

River Bend Growth Association names auto body shop business of the month

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By FRED POLLARD

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ALTON - Andy's Auto Body has been awarded the River Bend Growth Association Business of the Month for October.

"This is a big honor for me," owner Mark Anderson said. "You strive to do a good job and sometimes it is great to be recognized for that."

Andy Batchelor opened his auto body shop in 1974. For 35 years, the business has provided computerized frame and unibody repairs, precision color matching and paintless dent removal, as well as ongoing support for the Alton area.

"Community involvement was an important legacy Andy left me," Anderson said. "He always says if you give to the community, it will give back to you."

In addition to work with food drives, the Boy Scouts, and Meals on Wheels programs, Andy's also holds T-shirt giveaways annually at Alton High School during prom season. Students adhering to restraint laws receive a shirt that says, "I got caught wearing my seat belt." This year, the shop also parked an authentic totaled car at the school to remind students to drive carefully while celebrating.

"The day-to-day stuff is our bread and butter, but it can sometimes be hard to see the rewards," Anderson said. "Community service is different; we really get a lot out of it."

On Nov. 28, Andy's will be hosting its second annual Thanksgiving dinner at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Alton. The dinner will be open to the public.

"We have some people come just because they want the company," Anderson said. "Scott Waltrip, a friend of (auto body technician) Greg Hosford, helped organize the event. It is exciting; I think we have twice as many volunteers as we did last year."

Hosford has worked for Andy's for at least 15 years. Anderson said the technician is an example of the experience and dedication of the employees.

"The work that we do keeps people coming back," Anderson said. "It is a tribute to the (staff) we have here."

Anderson is passionate about the industry. He is training a high school student as a "body man intern."

"The average age of a body man nowadays is 60 years old," he said. "You have to go out and find young men who have the talent and loyalty to do this job."

Versatility is another attribute that Anderson said is becoming more important in his line of work.

"These days, you need to offer more than just one service," he said. "You have to be able to do body work, glass work, paintless dent removal. You need to be prepared to offer just about everything."

With more than 30 years of experience in the business, Anderson said he is still learning and often goes to trade shows to pick up what he can. He and his wife, Diane, purchased Andy's Auto Body in 2004.

"I worked for a dealership for 21 years," he said. "I decided I wanted to work for myself. One of the reasons we bought Andy's is because my wife's entire family is in this area."

Anderson, who is from the St. Charles area, said he is impressed with the hometown vibe of the Alton area.

"Everyone knows everyone here," he said. "It is a real community feel."

Since purchasing the business, Anderson has built on and expanded the foundation on which the shop was formed. He bought Central Wheel and Alignment in 2007, opening Andy's Car Care, and a second auto body location was opened in Maryville in 2006.

"We bought the Maryville location from Merger Motors," Anderson said. "Breaking into a new area can be tough, but we had the advantage of our reputation behind us."

Previous owner Andy Batchelor remains involved with the dream he started, taking care of advertising needs and helping to organize events. Anderson said the two men share a passion for Andy's to remain a safe haven for crushed cars and distressed drivers.

"From the beginning, my mission statement was to do the right thing," he said. "We strive for a good work atmosphere, quality work, and to treat the customer right."

Part of Anderson's work ethic also involves a close-knit group of employees.

"We have barbecues, play golf and just hang out together," he said. "That is the kind of ownership that I wanted to be involved with the (staff). It helps your business succeed with customers, and the interaction with customers is what we are all about."

"Other shops may do good auto work, but we try to fix the customers as well. We listen to them, hear their needs, and take them seriously. We genuinely care."

Andy's Auto Body is located at 3444 E. Broadway. For information, call (618) 465-7006.

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