

Auto body shop polishes reputation

Freer family known for community contributions

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GODFREY - Freer Auto Body in Godfrey has been awarded the February 2011 Small Business of the Month Award by the RiverBend Growth Association. This month's award will be the third one for Freer.

"We're honored," co-owner Margaret Freer said. "We appreciate the community's continued support, and the support from the Growth Association."

Freer Auto Body was established in 1991 by David Freer, a then 18-year-old graduate of Ranken Technical College, and his grandfather Arnold Freer. Though the business had a difficult start, it quickly expanded and developed a following in the Godfrey area. The original 30- by 50-foot building erected on North Alby Street in 1991 has since been expanded to two 50- by 90-foot buildings with more than 12,000 square feet of operating space and a new office area.

Today, the business offers auto body repair as well as modifications, employs 18 people and has earned an excellent reputation in the community. The shop is an I-CAR Gold Class Certified auto body shop, the highest level of training that an auto body shop can attain, and their paint division is considered one of the best in Illinois.

The Freer family is well-known for their contributions to community projects and fund-raisers. Some of their recent contributions have been Operation Kids Meals, Freer's annual food drive, donations of money and time to All of God's Children Shall Have Shoes, a charitable organization that buys shoes for children; and a charity dinner to raise money for a new walking track at United Methodist Village. These contributions are some of hundreds the family has made over the years.

While Freer Auto Body has experienced some high points in its history, the business - and the family - also has lived through adversity. On Sept. 11, 2008, David Freer was killed when his pickup truck overturned along Fosterburg Road. The 35-year-old's sudden death left the family and business devastated, but the family has been able to pick up the pieces and continue running the shop.

"It's amazing that we have been able to continue, but we are a close family," Margaret Freer said.

In memory of David, the Freer family has held their Cookies and Cocoa fund-raiser every year since 2008. The annual Christmas party is an opportunity for members of the community to enjoy hot chocolate and homemade cookies and donate toys and money to the Community Christmas program, one of the family's pet projects and something that the family as a whole contributes to all year. Even the youngest members of the Freer family, sisters Taylor and Lily, contributed to Community Christmas with a sloppy joe and Kool-Aid stand this past July. The sisters raised more than \$2,000.

The Freers are well-known in the community for their many contributions alone, but Freer Auto Body has earned itself a positive reputation in the community and with its employees. One of the more unusual facts about Freer Auto Body is that it has never laid anyone off, even during difficult economic times. During slow times, employees work on other projects, such as remodeling cars for Freer's rental fleet.

This practice embodies the core value at Freer Auto Body: to treat people as one would want to be treated.

"We strive for excellence," Margaret Freer said. "We try to do our best to treat people with the Golden Rule."