, confirming everything was satisfactory and thanking them for their patronage,” he says.

“Vehicle flow management can make or break a client’s perception of our shop,” Sump points out. Attention is directed toward properly scheduling appointments as the job is dispatched to the appropriate technician. Parts are promptly ordered and consistent contact is maintained with the customer as the work ensues.



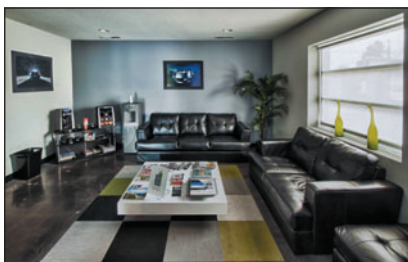
The customer pick up/drop off bay and entrance to the service desk and lobby.



The service desk and lobby area, including main entry into the facility. The window and doorway open to the service bay area behind the service desk.

“Maintaining a ‘yes’ company mentality” is another mantra that also entails “asking ourselves what little things we can do to make our clients happy,” he says. “Management follow-up is vital, and we also utilize an open dialogue practice between staff members to build consistency in application. Establishing a proper chain-of-command is also important. When the staff knows who to report to for concerns, a system of autonomy is inherent and every staff member takes ownership.”

Additionally, the shop is licensed to market used vehicles. “We don’t sell a lot of cars,” says Sump, adding that the service is mainly utilized as yet another convenience for the clientele. “We’ll buy and sell vehicles for customers looking for something specific.”



The client lounge features a selection of general interest and automotive magazines, complimentary snacks, coffee, hot cocoa, Vitamin Water and Culligan water.



The business lounge is complete with free high-speed, wireless Internet.



**JAMES E. GUYETTE**  
NEWS  
CORRESPONDENT

A journalism graduate of Ohio University, James E. Guyette has covered the automotive industry since the 1980s after having served in assorted positions at magazines and newspapers. He’s owned a few beloved cars in his day, including a customized 1979 Mercury Zephyr.

E-mail Jim at [JimGuyette2004@yahoo.com](mailto:JimGuyette2004@yahoo.com)



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TOP SHOPS 2014

# AFFIRMATIVE SERVICE

PATRONS' EYES AND EYES AFFIRM THIS YEAR'S TOP SHOP HONORS FOR ONE WASHINGTON, D.C.-AREA CHAIN.



## DYNAMIC AUTOMOTIVE

**JOSE BUESO, LEE FORMAN, DWAYNE MYERS**

Owners

**URBANA, MD.**

Main location

**3**

Number of locations

**19**

Years in business

**19**

Number of technicians

**24**

Total number of employees

**12,000 SQUARE FEET**

Shop size — main location

**13**

Number of bays — main location

**378**

Average vehicles per week — all

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"We've got a lot of Secret Service

BY JAMES E. GUYETTE | NEWS CORRESPONDENT

**W**ith a company motto of "Where Customers Become Friends," the dynamic ownership trio of Jose' Bueso, Lee Forman and Dwayne Myers has conveyed their commitment to providing their personal — and personable — best in delivering full-service maintenance and repairs to make Dynamic Automotive a *Motor Age* Top Shop.

In addition to mechanical expertise, the three-shop chain serving the Washington, D.C., area offers quick lube lanes and car washes.

"We tell people that we pretty much do anything except body work," says Myers. "It's a broad range of everything, and we do any type of repair on any type of vehicle."

European nameplates amount to 40 percent of the traffic because of the proximity to Washington and its high-end economic status as the nation's center of power. Budget-minded customers also are part of the marketing mix. "The farther out from D.C., the older the cars get," Myers reports.

Founded in 1995, Dynamic's do-it-all approach has proven to be a capital idea, as the company has established



Employees at the Urbana, Md., location include (from left) William King, Robert Blasini, Jason Sexton, Charles Renner, Kevin Kelly, Robert Allen, Dwayne Myers, Mark Murphy, Garrett Geisler, Paul Foster, David Dobson and Stuart Page.

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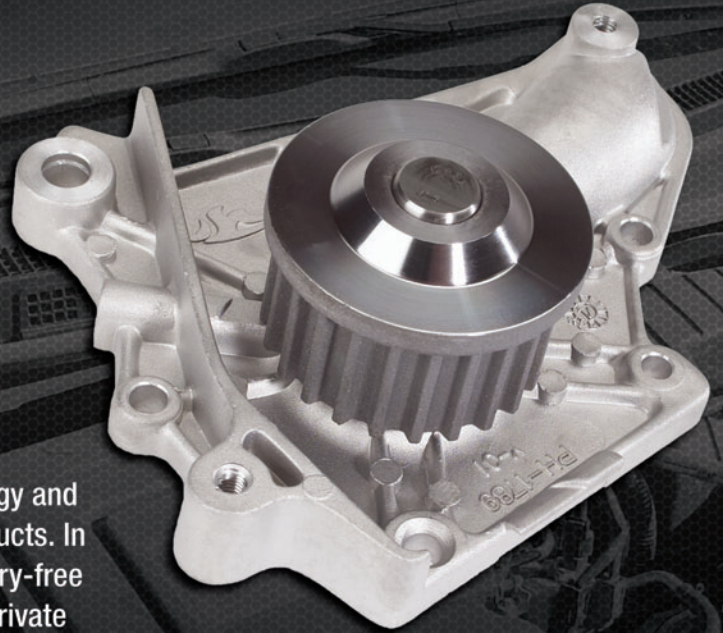




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agents,” according to Meyers. “We know this because they can’t give us their names; they’re listed as ‘John Does’ in our database.”

It seems that all eyes, and ayes, are on this business, as a certified online customer review site presents seven pages of mostly five-star ratings, netting a 4.6 average of respondents eager to recommend the company to their friends and associates. Female motorists are especially effusive in their praise:

“Dynamic Automotive takes care of me and my cars as if we were family,” says Donna. (*Motor Age* is withholding the writers’ full names.) “They do exactly what’s needed — no more, no less — and they advise me of services that will be needed in the near future. They maintain accurate records on my cars, and they can advise me about what needs watching and/or repair. I feel that the crew cares about me personally, my safety, and the state of my vehicles. It’s very personal, and they will take whatever time is required to make me understand what is needed or to answer my questions. They trust their staff to do the right thing with customers. I have total confidence in this business, and I will keep returning.”

“I was recommended by a friend and will pass the favor on to another friend,” says Jennifer. Another Jennifer reports that the shop possesses “A fabulous staff! Accommodating and friendly. Speedy service, too!”

“Dynamic Automotive is my personal car shop,” an additional reviewer comments. “They know my car and me, and they treat us both like it really matters. I love this business, but mostly I love the fact that they are always looking out for me and my vehicles.”

Yet another satisfied patron reports that she has passed the shop’s reputation along to a third generation: “My grandson now comes to you.”

And the roll call of votes-of-confidence goes on and on...

“We try and try and try” to deliver top service, “and we try and try and try to be personable,” Myers notes.

### Community-Centered Car Care

“All three of our shops are in ‘communities,’” Myers explains. Local demographic characteristics are studied prior to entering a given 10-mile marketing sphere. Executing an expansion in 2005 is a case in point. “We opened it before the town was ready,” Myers recalls. “It was going from farm to residential and they were building new homes.”

Myers, Bueso and Forman decided that debuting a deluxe “monster shop” represented an appealing and ultimately effective entry into the burgeoning neighborhood. “When we opened our third store, we went from small shops to one with a lot of overhead. We had an architect, but we designed it ourselves; it was our ideas and thoughts that went into it,” says Myers. The subsequent customer counts confirm that the correct choices were made. “These are busy areas — a lot of growth.”

Each particular parcel in the triad of bedroom communities being served is picked to provide the surrounding residents with non-hecktic, easy, close-to-home commuter access. “We’re not on the pike in the rat race. People start their cars in the morning and drive to D.C.”

Although many of the residents are well-heeled, they also can be foot-loose, as the population tends to be transient, shifting in makeup when election results are tallied and political



David Dobson changes an oil filter in a customer’s vehicle.

employment changes are implemented. “Government workers come and go, and there’s a high turnover rate in the housing here,” Myers points out, emphasizing the necessity of maintaining an assertive array of online and traditional advertising strategies to attract potential patrons moving into the area. “You’re new to the community — why don’t you give us a try?” is the most-conveyed message.

Mechanical competence, solid business ethics and friendly personal attitudes take over from there to produce an ongoing pattern of word-of-mouth recommendations, which Myers views as the most dynamic and effective form of advertising.

“We use a variety of marketing tools, including sponsoring a local radio personality, Dave Serio, who hosts a weekly show on Saturdays called ‘You Auto Know’ on WFMD. Dave mentions Dynamic Automotive as a sponsor and directs callers to our shops for service,” says Myers. “We (send) direct mail flyers throughout the year to our specific marketing areas. We have found this to be one of the best ways to drive customers to our doors.”

“To educate our customers about the products and services we offer we have videos that loop on (in-house)



(Left) The center view of the quick lube basement. (Right) There are four bays in the quick lube department, in which oil kept on-hand also is displayed.



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small monitors and display areas with information. And we have invited our product vendors to hold demonstrations at our annual benefit car show. Also, social media is a great way to promote our business for minimal cost.

Plus there is free popcorn awaiting in the waiting room. "It's a big hit," reports Myers, citing the tantalizing smells wafting from the vintage-like tilting kettle cooker. "I say, 'come on by when you're not spending money,' and we've had people come by just to eat the popcorn."

### Fitting into the Team

There is more than just a kernel of truth in that the key factor in hiring

staff members is that they have to be genuinely nice people eager to impart their natural friendliness to the customers coming through the bay doors. "You have to treat them right because word-of-mouth is the most positive — and negative — thing you can have."

That attitude is further reflected in the methods Dynamic utilizes to handle operations on the air-conditioned shop floor. "My job is to take care of my people, and they take care of the customers."

Candidates for employment are selected largely on their ability to work across the aisle with their colleagues. "I look for the right fit — who's going to fit into the team best," says Myers.

"The guys in the shop work on a team system," he explains, adding the approach eliminates internal competition for the more lucrative tickets while ensuring that each individual's skill sets are appropriately applied. "They pick whatever they're strong at, and that's what they work on. No one person is as smart as the team together."

A majority of the staff lobbied for this non-competitive approach. "It's what they wanted and I went for it; it's worked out great."

As a former tank mechanic in the Army, where errors can be catastrophic, Myers has long been a big believer in ongoing training and education.

"As the technology in the automotive industry is ever-changing, we encourage our employees to stay up to date. We pay for continued education classes, seminars at local colleges, trade schools and events held by our suppliers like Auto Service Plus and WORLDPAK to encourage our employees to continue learning. Our technicians' pay structure is based in part on each ASE certification they hold. This is to encourage our technicians to keep advancing in their career," he says.

"We track each technician's performance by analyzing efficiency, proficiency and productivity. Monthly bonuses are awarded for certain levels of sales based on their productivity," Myers reports.

"We encourage our employees and managers to handle day-to-day issues. If they take the initiative and make a mistake, I won't fault them for trying; instead I will explain how I would have done things differently. It's a learning experience for them," he points out. "We also have apprentice technicians who are learning and fine-tuning their skills to take advantage of advancement opportunities as they arise." **TM**



Shown is the entrance to the shop's carwash. The customer pulls their vehicle up to the entrance and an employee scrubs the tires and car down before running it through. The picture shows a car being pulled through the carwash tunnel.



The shop's employees' kitchen features a round table the employees can use for lunches or the staff as a group can use for meetings.



**JAMES E. GUYETTE**  
NEWS  
CORRESPONDENT

A journalism graduate of Ohio University, James E. Guyette has covered the automotive industry since the 1980s after having served in assorted positions at magazines and newspapers. He's owned a few beloved cars in his day, including a customized 1979 Mercury Zephyr.

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<sup>1</sup>2013 Aflac WorkForces Report, a study conducted by Research Now on behalf of Aflac, January 7 – 24, 2013. <sup>2</sup>Eastbridge Consulting Group. U.S. Worksite/Voluntary Sales Report. Carrier Results for 2012. Avon, CT: April 2013. Coverage is underwritten by American Family Life Assurance Company of Columbus. In New York, coverage is underwritten by American Family Life Assurance Company of New York. Worldwide Headquarters | 1932 Wynnton Road | Columbus, GA 31999

## TOP SHOPS 2014

# AHEAD OF THE CURVE

A UNIQUE NICHE MARKET IS JUST ONE SEGMENT OF CLIENTS THIS REPEAT WINNER SERVES.

BY ROBERT BRAVENDER | CONTRIBUTOR

It was curious; lots of facts and figures are tabulated for these profiles, but in listing the number of customer vehicles they get per week, one shop had added a subcategory called "Interlock clients." Are those cars that got stuck together? People who can't get out of their vehicles? Two cars with the same key?

"Colorado's zero tolerance policy on DUIs requires an Interlock breathalyzer be installed on your car," explains Judi Haglin, who with husband Dana runs Haglin Automotive in Boulder, Colo. "We have a contract with (manufacturer) LifeSafer, and these clients come in every 30 to 60 days to get them checked. Basically it provides a service, and we try to convert several of them into becoming customers."



### HAGLIN AUTOMOTIVE

**DANA AND JUDI HAGLIN**  
Owners

**BOULDER, COLO.**  
Location

**1**  
Number of locations

**33**  
Years in business

**5**  
Number of technicians

**10**  
Total number of employees

**9,400 SQUARE FEET**  
Shop size

**12**  
Number of bays

**80**  
Average vehicles per week

**BLUE SEAL, AAA, BBB, ASA**  
Affiliations



The Haglin crew comprises (from left) Dana Haglin, Judi Haglin, Corey Winter, Chris Drake, Jeff Abazaris, Joel Stainbrook, Miranda Murphy, Lori Nilsen, Chris Arrach and Jordan Dittrich.

Ingenious, but rife with potential awkwardness. The Interlock tests a driver's sobriety before allowing the ignition to work. And since they aren't clients by choice, how does Haglin convince a group of doubtlessly ill-tempered folk into becoming pleased patrons?

Photos: Haglin Automotive

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“You have to basically be their advocate,” she says. “When they get to us they’ve been through every part of the legal system; we’re the last step. So you have to be really compassionate, you have to want to help them get through it. We forward the phones on the weekends to either me or one of the service writers, and we take quite a few calls from people who have a temporary lockout and are freaking out. We tell them to wait 15 to 20 minutes, get something to eat, drink a lot of water, etc., to help them through this.”

Not everyone was on board when she first proposed this a few years ago. “Everybody just said, ‘But they’re all drunks,’” recalls Haglin. “I explained that they’re not, they’re just people who got caught. In all the time we’ve

been doing this, I can honestly say we’ve only had two true alcoholics who shouldn’t ever drive until they’ve quit drinking. Otherwise they’re just regular people. You just have to be patient with them and explain the system. It’s not Haglin Automotive that’s against them; we’re here to help.”

During an Interlock check, Haglin’s goes through a courtesy checklist just like on any other customer’s car to make sure everything’s working: lights, fluids, etc. The Interlock install itself takes about 20 minutes to an hour on a basic car. “It’s not any longer than an oil change and a checklist,” she notes.

But that last item is getting quicker all the time with the shop’s recent adoption of a BOLT ON TECHNOLOGY program. A software/hardware system that ties

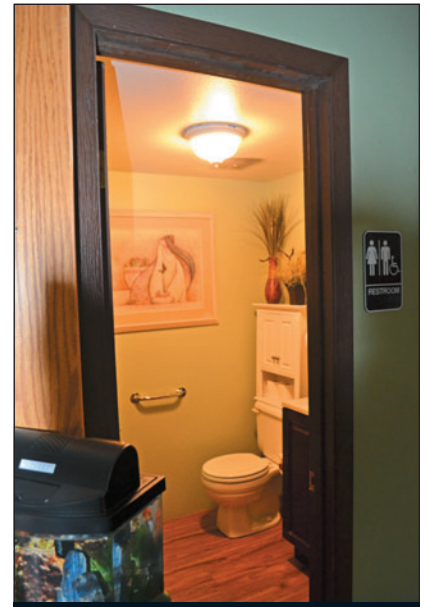
lots of functions together — communications, scheduling, inspections — it has greatly improved efficiency.

“We’ve got a very long shop at 7,000 square feet, six bays long,” Haglin points out. “For the guys at the far end, it’s a long walk to the office and back. One of the reasons we went with electronic inspection forms was that we could cut out the paper trail between the technicians and the office.”

Called Team Chat, all information flows through tablets supplied to each technician. “When we check a car in we can change the status to In Progress or Check CPL,” Haglin says with relish. “The technician knows exactly what cars he’s working on, and can do the checklist right on the tablet. From there you can use canned Notes, Jobs and



Here is a view of the south side of the service bay, featuring an alignment rack and three bays with two lifts.



The restroom sits off the waiting area.



(Left) Jeff Abazaris, Master Technician, diagnoses an Audi. (Right) Chris Jarrach works up estimates while managing the flow of the shop.



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There simply is no other diagnostic tool at this price point packed with these features.







(Left) The crew has its own lunch room and break area. (Right) The customer waiting area includes all the comforts of home.

Recommendations,” the latter actually listing parts and labor.

“Then the technician sends the checklist up to the front desk, where they start right away on the estimate,” says Haglin. “Techs can write notes straight into the invoice that tells the front desk what the issues are, like someone came in with an overheat, etc., so all the info is right there and the technician doesn’t have to run back and forth with all the paperwork. It all magically just happens,” she laughs.

“For the customer, (the system) has electronic signature for the final invoice; we can email them that and any estimates and/or text; we can text message the customers right through the invoice. There are many issues it really helps with, and we’re

still trying to get all the system’s facets put together.”

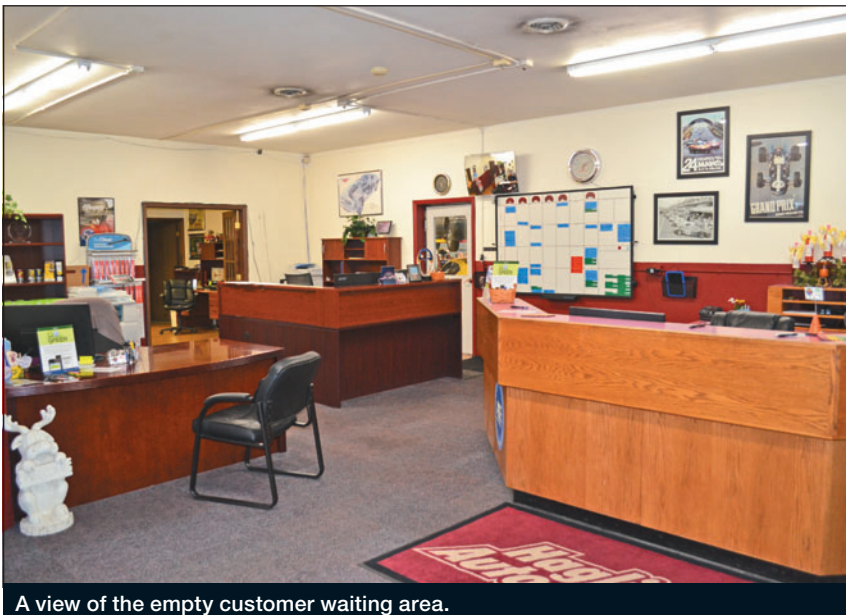
It’s clear the Haglins throw themselves into these ventures with great enthusiasm; one of their longest projects — and possibly longest lasting — has been a succession plan. “It all goes back to an ATI seminar,” relates Haglin. “Of course we thought they were talking about retirement and getting out of the business. But after listening some more, it became a paradigm shift for us; they were talking about a transition from working in the business to working on the business — basically being more efficient so we could get more time away.”

Right now the Haglins are working on listing all the jobs that each of them do and how to delegate them. “It sounds simple, but trust me, the list

is long. It’s the little things that add up. Then you have to train someone else to do what you’ve done for years. Right now we’re working on a daily report that our service writers put together. This sums up sales, deposits — basic information — plus what worked, what didn’t.”

The succession planning has been going on for two years now; it’s not something to be taken lightly, Haglin explains. “The other part we’ve been working on for even longer is finding the right people. That has been the biggest challenge. Right now we’re real excited; we have a crew that we think is going to be ‘it.’ Now it’s a matter of fine tuning them to work really well as a team.”

It’s clear the Haglins pride themselves on not responding to the market, but anticipating it. Judi reports that research is ongoing into technologies that will likely impact, if not dominate the industry in the next decade. Plus they’re currently overhauling their website to the “responsive” format. And they rescue dogs. By plane. What more do you need to know? **ZZZ**



A view of the empty customer waiting area.



**ROBERT  
BRAVENDER  
CONTRIBUTOR**

Robert Bravender graduated from the University of Memphis with a bachelor’s degree in film and video production. He has edited magazines and produced shows for numerous channels, including “Motorhead Garage” with longtime how-to guys Sam Memmolo and Dave Bowman.

✉ Email Robert at [rbravender@comcast.net](mailto:rbravender@comcast.net)



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## TOP SHOPS 2014

# DOING THE RIGHT THING

THIS IDEA SOMETIMES CAN BE EASIER SAID THAN DONE. THAT IS NOT THE CASE AT THIS COLORADO SHOP.

BY **TSCHANEN BRANDYBERRY** | MANAGING EDITOR

**W**hen you have employees with a good work-life balance, things around the shop are easier. Dana TePoel discovered that and has made it his goal to train employees at his shop, Lake Arbor Automotive and Truck, in areas outside of automotive repair to ensure that balance is found. "Training used to always be about making the person more productive

and flagging more hours. As time evolved, one thing I've learned is that happy people make good employees," says the owner of the Westminster, Colo., business, who admits he used to leave before his children woke for the day and get home after they were back in bed.

"I found that if you actually care about your employees and you teach them how to have that balance in their lives, how to be financially successful in their lives, how to manage



The staff includes (from left) Mike Crumpton, Jose Rodriguez, Darcie Hernandez, Travis Holmes, Gary Kingsbury, Dana TePoel, Sean Kuchera, Ema Gutierrez, Eddie Esparza, Kent McCray and Raul Manrique.



## LAKE ARBOR AUTOMOTIVE & TRUCK

### DANA TEPOEL

Owner

### WESTMINSTER, COLO

Location

**1**  
Number of locations

**22**  
Years in business

**6**  
Number of technicians

**11**  
Total number of employees

**9,400 SQUARE FEET**  
Shop size

**11**  
Number of bays

**136**  
Average vehicles per week

**AAA, ASA, BBB, ASE, ADS, BOSCH**  
Affiliations

their time, how to cope with stress, all the things that are typically saved for the management people ... they show up well rested, they have happy families, they're not driven by the need to survive."

Photos: Lake Arbor Automotive & Truck

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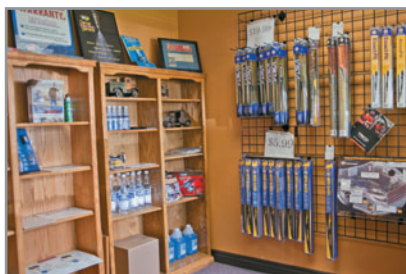
TePoel says offering training beyond technical repair is just part of doing the right thing, which happens to be the shop's mantra. "I tried lying when I was a very young child. I was never

good at it; I always got caught," he jokes. "If you just do the right thing, it's the only way to go."

Creating the simple bottom line of doing what is right for your customers makes the employees' jobs easier. He notes that it relieves the tension of on-the-job decisions. Lake Arbor Auto's policy creates an environment in which employees feel empowered to treat the customer well, without worrying about the impact on the company's bottom line. Also, TePoel and company have a written work-flow process to increase productivity, with feedback forms that can be filled out and distributed either up or down the chain of command, they report.

"I've just held my guns about doing the right things and being a good person in the community," TePoel says. "I've discovered how this works as a marketing tool. Customers recognize that you've passed up an opportunity to put money on the bottom line."

But TePoel continues that it's not a missed opportunity on the bottom line of today, but rather an investment in that of tomorrow. It also works on the employees, as they have added confidence and continue to look to be an effective leader. "If you're looking to be an effective leader and manager, and you get people to be on your side and engage in the process you have going, having an entire system build on doing the right things for the right reasons and not cheating anybody, it's much easier to get people on board. To do the right thing is listed on page one of everyone's job description."



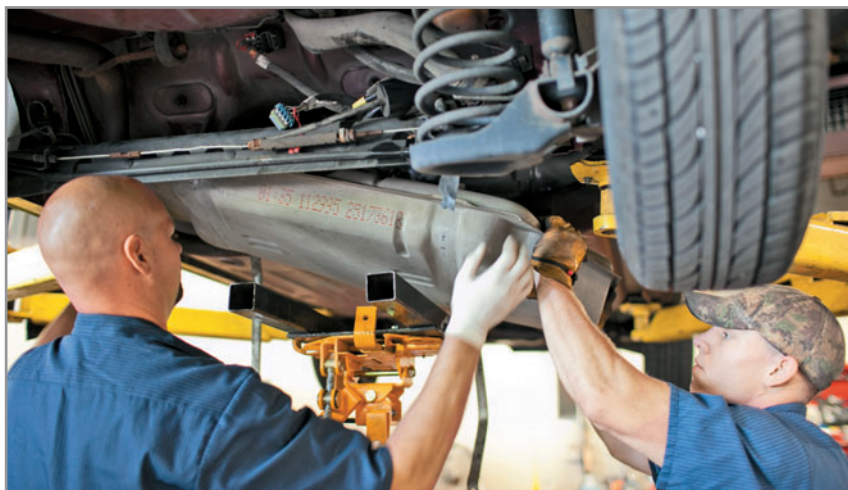
The Colorado shop carries a variety of merchandise for customers.



Customer waiting area features comfortable stuffed furniture, a handmade quilt on the wall and a TV.



The restroom caters to young clients, too.



Mike Crumpton (left) and Travis Holmes remove a gas tank to replace fuel filter.



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### Working With the Customers

Lake Arbor Auto incorporates the “do the right thing” attitude in a couple of programs for its customers — buying groups and its Wherever Warranty.

TePoel explains the groups came about as a way to draw in more customers after he realized he had a client base of men who brought in trucks for state diesel emissions tests, but not their spouse’s vehicles.

“As I began to think more about how it might work, I knew the first step needed to be (to) double the amount of cars I have on the customer,” he explains. So for a group of two, the customers get a 5 percent discount on labor. After that, the next designation is a group of six people, which receives a 10 percent discount on labor.

“I chose the number six because it had to be obtainable, but it had to move outside the boundaries of a person’s family. You’d probably have to

move outside of your family and to a co-worker,” TePoel notes.

At the next level, 25 customers, members receive a 15 percent discount on labor, an effort created to bring in companies. Overall, the programs are not meant to measure customer dollars, but rather drive customer behavior.

“Everyone has to play. It can’t be the same person twice, or three people twice,” TePoel says of the various visit requirements each group holds. “When a group has five different people in the group who have engaged in the process say in the month of October and they need one more person, you email the group and say, ‘If one more person in the group comes in, you get 10 percent rather than a 5 percent discount. So one more person comes in because they’re encouraged by the others in the group (to do so).

“It helps us build and keep that core in the center,” he continues. “You’ve always got new customers coming in and you have some attrition in customers always falling off the back. We try to control the people falling off the back.”

In addition to the groups, the Wherever Warranty offers that if a vehicle owner brings the vehicle to Lake Arbor Automotive with issues that should be covered under warranty, the shop will offer to take it to the nearest dealership and bring it back upon completion, at no additional cost.

“It’s again, an investment in tomorrow’s bottom line. This is the same thing as doing the right thing,” TePoel states. “Initially, I did it because it was the right thing to do. If I’m in a position of trust and a customer brings their car to me and they don’t know that they may be entitled to some kind of extended warranty, they may invest if they knew they could get the repairs for free.”

For example, TePoel experiences this a lot with diesel trucks. Many owners extend warranties unbeknownst to them based on past proven failures in the vehicle models. The shop lets them know about the repairs, building trust with them, as he can do other, and in his words, better service for the customers.

“Every time I did this for someone, they were flabbergasted,” he says. “They say, ‘I was ready to spend \$1,800, and I never would have known, never could have known.

### Moving Forward in Life

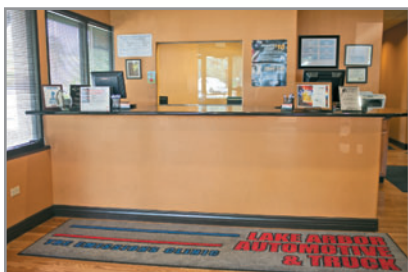
While TePoel is not ready to move out of the business just yet, he has his goals in place and will be ready to complete his succession plan just more than five years. Down the line, he also has in place plans to sell the building to whom-ever buys the business. Staggering the timeline works well for him.

“I’ve got quite a bit of skin in the game,” he explains. “That’s kind of how, from a business perspective, I have chosen to sell (the business) in 2022, and then sell the building in 2032.”

The extra time will allow TePoel to continue grooming the technicians and service employees learn to understand the business like a business owner. Once the employee hits certain benchmarks, TePoel talks with him or her, outlining his plan for retirement and sharing his intention to sell to someone in the shop that will continue the “do the right thing” approach. The approach also pays dividends now, as these employees are more efficient, making more money for themselves and bettering the shop.

Then he can shift gears and become the shop’s consultant, keeping the community outreach going. His plan also will allow him to spend more time with his grandchildren, who will be 11 and 8 at the time of sale, in addition to any other grandchildren who will come along. He plans on building on Friday Fun Days, during which he takes the children to the museum, zoo, parks and more. It’s part of being there more, like he wishes now he would’ve been when his children were young.

And ties back into training his employees outside of the bays so they can have a better work-life balance from the start. **ZZ**



Lake Arbor’s customer service counter.



Technician Mike Crumpton (right) speaks with visitors in the training room.



Cubby holes in back room hold techs’ special tools and shop equipment.



**TSCHANEN  
BRANDYBERRY**  
 MANAGING EDITOR

Tschanen Brandyberry has been with *Motor Age* since 2008, after writing for *Aftermarket Business* for two years. She is a graduate of Ohio University and served in editorial positions at multiple newspapers in Ohio.

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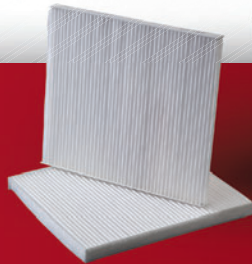


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## TOP SHOPS 2014

# DON'T GET PUSHY

**RADICAL DISDAIN FOR PUSHY SALES TACTICS HIGHLIGHTS REASONS RAD AIR IS A TOP SHOP YET AGAIN.**

BY **JAMES E. GUYETTE** | NEWS CORRESPONDENT

In business since 1975 with a pattern of steady expansion around Northeast Ohio, Andy and Elissa Fiffick's Rad Air Complete Car Care and Tire Centers has netted *Motor Age* Top Shop honors for five years in a row.

And Andy Fiffick is quick to salute the other high-scoring Top Shops for being among industry's best and most reputable. "Everybody on that list is awesome," he observes, adding that

too many repairers throughout the country are so intent on upselling and running up big tickets that they have lost sight of what should be the overriding goal: Providing trustworthy and reliable services at a fair price.

"That group gives us all a black eye," says Fiffick, expressing his disdain for excessive sales pitches. Overreaching to reach financial quotas by tacking on unnecessary tasks or rushing to push certain repairs that can safely wait until a later date "is counter-productive to

what the client actually needs, and it sets up the staff to be dishonest," he contends.

Most motorists have enough concerns over making mortgage payments, buying braces for the kids or meeting other household expenses that being socked with an inflated auto repair bill is simply the wrong way to conduct business. Rad Air's position might seem radical to some, and while



## RAD AIR COMPLETE CAR CARE

**ANDY AND ELISSA FIFFICK**  
Owners

**PARMA HEIGHTS, OHIO**  
Location

**12**  
Number of locations

**39**  
Years in business

**6**  
Number of techs — main location

**72**  
Total number of employees — all

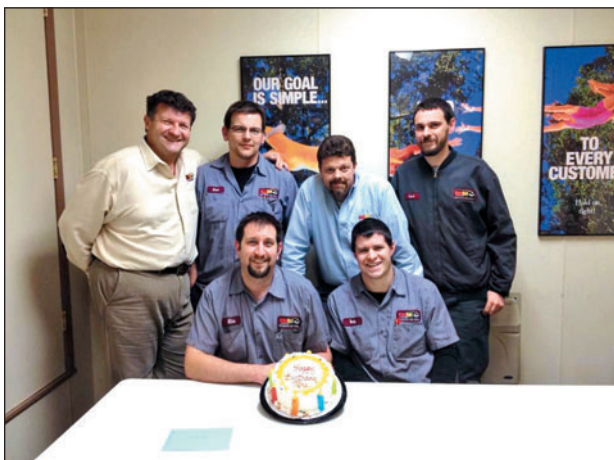
**6,623 SQUARE FEET**  
Shop size — main location

**9**  
Number of bays — main location

**64.6**  
Average vehicles per week — main

**BLUE SEAL, AAA, BBB**  
Affiliations

unsavory tactics might bring in short-term funds, over the long haul those customers are unlikely to return — and chances are they will share that unpleasant experience with their friends, neighbors and relatives, according to Fiffick.



The Parma Heights staff includes (from left) Andy Fiffick, Dean Maynard, Rob Marflak, Chuck Witkowski, Mike Balogh and Randy Prem.

Photos: Rad Air Complete Car Care

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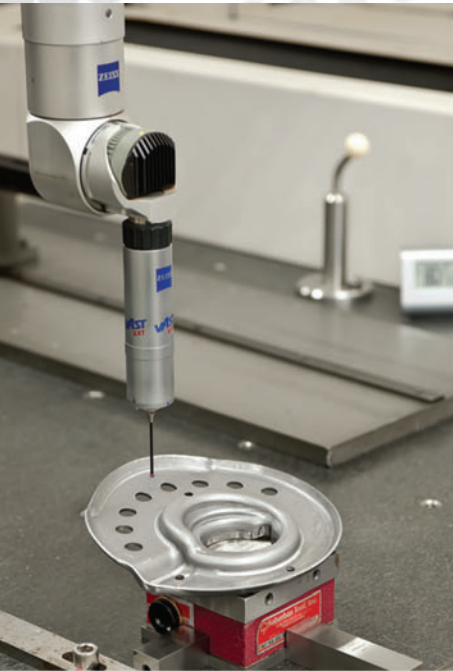




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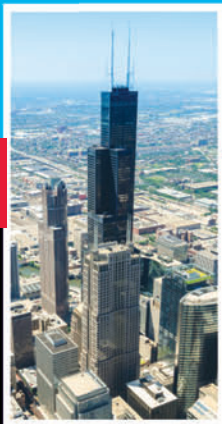


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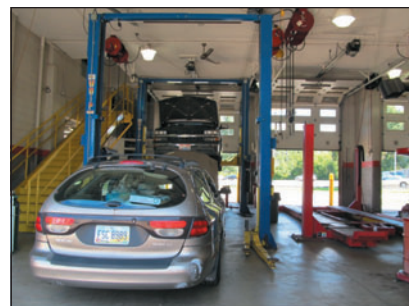
For more information and to register visit [automechanikachicago.com](http://automechanikachicago.com)



A look of the interior central service bays looking south.



A look at the exterior of the rear service bays on the east side of the facility.



Another view of the Parma Heights' rear service bays, this time looking east.

"We wholeheartedly believe in what we are doing by taking care of our customers," he declares. "Rad Air is known as the go-to shop for expert repairs and unparalleled customer service." The company's impressive growth pattern over nearly 40 years presents ample evidence that a "fix it right the first time" focus with no bill-padding is the right route to success.

Currently encompassing 12 locations, the company began as a single small radiator and air conditioning repair shop, hence the "Rad Air" name, in suburban Cleveland.

"We quickly earned a reputation for offering car owners the best service in the area at an affordable price," says Fiffick, who credits his father and grandfather for fostering in him a solid sense of ethics coupled with an exacting attention to detail.

"My Dad was a sergeant in the Army motor pool working on tanks and Jeeps. My grandfather was a cabinetmaker — talk about perfectionists! I started early," he continues, recounting how he began working on cars alongside his father at the tender age of 6.

"On evenings and weekends, my Dad taught me to fix a vehicle correctly the first time, and I began striving to become an expert technician." After high school Fiffick attended the Lincoln Technical Institute in Indiana and became a Master Technician, a certification he still holds today. He later earned an associate degree in business management.

### Launching New Locations

Joined by Fiffick's wife Elissa and daughter Brittany Fiffick-Gumucio, who has developed a sophisticated and wide-ranging Internet and social media presence, Rad Air has been expansion-minded from the get-go. "Our goal is to open new stores each year for the foreseeable future," he reports.

At this point there are five potential properties being considered for additional locations. "Three of them look promising," Fiffick reveals, describing the intricacies of completing these types of transactions.

"You have to find the right property at the right deal," he notes. Other analytical aspects include getting a handle on a neighborhood's vehicle traffic patterns, economic and population demographics, and the average age of the cars being driven.

Keeping abreast of the latest in propulsion systems has proven to be another element. Although electric vehicles (EVs) do not yet comprise a huge market within the Cleveland-Akron axis, in March the Fifficks launched a new division called Cleveland Hybrid to provide hybrid and electric vehicle owners with replacement batteries, maintenance and repairs. Thus far sales have been electrifying.

"We've been getting hybrid people driving from up to 100 miles away to get their hybrids serviced," says Fiffick. "I owned the first hybrid Ford Escape in the Cleveland market in 2005, and we've been training on hybrids since they came out." The company also runs hybrids within its fleet of business vehicles.

"Hybrid and EV owners can face challenges when attempting to get their cars repaired or find replacement batteries," he points out. As the region's first aftermarket shop dedicated to hybrids, "the goal of Cleveland Hybrid is to offer an affordable alternative to the pricey services offered by traditional dealers," says Fiffick.



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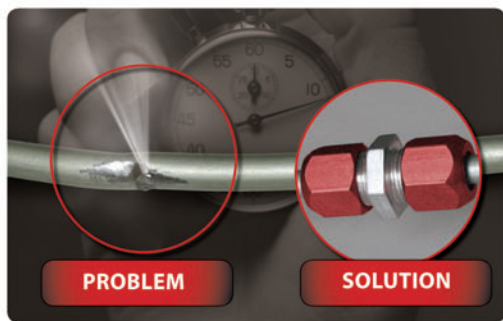
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“There is no doubt that these services are needed in our area,” he says. “There are literally thousands of hybrid cars on the streets in our area, which are great for the environment and for gas usage, but getting them serviced has been a real hassle for car owners,” Fiffick explains. “The launching of Cleveland Hybrid provides these car owners a new source for affordable, expert repairs and replacement batteries that will save thousands of dollars.”

This new division promises the same “fast, friendly, community-based service” that has driven the shop’s reputation over the years. “Clients can expect honest advice, no pushy sales tactics, free loaner vehicles and an excellent warranty.” The specialized services are available at all the Rad Air locations.

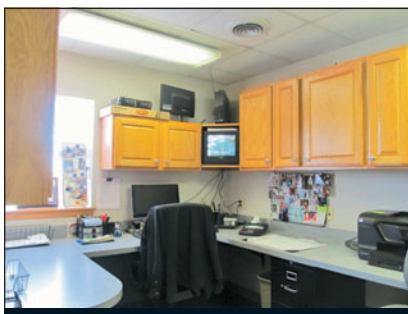
### Ongoing Upgrades

“In addition to making sure our staff has the education they need to be the best, we also make sure we provide proper tools and equipment so they may provide superior service,” says Fiffick.

“Unique scanners (such as those for BMW and Mercedes) and unique tools are shared between shops and are hand-delivered by a Rad Air staff member on an as-needed basis. New tools are purchased when they are needed in the shop more than twice per month,” he says.



Locations have similar, but unique waiting areas based on shop setup.



A look at Parma Heights’ rear office.

“Managers and senior technicians work together to identify new tools and equipment to improve the shop’s operations and service offerings. We allocate 3 percent to 5 percent of gross profit to purchase new equipment, update existing equipment and renew OEM and aftermarket software subscriptions,” says Fiffick.

“In addition to making sure our shops are supplied with the proper tools and equipment, we recognize that we must also provide our managers with clean, modern service counters and waiting areas.” This year five locations underwent renovations on the counters, offices and waiting rooms.

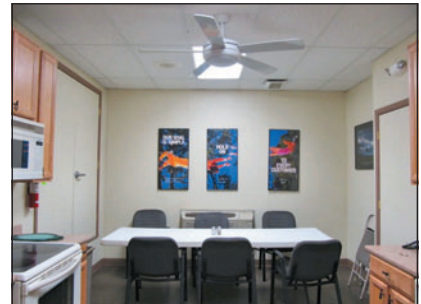
Along with factory-level training available as part of the ACDelco TSS program, the company also contracts with respected consultants to conduct educational sessions for the staff. In addition to John Anello, G. Jerry Truglia and Sam Bell, Rad Air has retained the services of pioneering hybrid guru Craig Van Battenburg and his Automotive Career Development Center (ACDC), which has provided 40 hours of instruction.

Tom Warmuth, vice president of operations and general manager, regularly schedules in-house education to ensure that all technicians are kept current with the latest technologies. “Training is paid for by the company and allows our technicians to become the best technician they can be,” according to Fiffick.

“This training also allows Rad Air service centers to repair all makes, models and years. Employees receive incentive bonuses and recognition for updating their education and improving their skills,” he notes.

“Each Rad Air service manager is expected to run their shop as if it were their own business while adhering to Rad Air’s business philosophy and company values of honesty and integrity,” says Fiffick. “This allows them to take the responsibility and authority for improving employee productivity rates and client retention rates.”

The company’s “primary focus is building relationships with clients who will become our brand ambassadors in their own communities,” he emphasizes. “Therefore, we do not use sales or job quotas, productivity goals or SPIFF (Sales Promotion Incentive



Parma Heights employees’ lunch area.



Lead Technician Mike Balogh performs a safety inspection on a 2012 Jeep Liberty.

Fund) programs. Instead, we examine gross profit and employee productivity figures on a monthly basis. Each employee strives to reach a productivity rate of 85 percent.”

As part of the company’s succession plan Warmuth is slated to oversee the operation when Fiffick eventually steps down from his position as president.

Warmuth’s existing duties include examining staff productivity rates along with supervising the training programs. Additional aid is offered to branches and individual employees who need assistance reaching the company’s stated goals. “Most importantly,” says Fiffick, “maintaining a client retention rate of 82 percent or better is the greatest indicator of our ability to successfully manage each shop.” *MZ*



**JAMES E. GUYETTE**  
NEWS  
CORRESPONDENT

A journalism graduate of Ohio University, James E. Guyette has covered the automotive industry since the 1980s after having served in assorted positions at magazines and newspapers. He’s owned a few beloved cars in his day, including a customized 1979 Mercury Zephyr.

✉ E-mail Jim at [JimGuyette2004@yahoo.com](mailto:JimGuyette2004@yahoo.com)



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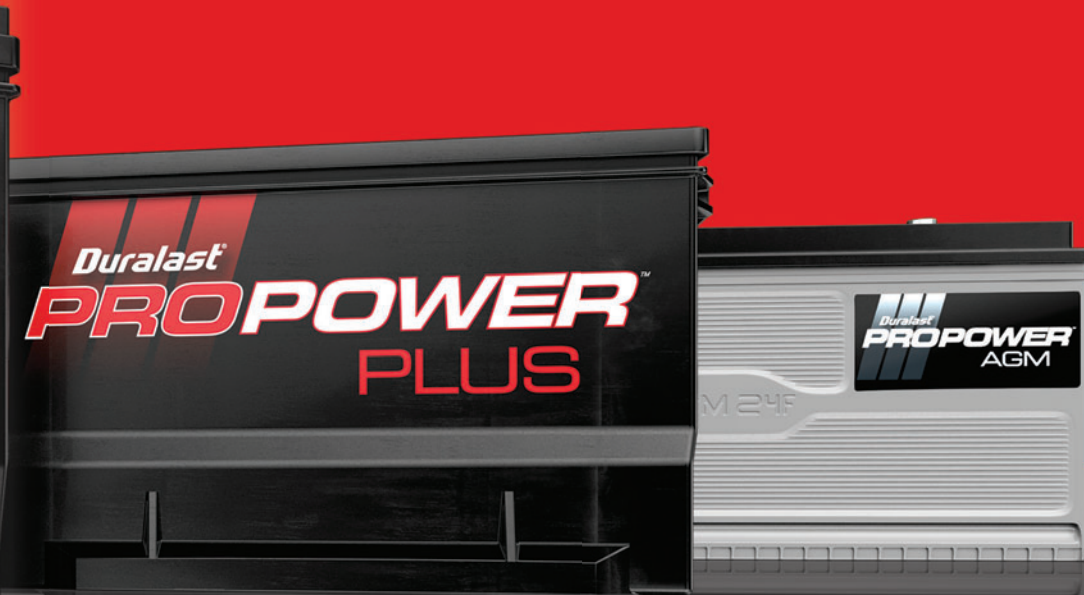




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TOP SHOPS 2014

# PROACTIVE = ACTIVE PROS

THINKING THEY COULD DO BETTER THAN OTHERS, THIS PAIR SET OUT ON THEIR OWN, AND DID JUST THAT.

BY ROBERT BRAVENDER | CONTRIBUTOR

**W**hat does it take to be proactive? To act on an idea. Like the notion Reed Galloway and Mike Wright had that there had to be a better way of treating customers than the disconnect they witnessed at the dealership they worked for. By 2000, they put thought into action and opened

RM Automotive in Northridge, Calif. Today, Wright oversees the workflow of their technicians, while Galloway handles the business affairs of a shop that specializes in Japanese makes.

"We go above and beyond what most shops do," Galloway states. "That has molded us; we try to be a model shop as far as trying to change the industry and what people perceive automotive repair to be."



## RM AUTOMOTIVE

**REED GALLOWAY, MIKE WRIGHT**  
Owners

**NORTHRIDGE, CALIF.**

Location

**1**  
Number of locations

**14**  
Years in business

**3**  
Number of technicians

**5**  
Total number of employees

**3,900 SQUARE FEET**  
Shop size

**5**  
Number of bays

**40**  
Average vehicles per week

**BLUE SEAL, AAA, ASCCA**  
Affiliations



Team members are (from left) Mike Wright, Rich Wilson, Heidi Buchanan, Jeff Steiniger, Emilio Chavez, Jose Suarez and Reed Galloway.

While this northern L.A. suburb is known primarily for being the epicenter of the devastating 1994 earthquake, Galloway and Wright set about mending the chasm between the client and the front counter. "We (still) feel people are just a number at the dealerships," says Galloway. "They don't offer the personal touch that we as indepen-

Photos: RM Automotive

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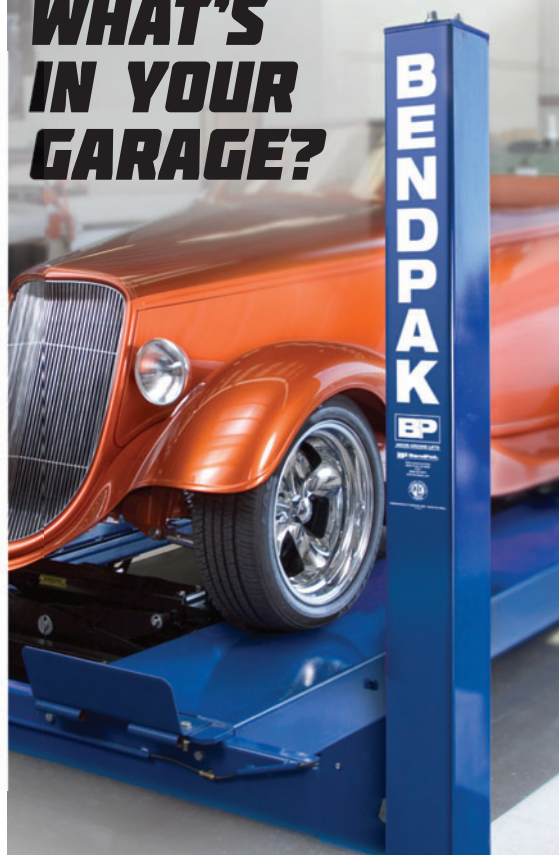
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dents do. Over time, we've built relationships; we know the customers' families, gone out to dinner with some of them, become friends."

Galloway points to his service manager/writer, Rich Wilson. "He's very personable with the customers, asking a ton of questions to make sure that he understands their problem properly. As far as consumer satisfaction goes, all of our customers receive a complimentary 30-point inspection with every service. We give out free loaner cars if theirs is staying longer than a day. We offer shuttle service without limiting it to five miles, like a lot of people would do."

They will literally go that extra mile; Northridge has around 60,000 people, but the entire San Fernando Valley has 1.8 million within its 20-mile radius, and Galloway says they will go almost anywhere in that area. "In many situations if (the client) is stuck somewhere, we'll drive the shuttle over there, jump them, and bring them and the car back to the shop. We'll also pick up cars at people's houses, do the work, bring them back; it's things like that that sets us apart."



Technician Emilio Chavez replaces a passenger rear window regulator on a 1998 Toyota Avalon for a customer.

What immediately gained RM traction in this highly competitive market was the fact that Wright was a winner of the 1999 Honda Top Tech contest. A rigorous trial of knowledge and skill, technicians are given a Honda vehicle with several bugs — problems that have to be diagnosed and fixed. "Honda's best

trained techs in the country are invited," Galloway explains. "Only two techs get to win it every year."

### Getting in the Door

Even though they opened in 2000, the industry has changed drastically since then. "Back then the typical model



While empty here, the shop fills its five bays with an average of 40 vehicles per week.

of getting a customer in the door was still the Yellow Pages, and you had pay phones everywhere," recalls Galloway. "Now people hit a button on their phone to locate you, another to find a review. The technology is so vast that there are companies coming up left and right with new ways for you to advertise."

But RM had an edge there as well: Wright's father was "very computer savvy, and I want to say we had a website as early as 2002," says Galloway. "We were very much at the forefront, knowing that we would need a one; there are still so many shops today that don't think this is a necessity."

Of course venturing into this new realm required some trial and error. "We probably interviewed three or four different companies to put a new website together," Galloway admits. "But now we use a guy who specializes in automotive websites, and he was very instrumental in getting us on top of organic searches." But nothing evolves faster than the Internet, and he points out that at least on the West Coast, Yelp is overtaking Google in that domain.

"We believe our online reviews have helped us tremendously," Galloway notes. "We post a minimum of two Facebook posts a week, and on Twitter we engage in conversations with people who Tweet about their cars."

However, some old school ideas still work. By January 2014, Los Angeles County had outlawed plastic bags, and RM took advantage of this by printing up recyclable canvas shopping bags with their name and website on the sides. "We go out to the farmers market and stuff and pass out our bags and cards," Galloway reports. "We also have them under our counter if a customer needs one. People like them because we bought the extra big ones; they can put at least two gallons of milk in there."

Apparently this didn't go unnoticed; "Just today a dealer brought us some



Service Advisor Rich Wilson helps a customer on the phone at front counter.

engine mounts in one of their own recyclable bags," he laughs.

Over the past 14 years, what has worked best? "A lot of things," muses Galloway, "but more than anything, having the right staff is always critical. We haven't really gone out and hired apprentices to train; a lot of techs came to us through our reputation. I also think it's important to get out in the community, being part of the Chamber of Commerce."

On a state level they are members of the Automotive Service Councils of California (ASCCA) through its fifth chapter, which was just named Chapter of the Year by the state board. They take part in the ASCCA Summer Conference, and Galloway was part of the National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF) panel that helps a local high school get continued funding for their automotive program and staff.

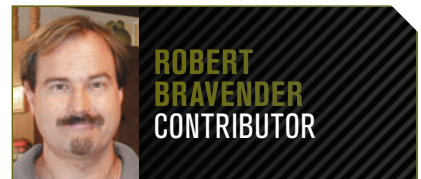
"They're very proactive owners," says Galloway of fellow members. "They're always having seminars, guest



The complimentary customer refreshment area in the waiting area.

speakers, etc., that help us all grow in the automotive business. They're also very active regarding state laws; we lobby up in Sacramento on bills like one regarding unlicensed mobile mechanics advertising on Craigslist.

"More than anything, we love what we do," Galloway says. "We try to make our shop an example and make it better for everybody; not only the consumer but our industry as a whole. It's not easy—just one day at a time." *TM*



ROBERT BRAVENDER CONTRIBUTOR

Robert Bravender graduated from the University of Memphis with a bachelor's degree in film and video production. He has edited magazines and produced shows for numerous channels, including "Motorhead Garage" with longtime how-to guys Sam Memmolo and Dave Bowman.

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## TOP SHOPS 2014

# MORE THAN THE TRANS

**TRI-CITY SHIFTS BUSINESS INTO HIGH GEAR THROUGH LEAN REPAIRS, CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS.**

BY **JAMES E. GUYETTE** | NEWS CORRESPONDENT

**A**s a *Motor Age* Top Shop, Arizona's Tri-City Transmission sets itself apart from competitors by focusing on "diligence in serving the customers," says owner Dave Riccio.

"We're diligent to the Nth degree," he elaborates, pointing out that word-of-mouth recommendations

from satisfied patrons drive the business because individual transmission repairs tend to be sporadic. "We see them every seven years. Our largest referral resource is from a family member or another customer."

A key example of Riccio's diligence is his emphasis on making sure that each customer's vehicle is treated to the most effective fluid based on what works best in their particular model.

"I stock 32 flavors of transmission



Tri-City employees are (from left) Chris Clark, Ray Tansley, Randy Marsh, Travis Schmidt, Dave Riccio, Kristian Fossler, Cindy Hillquist, Gene Lewis and Esau Tineo.



## TRI-CITY TRANSMISSION

**DAVE RICCIO**

Owner

**TEMPE, ARIZ.**

Location

**1**

Number of locations

**42**

Years in business

**6**

Number of technicians

**11**

Total number of employees

**9,000 SQUARE FEET**

Shop size

**10**

Number of bays

**30 TO 50**

Average vehicles per week

**ASA, ASE, BBB, ATRA, ATSG**

Affiliations

fluid," he reports. Each product is diligently studied to determine its performance capabilities. "I had them chemically tested, because the manufacturer isn't going to tell you what's in it."

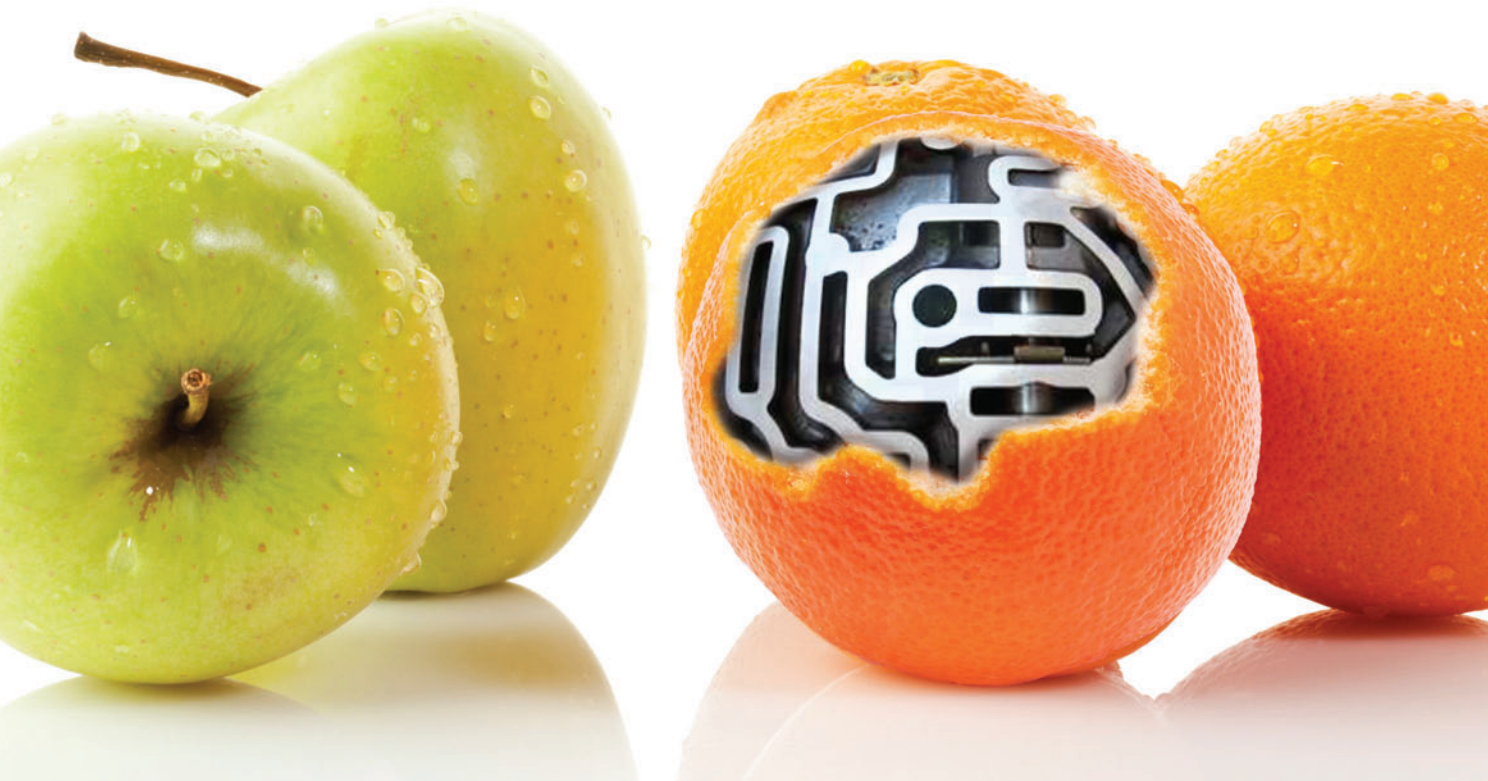
Serving the bustling metropolitan region that Phoenix has become, Tri-

Photos: Tri-City Transmission

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City takes its name from the shop's centralized location amid the triangle of Tempe, Mesa and Scottsdale. "I grew up here, so I've watched all these towns grow into each other."

Not surprisingly, transmissions take a beating in a desert climate, where the mercury can climb to 115 degrees. "It gets smokin' hot under that engine compartment," says Riccio, explaining that a transmission's seals are an especially vulnerable aspect of such punishing heat radiating off the pavement; the consequences often remain dormant until relatively cooler conditions prevail.

"Transmissions take on damage in the summer that doesn't show up until the winter. December is my busiest month," he says. "Transmission fluid expands and contracts with the temperature, and in the winter the fluid contracts and it fits through that hole."

Each new customer undergoes a thorough interview to ascertain the exact nature of the problem and implement the correct course for the repair. "We have a rigorous, systematic and script-

ed appointment-setting process as far as getting the right information. We've found that a poor customer interview is a huge time-waster for the shop. What happens in most auto repair shops is that the customer walks in the door, an advisor asks a few questions and then assumptions are made based on that information. The problem is that the transmission is a complicated component, and issues that appear transmission-related may not be related to the transmission at all," according to Riccio.

"When we don't get enough information — or the right information from a customer — we are lead down a rabbit hole. We end up wasting valuable time chasing the wrong issue. That initial interview process is the foundation for an efficient service process and a happy customer. Also, we've discovered that noises and vibrations are always a big time-waster. Whenever there is a noise or vibration, our protocol is to always go on a test drive specifically with the customer. The minute you skip protocol is the minute you have a problem," he adds.

## Learning to be Lean

"We are one of the few transmission shops in the U.S. that uses lean manufacturing to increase efficiency and reduce costs. In lean manufacturing, everything is visible and everyone has a role, so there is no question as far as delegation. The roles are very specialized; one person is a diagnostician, one person is a rebuilders and one person does quality control. There is one person for each step of the transmission repair process, and everyone is a specialist within the shop," Riccio continues.

"We have found that the concept of specialization is completely foreign to most shops. I look at it just like a football team. We still cross train, but we never put the quarterback at the defensive line. There are just certain things you can't switch up. My best employee is going to be the quarterback, but we still cross train because he has to go on vacation. We try to put people in the right role based on experience, proficiency and natural gifts. We're a learning facility as well,

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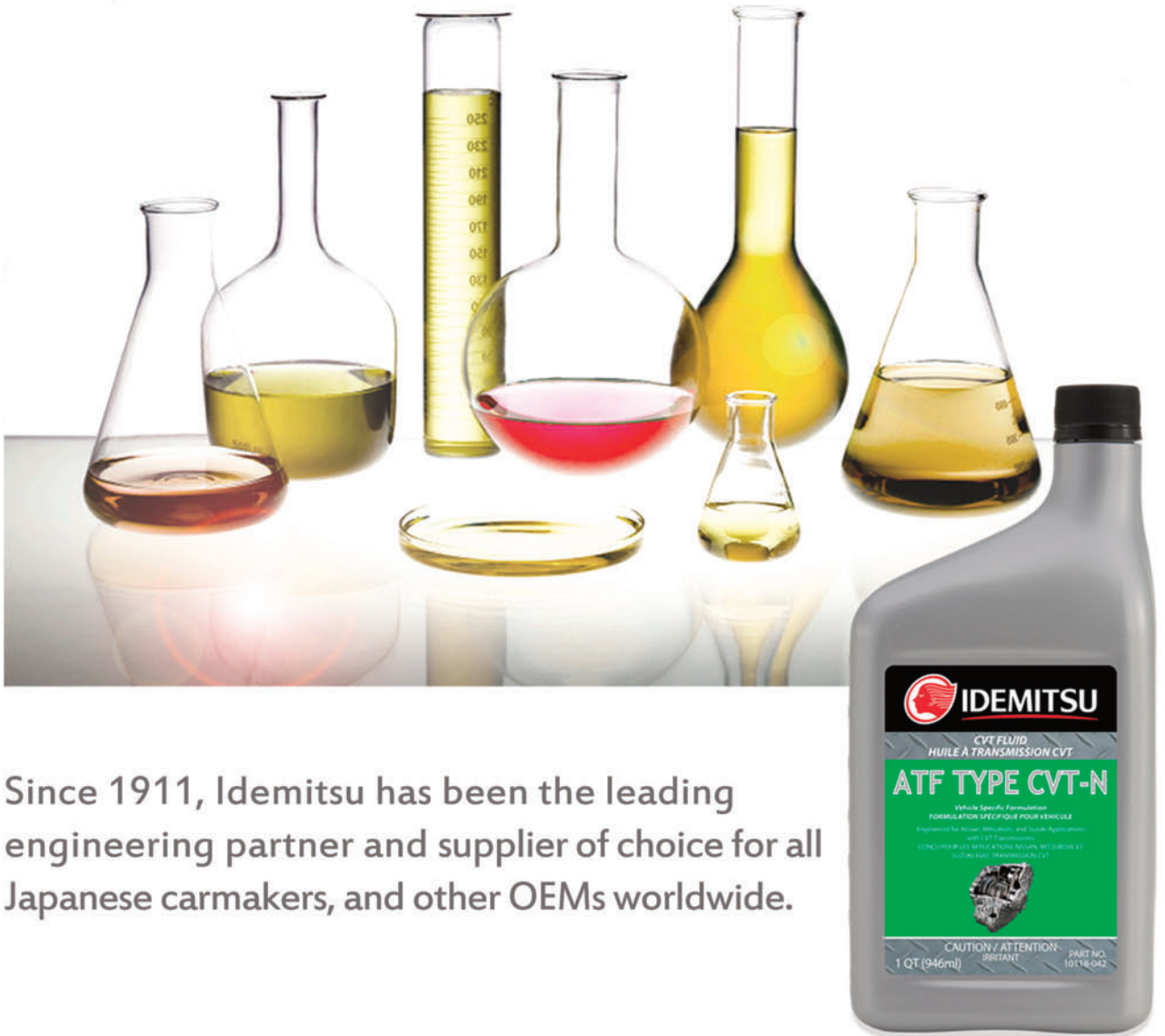
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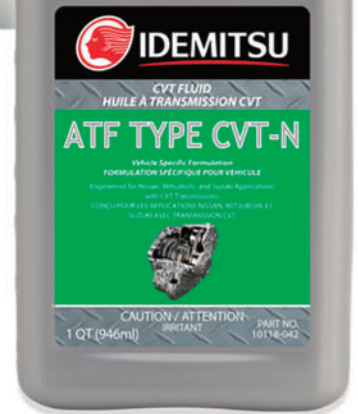


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- Rad Air Complete Car Care & Tire Centers, Hinckley, Ohio
- RM Automotive, Northridge, Calif.
- Tri-City Transmission, Tempe, Ariz.
- Victory Auto Service & Glass, Fridley, Minn.
- Zimmerman Automotive, Mechanicsburg, Pa.

which means that the quarterback will also take on a less experienced technician and coach him."

Using PIF Pro shop management software from ProfitBoost, repair orders are bar-coded and each employee has an ID card with a bar code on it as well. "When they are working on a job, they are able to scan the bar code into the system so that at any given time we can tell what each employee is working on and how much time it is taking," says Riccio.

"Everything is based on time. We work on a gross profit per hour system instead of just gross profit system or the PIF (Profit Index Factor). Our costing is based on how much time a job actually takes based on all the data we have collected through PIF Pro. We know what our average is down to a hair on a particular job," he says. "Time is a finite resource. We can't buy more time. We work on adjusted capacity. Everybody communicates about the job through the PIF Pro system. I can get a snapshot in real time of what everyone is doing."

Transmission repair is an auto repair specialty that requires extensive training and experience to achieve success, Riccio observes. "Because of that, we attend any transmission-related training that's available from ATRA (Automatic Transmission Rebuilders Association), ATSG (Automatic Transmission Service Group), WORLDPAAC and other vendors. We pay for our employees to take these training classes when there is a cost," he notes.

"In addition, every year we take our key employees to ATRA's Power Train Expo in Las Vegas. We take care of their expenses for their room, travel and entertainment as well as getting paid for their regular work day. The incentive to employees is that the more training they have, the better they will be on the job, which opens doors to advancement in position, pay and benefits. Of course, a free trip to Vegas is an incentive in itself!"

**Choosing a Path**

Riccio's ownership of Tri-City began with a devastating illness diagnosis. "In 2006 life was going well. I was 26 years old, happily married and had a precious newborn son. I also had a great sales career in the industrial heating, ventilation and air conditioning industry (HVAC). Then one day an event occurred that changed my life forever," he recounts.

"It started out as any other day; I kissed my wife Cira (pronounced "Seeda") and son and got into my car to go



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to work. However, when I tried to put the key in the ignition my hand was shaking so badly, I couldn't do it. I also noticed that I had a very bad headache. I just figured that I had a migraine and called in sick to work that day. After a couple days when the headache and shaking didn't get better, I went to the hospital. It took weeks of testing before a diagnosis was confirmed. I had Multiple Sclerosis (MS)."

Currently a new medication regimen has the condition under control, yet upon learning of the illness, Riccio (pronounced "Richeo") was filled with despair over how he would support his young family. Owning his own business was the way to go. But what? Automotive rather than HVAC became the chosen path.

"Since I can remember I have loved taking stuff apart and fixing it. At 16 years old I started working at one of

Arizona's largest tire franchises as a tire guy. By 22 years old I had moved up to become the manager of my store where I grew the shop's revenue to over \$1.2 million," he recalls.

"Then it occurred to me that I had a couple of customers in my HVAC business who owned Tri-City Transmission and it looked to me like they were old enough to be retired. I asked them if they were interested in selling their business and they said they were. I just went to a bank and filled out a loan application. Long story short, I picked up the keys to Tri-City Transmission on Nov. 1, 2006. When I purchased the business sales were at \$1.1 million. Over the course of nine years, even with the setback of the 'great recession,' I was able to grow sales to \$1.8 million."

The shop's marketing plan is strategic and highly integrated, including referrals and networking, publicity,

direct mail, radio advertising, website optimization, personal sales calls, on-site visits, telephone on-hold messaging, a 24-hour answering service, telephone follow-up, thank you notes, pizza and more.

"Because we do not do general auto repair, about 25 percent of our business comes through referrals from many of the 800 general automotive repair shops in the Phoenix area," says Riccio. "We encourage referrals by the use of a sales representative who pays personal visits to the automotive shops in the area to build relationships. I personally go visit the shops as much as I can and in some cases provide transmission training for their staff."

Radio spots have been particularly effective, and Riccio hosts a Saturday morning program called "Bumper to Bumper" that reaches a wide audience of automotive aficionados.

A professional Internet presence is another plus. "Transmission repair can be an expensive and high-risk transaction, and therefore people are very unsure about who to trust. With that in mind, our No. 1 goal with our website is to convey trust so that people will call us to set an appointment. We build trust through the use of reviews, real faces of real people and education, and through answering the most important questions of our potential customers."

Upfront pricing is a critical component, because the technique helps avoid people who are merely clicking online for the cheapest deal.

"We don't want that type of customer," Riccio asserts. "We want the savvy customer who does good research and is looking for quality over price because while we're not the most expensive transmission shop in Phoenix, we're not the least expensive either." **TL**



A view of the transmission builder room.



The rear of the shop as seen from the vehicle storage area.



**JAMES E. GUYETTE**  
NEWS  
CORRESPONDENT

A journalism graduate of Ohio University, James E. Guyette has covered the automotive industry since the 1980s after having served in assorted positions at magazines and newspapers. He's owned a few beloved cars in his day, including a customized 1979 Mercury Zephyr.

**E-mail Jim at [JimGuyette2004@yahoo.com](mailto:JimGuyette2004@yahoo.com)**



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TOP SHOPS 2014

# RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

HOW DOES A SHOP IN FLORIDA BLEND WITH FIVE LOCATIONS IN MINNESOTA? IT ALL MAKES SENSE IN THIS OWNERS' PLAN.

BY **TSCHANEN BRANDYBERRY** | MANAGING EDITOR

Opening one repair shop can be intimidating. Going from one location to two is even bigger. In some ways, growing the number of locations is kind of like being a parent – you don't know what to expect.

So says Jeff Matt, owner of Victory Auto Service and Glass, with six locations around Minnesota and Florida. The company, in business for 14 years, has its roots in Fridley, Minn., and this year opened its sixth location, a new spot in Florida.



There are 37 employees companywide, including at the Fridley location (from left) Jose Escamilla, Jeff Matt, Lloyd Matt, Troy Thompson, Dan Scherer, Coreen Weiner and Jeremiah Reedy.

"It's been really keeping your eyes and ears open, looking for opportunities and creating your own luck, they just kind of presented themselves," Matt says.

That right place, right time fortune has paid off for Matt, who started his shop in a rented facility. As he built his business, he realized owning the building was important to his business plan. He looked to move locations, but when a large client encouraged him to stay put, the timing to add a location presented itself.

"It ended up working. Then when we looked at a third location, the goal was to close the location that we were renting," Matt explains. "It was strategic that way. When we went from two to three or four, it was opportunities. I was able to get that (fourth location) really at a good value and it was in a city that I had been thinking about. ... That opportunity just kind of presented itself. From



## VICTORY AUTO SERVICE & GLASS

**JEFF MATT**  
Owner

**FRIDLEY, MINN.**  
Location

**6**  
Number of locations

**14**  
Years in business

**19**  
Number of technicians

**37**  
Total number of employees

**4,803 SQUARE FEET**  
Shop size — main location

**8**  
Number of bays — main location

**319**  
Average vehicles per week - all

**AAA, BBB, ASK PATTY, NAPA**  
Affiliations

location four and five came kind of by a connection. It was an opportunity I couldn't have created on my own."

Matt found the sixth location in Florida on Craigslist. Thinking ahead in terms of succession and vacation homes, he thought it was a great

Photos: Victory Auto Service & Glass

2014 TOP SHOPS SPONSORS



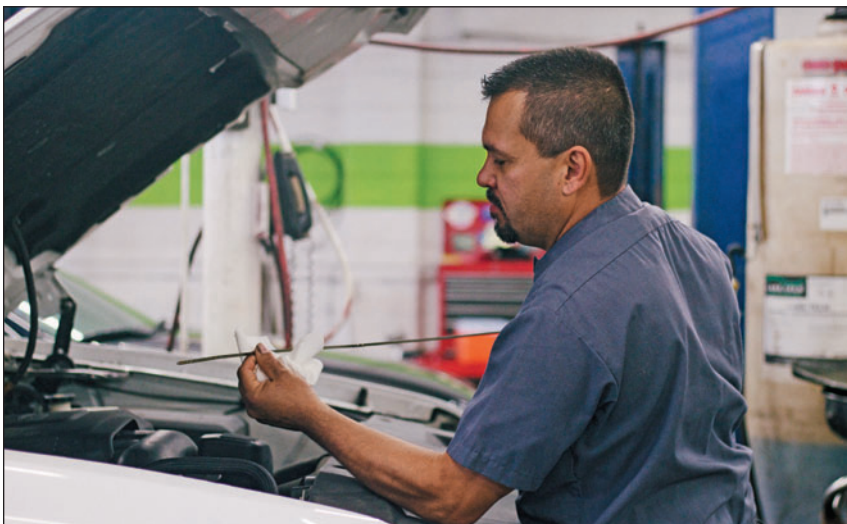




The shop makes the most out of its space for the customer waiting area.



The upstairs office area with room for employees to overlook the shop floor.



Jose Escamilla checks oil on customer's vehicle.



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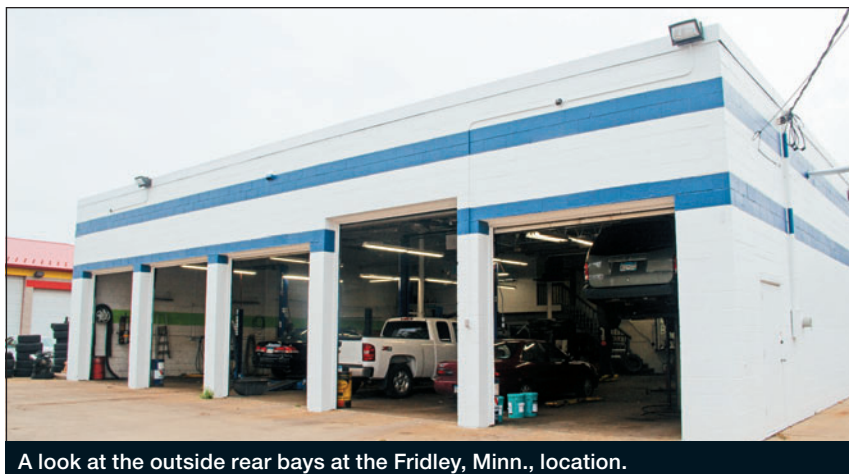


opportunity that fit in well with his plans. With some work, he will be able to keep his stress level low in regards to remotely managing the location.

"You just have to have employees that you can count on," he notes. "We acquired a manager that has a lot of experience that will do that. It's about keeping a close eye on it and trusting your instincts."

To help keep everything in line, Matt and his staff conduct regular audits of the shops. Utilizing QuickBooks and benchmarking software learned from its Business Networking International (BNI) group, the staff is able to implement industry financial best practices among other measurable marks.

"We have an open book policy and monthly discuss with managers the business and financial aspect of each location, including industry benchmarking of primary business success indicators and the business as a whole. We invite managers to help us audit our locations, giving them hands on experience in the running of a business," Matt notes.



A look at the outside rear bays at the Fridley, Minn., location.

"We monitor things like our Google+ account and make sure our managers are monitoring our online reputation," he adds. "Not only do they watch, but they can direct an unsatisfied customer and take that next step to fix the problem."

### Moving Within the Business

Matt is able to keep all of his locations moving on the same line through tried

and true methods. First, he reports they have implemented easy-to-read inspections that clearly show in red, yellow and green a vehicle's condition.

"We have a thorough employee manual as well as a standard operating procedures manual that clearly spells out company expectations. We also have detailed employee job descriptions that we use to hold each position in our company accountable," he reports.

Like many shops, they cover the cost of ASE tests, and provide training throughout the year. They also follow a growing trend in offering training in leadership and business courses, helping the employees develop their public speaking, networking and business skills.

When it comes to on-the-job training, Matt explains that they follow it up by utilizing phone call recording software. For example, one item they focus on is making sure employees comply with the policy of not giving out prices over the phone. Keeping tabs on items like this helps not only the bottom line, but training and best practices.

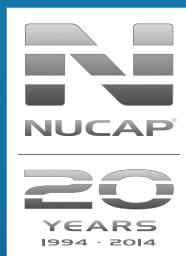
"That has been really an eye opener, because we spend a lot of time talking with the employees and going over procedures and having them sign off on acknowledgement forms and figuring out (standard operating procedures)," Matt says. "But it really doesn't matter what your staff tells you that they know and practice. What really matters is what they know and how they interact with customers."

Matt adds that the management takes the data and matches it with repair order audits they regularly complete. The company started this proce-

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ture this year as a new way to boost its training efforts. During the day, backup employees fill in for others so they can work with management staff to listen to phone calls and look for areas of improvement.

“It lets peers help each other,” he states. “We built a portable counter and do actual role playing. You can’t do enough training with your employees; it’s just become a huge, important thing.”

It’s so important, in fact, that Matt plans to grow the program, possibly doubling it and including additional topics.

### Unique Services for Employees and Customers

Matt and company also take advantage of training opportunities to turn the table on their customers. Simple how-to videos on Victory’s YouTube channel show customers basic concepts like how to check oil and wiper fluid levels, change their wiper blades, etc.

“The thought was too many people would be embarrassed to ask how to do this,” he says. “We’ve gotten a lot of feedback from men.”

They also bring customers into their locations with introduction videos for each shop. Each individual shop’s landing page within Victory’s website has a video from the shop manager. It shows the customer what he or she would see if they were standing at the front door, including the waiting area and amenities.

Matt also actively gives back to the community through its work with Free to Be, Inc., which helps local residents by providing single parent families and individuals with vehicles and/or repairs. From 2006-2013, Victory Auto donated approximately \$600,000 in



Dan Scherer, Fridley store manager, goes over a repair estimate with a customer.

in-kind contributions. Free to Be has donated more than 850 vehicles and repaired more than 3,500, with the majority of those repairs having been done at one of our locations.

Beyond helping others, Victory also helps its own employees. Matt reports that employees who perform with excellence are rewarded in a variety of ways, such as being selected as our employee of the month (which comes with social

media recognition and a half day off paid), monetary bonuses, and incentives or tickets to local sporting events.

Matt says the recognition and contests between shops help keep spirits up, and keeps the management in tune with the employees. It all helps build the groundwork to move the company to the next level the next time Matt and company are in the right place at the right time. **ZZ**





**TSCHANEN BRANDYBERRY**  
MANAGING EDITOR

Tschanen Brandyberry has been with *Motor Age* since 2008, after writing for *Aftermarket Business* for two years. She is a graduate of Ohio University and served in editorial positions at multiple newspapers in Ohio.


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## TOP SHOPS 2014

# DUTCH TREAT

**BORN INTO AN AREA RICH IN REPAIR, THIS FAMILY BUSINESS REVELS IN THE NAME OF ITS CITY, MECHANICSBURG, PA.**

BY **ROBERT BRAVENDER** | CONTRIBUTOR

**A**s you can well imagine, Mechanicsburg, Pa., has a rich history of repair, ever since the early 1800s when wagon mechanics plied their trade along the old ferry road. Today, the region is famous in the automotive world for the mega car shows at nearby Carlisle. But for Judy Zimmerman Walter, this history is far more personal. She claims that her career in the repair industry started at birth.

While that's not literally true, it's pretty close; her father Norman started

Zimmerman's Automotive only months after she was born, and her childhood is filled with memories of running through the shop barefoot to deliver messages, of pumping gas and selling candy, even writing up paperwork for inspection stickers. After high school she began working there full time, learning the business from the ground up. Today she is co-owner of the shop with her two uncles, overseeing daily operations as well as being the CFO for the corporation.

Early on, Judy became something of a pioneer when she began influencing the management style of the business



## ZIMMERMAN'S AUTOMOTIVE

**JUDY ZIMMERMAN WALTER, JAY ZIMMERMAN, PAUL ZIMMERMAN**  
Owners

**MECHANICSBURG, PA.**

Location

**1**  
Number of locations

**56**  
Years in business

**9**  
Number of technicians

**26**  
Total number of employees

**11,000 SQUARE FEET**  
Shop size

**12**  
Number of bays

**305**  
Average vehicles per week

**BLUE SEAL, AASP-PA, NIADA/PIADA, AUTO CARE ASSOCIATION**  
Affiliations



Staff is (from left) Judy Zimmerman Walter, Jason Lyons, Jeff Homan, Paul Zimmerman, Dave Cox, Scott Livingston, TJ Myers, Steve Sheriff, Ken McKean, Dan Hower and Eric Zimmerman.

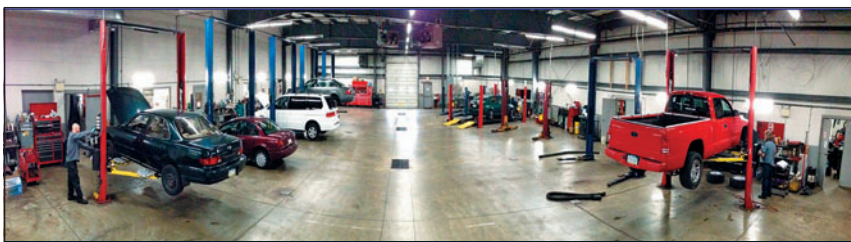
by focusing attention on the shop's overall appearance and presentation. "Women never came into the garage alone," she observed. "My goal was to make the business a lot friendlier for

Photos: Zimmerman's Automotive

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A panoramic view of the 12 bays at the shop, in business since 1958.



Master Technician Dave Cox performs service on a customer's vehicle.

women. I did things like decorate for Christmas, clean the restrooms regularly, tiled the office and waiting area floors, played music, banned all pictures of scantily clad women, burned a candle when things got too smelly from the shop and dressed a bit nicer.

"To me it seems funny," Walter continues, "because I was doing that in the late '70s-early '80s," long before the market caught up to her way of thinking. Not that it wasn't already in flux; Zimmerman's soon divested itself of gasoline sales to avoid being turned into a convenience store. To offset this, the company eventually evolved two more divisions: car sales and quick lube. Both came out of customers' requests.

"(They) were saying, 'You fix our cars; why don't you buy a car for us?'" says Walter. The hunt for specific cars turned into a small car lot. "Then in the '90s the quick lubes were coming up, and our customers were talking about was how it was a pain to make an appointment just for an oil change. Actually it was a pain for the shop, too, taking a tech off something else."

By then they were building a new shop; a 900-sq.-ft. quick lube facil-

ity was easily added. "It was cutting edge," says Walter. "We were the first one here to do that. It's very convenient for my customers, and it's worked out so well for us."

Auto sales generate more than half of Zimmerman's income. "I can sell a car for \$20,000," she reports. "I can sell three of those a month and beat out the service department, but service remains the core of the business. One of our philosophies is we don't work on vehicles; we work on families of vehicles. Say my neighbor owns a Taurus, also has a BMW, and his wife drives a Volvo; I can work on all of them. A dealer can't."

Yet the newer divisions engage the company in other ways. "As a rule, people are probably not going to buy a car online — not yet, anyway," she notes. "But a lot of people will look online and then come out and buy. That brought the Internet to the forefront (of our marketing). We have a son who graduated with a degree in communications and marketing, and he's helped a lot to get our web presence up there to where it should be."

It also turns out that the quick lube was an effective vetting process for per-



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sonnel. "I work with the local vo-techs and hire guys or gals on the co-op program," Walter explains. "They go to school half the day and come in and work in the quick lube for the other half.

You'll soon see who's serious about really wanting an automotive career.

"Today I have two guys in my main shop and the manager of my quick lube who started that way. Training them

takes time, but in the long run it's worth it," she resolves. "I've had guys leave, but if I'm not willing to take a chance and train someone, I'm never going to go anywhere."

Her own daughter started with the company working in the lube pits, and eventually ran a satellite quick lube until it was folded back into the main branch. Today she is running Judy's office, and she and some of Walter's cousins make up the next generation of Zimmermans in the company.

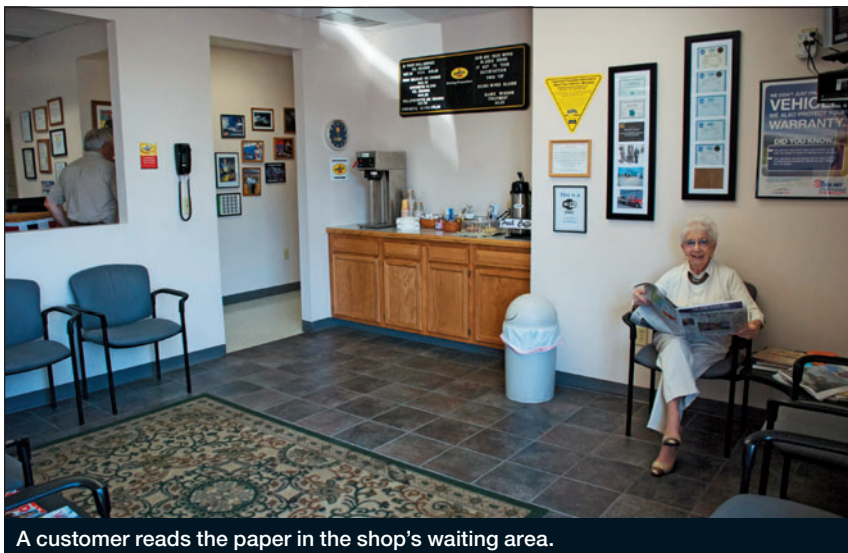
"My dad always said when he went into business he had a hammer, a screwdriver and a wrench," laughs Walter, who brings her own tools to the table, such as communication skills. "I meet with my guys every morning at 7:55 before they start. One of the things I tell them is to look at what we need next. I usually do a lot of research, because I'm the one that gets out to the tool shows, keeping them informed as to what is available. For the last budget we made, my guys actually did the final pick between two different pieces of \$7,000 equipment. All that comes from a long relationship with them."

The same approach goes for clients. "We offer relationships, and that's one of the big differences today," she emphasizes. "If you're going to spend \$1,000 on a car, I would want to know the person working on it. Anybody can change oil; it's the relationship that you give and service that you provide while doing it.

"This business is such a part of me," Walter proclaims. "I grew up in the industry and I love it! I know I'm a sick puppy, but that's life; there are days where I know I have to face tough stuff, but in the long run I still love going to work in the morning." *TL*



Ownership makes sure they work with technicians to supply them with tools they need.



A customer reads the paper in the shop's waiting area.



A quick lube section of the shop provides additional service opportunities.



Robert Bravender graduated from the University of Memphis with a bachelor's degree in film and video production. He has edited magazines and produced shows for numerous channels, including "Motorhead Garage" with longtime how-to guys Sam Memmolo and Dave Bowman.

Email Robert at [rbravender@comcast.net](mailto:rbravender@comcast.net)



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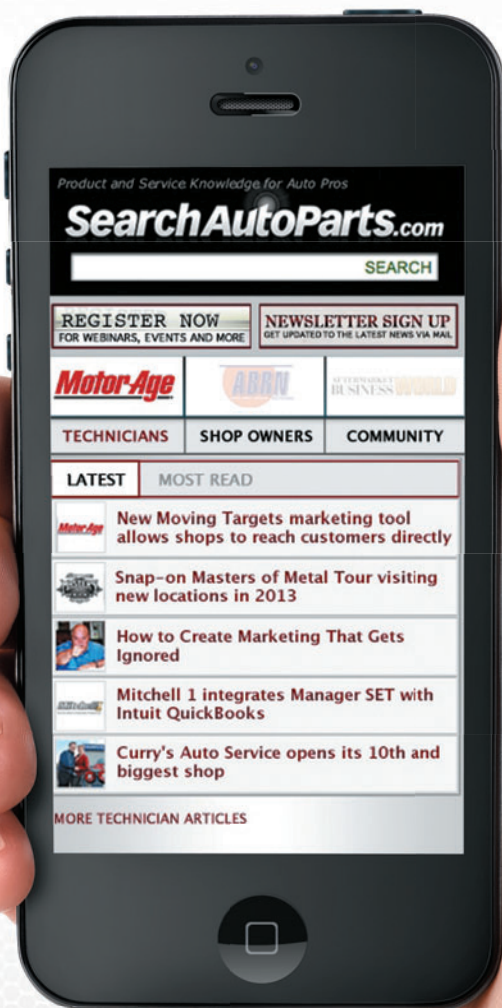


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### HAND CLEANER

Permatex has expanded its No. 1 selling Fast Orange Hand Cleaner line with the addition of a new, solvent-free hand cleaner specially designed for professional technicians. Fast Orange Professional Hand Cleaner ushers in the latest advance in hand cleaners with a powerful cleaning capability infused with new odor eliminating technology. Fast Orange Professional works just as well as the original Fast Orange but delivers the added benefit of removing physical dirt and annoying odors that remain after normal clean up, according to the manufacturer. Permatex Fast Orange Professional features a pumice ingredient that helps to quickly remove even the heaviest deposits of grease, tar, oil, dirt, soil, resins, paints, glues and rubber cement. All of this cleaning power is coupled with premium skin conditioners including lanolin, aloe vera and jojoba to help leave raw, rough hands feeling smooth again.

For more information, visit [www.permatex.com](http://www.permatex.com). Permatex

### WHEEL ALIGNMENT SYSTEM

John Bean introduces its new V3400 Wheel Alignment System. The new John Bean V3400 Wheel Alignment System features advantages, including fast, accurate readings — readings in less than two minutes mean increased productivity and less waiting for measurements; fully featured hardware — features like drive-through design, wireless communication, automatic camera tracking and high mobility allow sharing between bays or relocation within the shop as needed; software productivity enhancers — features like automated caster sweep, 3D animations, rolling radius and cross diagonal measurement, A-arm adjust and EZ Toe to get the job done right the first time; and comprehensive vehicle database — frequent updates ensure the most current information is readily available and VIN scanning speeds the vehicle selection process, according to the company.

For more information, visit [www.johnbean.com](http://www.johnbean.com). John Bean/Snap-on Equipment



### HYBRID A/C COMPRESSOR OIL

Tracer Products has introduced TP-9775-0008 Hybrid A/C Compressor Oil for use in all hybrid vehicles. This OEM-based ester lubricant provides excellent lubricity and compressor protection, while its high dielectric properties help reduce the risk of shock hazard to technicians, the company reports. Packaged in a convenient 8-oz. (237 ml) easy-pour bottle, this formula is ideal for technicians who prefer adding oil to a compressor prior to installation.

For more information, visit [www.tracerline.com](http://www.tracerline.com). Tracer Products

### BRAKE LINE KITS

StopTech, the high performance and racing brand from Centric Parts®, introduces braided stainless steel brake line kits for both the 2014 Ford Fiesta ST, as well as the 2015 VW Golf (Mk7). StopTech Braided Stainless Steel Brake Lines provide a quicker, firmer, more consistent pedal response by reducing system compliance and maintaining consistent brake pressure, the company says. StopTech stainless steel lines provide precision brake modulation, especially during threshold braking. The improvement in pedal feel is more dramatic on older vehicles where the factory rubber line might have softened and swelled due to age.

For more information, visit [www.centricparts.com](http://www.centricparts.com). Centric Parts

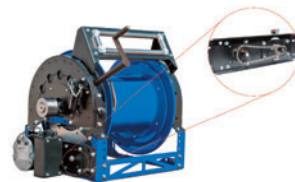


### MOTORIZED HOSE REELS

Coxreels introduces idler sprockets for the 1600 Series motorized hose reels. This new add-on reduces the rewind speed, increasing motor torque and fitting an optional three-way brake. These all-steel, idler sprockets are chain sprocket assemblies with a corrosion protective coating that change the drive ratio of the motor-to-drum drive system. They are available in three ratios 1:2, 1:3 and 1:4 and available with or without an optional extended shaft allowing for the use of three-way brakes or electromagnetic brakes. Coxreels idler sprockets are mounted on a zinc plated steel axle and rotate on two self-lubricated bronze bearings. This add-on generally is used on electric motor drive systems, but Coxreels' idler sprocket also is available for hydraulic and 4-Vane air motors with a 1:2 ratio idler sprocket, the manufacturer states.

For more information, visit [www.coxreels.com](http://www.coxreels.com)

Coxreels





## WHEEL WEIGHT HAMMER

Ken-Tool releases its Heavy-Duty Universal Wheel Weight Hammer (No. 35359). The new hammer is designed for installing and removing clip-on wheel weights for light to heavy duty trucks. The hammer is 12-inch (30.5 cm) long and features a 2.5 pound (28 oz./794 g) cast steel head — nearly twice as heavy as comparable wheel weight hammers. It has a non-marring, replaceable polyvinyl strike face that is 1.50 inches (3.8 cm) in diameter, which is 34 percent larger strike area than a typical 7/8-in. diameter hammer. The hammer's greater mass and large strike face allows a technician to efficiently install the wheel weight with a single blow, the company states. The fiberglass handle uses a shock resistant, ergonomic design to provide technician comfort with or without gloves, and to reduce fatigue. It is designed for use in a heavy-duty commercial environment with a rubber grip which resists common shop chemicals. It is four times stronger than a typical wooden handle, with improved longevity.

[www.kentool.com](http://www.kentool.com)

Ken Tool



## LED HEADLAMPS

Philips Automotive North America has released its line of Philips LED Headlamps for direct replacement applications on a wide range of vehicles with traditional 5 x 7-inch rectangular and 7-inch round sealed beam headlamps. These new DOT-compliant LED headlamps feature the same Philips LUXEON Altilon LED technology used in the latest luxury vehicles to deliver high-powered lighting performance, exceptional styling and long lasting durability. Philips' new LED Headlamps deliver powerful, precise illumination and a bright white 5600 K light output that is closer to the color temperature of daylight, while dramatically improving overall night drive visibility. A complex reflector design optimizes and evenly distributes light to create an ideal beam pattern and increased visibility while reducing glare, according to the company. The innovative LED design delivers a lifetime that is 50X longer than standard incandescent sealed beam headlamps and helps create a 'split-lamp' appearance that offers a unique look, whether the lamp is off or on.

[www.usalighting.philips.com](http://www.usalighting.philips.com)

Philips Automotive Lighting North America

## SAFETY EYEWEAR

Honeywell unveiled Uvex Hypershock safety eyewear, which combines premium sport-inspired style and best-in-class lens performance for maximum appeal and protection. Available in Matte Black, Smoke Brown or Clear Ice, the eyewear's wraparound frame delivers superior coverage, while 10 lens tints offer versatility for both



indoor and outdoor applications. High-performance Uvextreme Plus® lens coating delivers 10 times longer anti-fog protection and two times better scratch resistance than other anti-fog coated lenses, the manufacturer reports. The eyewear is ideally suited for rugged work environments ranging from manufacturing, construction and landscaping to utilities and oil and gas.

[www.honeywellcpg.com](http://www.honeywellcpg.com)

Honeywell Consumer Products Group

## EXTENDABLE TELESCOPING MAGNETIC FLASHLIGHT

The featured Impeltronics product is an Extendable Telescoping Magnetic Flashlight. This product not only includes a flashlight but also is extendable and magnetic at both ends. This three LED Flashlight shines bright and is packaged as a sturdy aluminum telescoping magnet that includes a strong stainless steel pocket clip. It is able to extend from a compact 6.75 inches to almost 22 inches. Impeltronics offers its customers two tools packaged as one with one low price. This is a product that truly lends a hand, the company says. The customer gains a free hand by only needing to hold one tool. Stick the flashlight to a magnetic surface using the strong bottom magnet for completely hands-free directed light.

[www.impeltronics.com](http://www.impeltronics.com)

Impeltronics



## AUTOMOTIVE PRODUCTS GUIDE

### WEAREVER PLATINUM BRAKE PADS

Advance Auto Parts Professional offers Wearever® Platinum, an exclusive line of premium ceramic and semi-metallic brake pads engineered to deliver quieter braking and superior stopping power. Wearever Platinum features the exclusive SoundLock Plus™ diamond pattern four-layer shim to eliminate brake noise. For more information on quality Wearever brake pads, visit [AdvanceCommercial.com](http://AdvanceCommercial.com) or call your local Advance delivery location.

Advance Auto Parts Professional



### COMPLETE BRAKE OFFERING

Magneti Marelli Offered by Mopar all-in-one brake pad kits come complete with stainless steel hardware for easier installation and less vehicle downtime, while making brakes quiet and extending their lifetime by reducing premature wear-out due to worn caliper hardware. Available in semi-metallic and ceramic formulas, these brakes provide excellent stopping power and superior braking performance, and are compatible with all major makes excluding Chrysler Group vehicles.

Magneti Marelli



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## WALKER PRODUCTS ANNOUNCES EXPANDED COVERAGE OF MAF SENSOR CATEGORY

Walker's coverage of Mass Air Flow Sensors for U.S. applications includes 131 part numbers covering most makes and models from 1984 to 2014. All of Walker's mass air flow sensors are new and do not require any core charges or returns. Every one of our mass air flow sensors are designed and manufactured to meet or exceed exact OE specifications. Contact Walker Products at 636-257-2400, [sales@walkerproducts.com](mailto:sales@walkerproducts.com) or visit us at [www.walkerproducts.com](http://www.walkerproducts.com).



Walker Products

## DUAL CLUTCH TRANSMISSION FLUID

LUBEGARD introduces LUBEGARD's Multi-Vehicle Dual Clutch Transmission Fluid designed to provide extreme pressure protection in high performance DCT vehicles. It is manufactured with the highest quality base oils and performance additives producing improved shifting proficiency at all ambient temperatures. This formula is infused with proprietary LXE, which provides friction durability, unrivaled shear stability and superior wear protection. LUBEGARD's Multi-Vehicle DCTF is the service solution for more than 99 percent of the wet-clutch style DCT passenger vehicles, giving our customers the ability to stock one technologically superior DCTF at a price that outperforms the competition.



Lubegard

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## FEDERATED OFFERS PREMIUM BRAKING PERFORMANCE FOR TODAY'S VEHICLES

Federated Auto Parts has developed an addition to its friction offering with a new co-label line developed and supplied by Wagner Brake. The new product line is a premium offering designed for professionals that was exclusively designed for Federated members and their customers. The line uses the highest performing formulas specific to each application and includes System Synergy Technology (SST), which is an OE approach to brake design that ensures the interaction of all brake components to provide the ultimate performance.



Federated

## THE PLATINUM NAPA FILTER

NAPA's Platinum filter offers technology for the latest advancements in synthetic oil and performance oil filters. Featuring a host of oil filter innovations, including wire-reinforced, fully synthetic media, ultra-durable hydrogenated nitrile compound antidrain back valve (where applicable), this oil filter provides the ultimate protection in the NAPA family of oil filters. Visit [www.napafilters.com](http://www.napafilters.com) for more information.



NAPA

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WORLDPAK

## AUTOMATIC LEVERLESS TIRE CHANGER

The new R80DTXF tire changer features an automatic bead lifter, variable speed turntable and bilateral bead loosener with direct hand-operated controls. It also offers a traveling drop-center tool, top bead assist rollers, dual lower bead lifting discs and a nylon non-marring wheel restraint device. A 31-inch capacity turntable with adjustable hardened-steel RimGuard wheel clamps helps shops broaden their service range. Visit [www.rangerproducts.com](http://www.rangerproducts.com) for details.



Ranger Products, a division of BendPak Inc.

## NEW MIRRORS FEATURE SIGNAL LIGHT

DEPO introduces 335-5409L/R3EFH1, the side view mirrors for Chevrolet Silverado/GMC Sierra 07-10 with signal lights. With knowledge and experience in auto lamp industry, DEPO has redesigned the internal components of the signal light and applied for a patent. In addition, the appearance of the signal light on the mirror surface is changed to DEPO logo. See more information on [www.maxzone.com](http://www.maxzone.com).



Maxzone



# AD INDEX

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# ON BEING PROFESSIONAL

HOW WE INTERACT WITH OUR CUSTOMERS AFFECTS EVERYONE IN OUR INDUSTRY.

BY **PETE MEIER**  
**Technical Editor**

In this month's edition of The Trainer, I'm taking a little different approach to the topic. I usually try to provide technical information and tips to help you fix those stubborn cars you have backed up in the shop, but to close out the year I'm going to use this platform to provide a little bit different form of training – professional ethics.

There are nearly 775,000 “professional” technicians in our country, but we all know that not all of them act professionally. Maybe that's one reason that consumers, as a whole, look at auto technicians much in the same way they view lawyers and used car salesmen. Sorry, not picking on lawyers or used car salesmen, but reality is reality, right?

I've always considered my role as a technician akin to that of a medical doctor. My “patients” don't understand, or care to understand, how their cars work. They are entrusting that care to me, and with that consideration comes responsibility. It is my duty to check over the entire car and report any condition that I find that requires attention to its owner, especially those related to the overall safety of the car.

Yet we all see the network news stories on shops and technicians that recommend only what serves their bottom lines. And while many of these stories are weighted in favor of the reporter's point of view (otherwise he'd have no story), we



[MotorAge.com/dec14trainer](http://MotorAge.com/dec14trainer)

all know that there is a small percentage among us where such practices exist. I'm willing to bet that you can name at least one shop where you've worked that this happens on a daily basis.

So, on which side of the spectrum do you fall? I'm also willing to bet that, if you're reading this, you are much closer to “professional” than “hack.” And if you take stock and make a few small changes, you'll improve that professionalism to the betterment of yourself and the industry. Once customers find a true professional, the trend is to stick with him and abandon that “wallet flusher” they used to go to.

Maybe we can accelerate the process just a little bit and run the unprofessional minority out of the business?

The Trainer is our monthly how-to video series, aiming to improve technicians of all levels. Let us know if there are topics you'd like to see covered. [ZZZ](#)

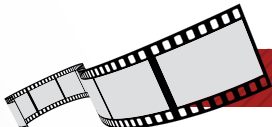
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## [VIDEOS]



When did you last offer air filter service?

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