

# Dollars in the details

## Growth association picks auto shop as top business of the month

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By FRED POLLARD  
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ALTON - PJ's Professional Detailing and Auto Accessories has been selected as the River Bend Growth Association's Business of the Month for February.

"I definitely appreciate the recognition and getting this award," owner P.J. Ely said. "This is a huge thing for me, my crew and my parents. (The River Bend Growth Association) has been a good networking tool for us also. We have many members who are regular customers of ours now."

PJ's provides everything from "once-over" hand washes to full detail service, including wax, vacuum, leather treatment and tire cleaning. Carpet shampoo, upholstery cleaning and undercoating are available. Full detail prices range from \$75 to \$150, depending on a vehicle's size, type and condition.

Ely, 28, opened his business in 2002.

"I did new car prep for Roberts Motors and that is how I got into the field," Ely said. "When I was about 17 we had our Suburban detailed. I asked how much it cost; it was about \$65, I think. I thought that was a pretty good business with the potential for decent money. I had always liked to work on cars and clean them up, so I thought, 'why not?'"

Ely started the business out of his home, providing pickup and delivery service from his garage. In 2003, the opportunity to purchase the property at 2102 State St. presented itself and Ely saw his chance.

With the help of his family and employees, he cleaned the new location, painted the building, resurfaced the parking lot and installed a privacy fence. Soon the young entrepreneur was ready to serve customers.

"A lot of getting the business off the ground had to do with my parents," Ely said. "My mom and my stepdad both owned their own businesses. They were able to help me with learning how to run my own company.

"At first I thought it would be a piece of cake, but the more I got into it the more I realized just how much is involved with running your own business."

Quickly getting a (door) handle on the best way to rev up his new operation, Ely learned that loyalty to customers is the best way to build a strong foundation.

"A lot of our first-time customers will ask how long we have been in business," he said. "They have seen so many detail shops open, be around for a year or two, and then are gone. I think one difference with us is that we have focused on our customers rather than rely solely on dealership work. We have always gone by appointment, and we don't push our customers aside."

In addition to customer loyalty, Ely says painstaking attention to quality also has paid off.

"We may not do as many cars in one day as some other shops, but we make sure each car is cleaned to 'our' standards," he said. "That sets us apart. We may do between three and six cars in a day, but we may spend three to five hours on a single vehicle. We want it perfect before it goes out the door.

"I think it is the extra little things we do that makes a difference. We have many customers that come back week after week."

Longtime employee John Moore and manager Matt Pace assist Ely with the day-to-day operations of the business, and Ely says they are indispensable.

"We have some high-end cars come through here, and my customers need to be able to trust my guys," he said. "I would not ask them to trust their vehicle to someone that I do not know and trust myself."

Ely is serious about remaining hands-on with customers.

"I personally inspect as many vehicles as I can to make sure each vehicle is just right," he said. "I love what I do. I enjoy it as much today as I did the day I opened."

PJ's Professional Detailing and Auto Accessories is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and Saturday by appointment. For information or to make an appointment, call (618) 465-7408.