

## Tony's Auto Service Center: Humble Beginnings

*Phoenix repair shop has come a long way from its first generation roots as a gas station.*

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In 1958, there was a Shell gas station on a street corner in Phoenix. After some literally humble beginnings – as a Humble Oil station – subsequent generations have moved on to bigger, better and smoother operations as a successful repair shop.



Tony's Auto Service Center in Phoenix is a one-location shop in business for 23 years following those humble beginnings. Tony Guido and Catherine Guido have operated the shop with their business background, growing it to the operation it is today.

Part of the success rests in the people with whom the Guidos have worked for so long. They have created a solid base of employees, the longest-tenured being in his 32nd year with the business. A dedication to reaching goals both for the shop and in life helps keep everyone moving forward at the shop.

Catherine Guido explains that they host quarterly meetings to help improve communication, self-development and more. Goal setting is an important part of these meetings.

"We're very much into setting goals. We focus a lot on retirement. We make sure employees can retire," says Catherine Guido, who adds that Tony sets up a retirement plan for every employee and helps with the goals to retire. "All employees have 25-year plans as to what we're going to do. I have a (process) where all my guys are on an Excel sheet."

They also have individual meetings during which employees can talk about personal and work goals. "What training do they need, what do they need from us to meet those goals," Catherine Guido says.

These meetings also include a focus on the shop, taking a look at any issues that come up, tools and equipment that are needed, customers and more. The essence of communication around the shop is key. To make that

happen, all customers talk directly with Guido or Scott Petrie, service advisor and assistant manager.

"We're competitive, but the thing we have on everyone else is service. Every customer talks to me or Scott. They're always talking to someone who can make a decision," she says. "Our techs go above and beyond doing something on a work order."

### **Perfecting the Process**

So if it's all about goals and making the customer happy, how do the employees of Tony's Auto get to that point? It starts with a simple organizational process. Technicians use time clocks and cards to monitor productivity, efficiency, sold time and e-time, Catherine Guido explains.

"Each guy has a white board. We pass out work in the morning when it comes in, and we pass it out equally. We put on the board how many hours each tech has sold for the day. And in a different color, we put if it's not due today," she states. "If I have a job to hand out, I go look at the boards and see, OK he has four hours. It allows whoever to say, 'Oh he's really busy, I need to pass some work along.'"

Well-established relationships with suppliers also help the shop stay ahead of the game. Guido says that interpersonal relationships Petrie has created over the years with dealerships and aftermarket suppliers alike have benefited the shop on more than one occasion.

One recent example is of a part that was national back order for months. Petrie's work creating solid relationships put him in touch with the engineer of the particular part that was being tested and soon to be released. The shop was able to use that to fix the vehicle when others couldn't. It's in part because they are not necessarily in competition with the parts side of a dealership and that they talk to them daily, Guido says.



"We can also call them and they will share with him information about a vehicle. It is key in us doing our job and not having to send people to a dealer. Our customers really appreciate that."

Servicing vehicles like that create stories the shop can use in its various marketing approaches. Other marketing comes from being environmentally responsible. The shop turned to solar power in February 2009 (a project two-years in the making to install panels and get them up and running).

"We are a green shop and that was the ultimate for us," Guido says. "Ultimately, the customers turned out to be a

great advertising tool. I've gained customers."

She reports that they are asked questions weekly on it. The investment has paid off in that marketing, in addition to fueling one-third of the electric bill.

### **Sharing Experiences**

All of the lessons that they have learned throughout the years at the shop are conveyed not only to the employees and customers, but to others in the aftermarket as well. Tony Guido has served on the NAPA Auto Care Advisory Board and American Automobile Association (AAA) Advisory Board. He is the facilitator/co-founder of Auto Repair Partners of Arizona (ARP of AZ), which reviews and looks at the future trends and management of independent auto repair shops.

Founding that board helped not only Tony's Auto Center, but other shops around the state. Catherine Guido explains that the shops are not in competition with each other, and there is a large trust factor. By establishing the group, Tony Guido thought they all would benefit from the new ways to share information.

And it's worked. Catherine Guido says the aftermarket involvement they all complete has been very beneficial. One source of ideas they are able to learn more about are technical offerings in the industry.

Catherine Guido reports they have a plan in place to upgrade equipment every two years.



"You can only plan as best you can plan. Technicians love playing with things. They are always looking for the latest equipment. We are online all the time. We take a lot of classes, take a lot of training," she elaborates. "We're involved with a lot of other owners and we put our heads together and talk about what each person has read or learned, by staying well versed and educated daily on our industry."

They also apply that attitude toward the

shop's website. Guido says she feels long-term it will be the way they communicate with customers.

"I do feel 100 percent that the future of business period is going to be, and is already starting to be, done on the Internet, on Facebook and in social media. I have older customers that wouldn't touch the Internet and new customers that it's the only way they communicate," she says.

Those computerized interactions will be a long way from the humble, Humble Oil roots of the late-1950s. But with the dedication to communication, goal setting and training, Tony's Auto will stay right on track for solid service.

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