

Missouri Collision Repair Shop Started as One-Man Operation

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Great Things Often Start with Small Beginnings.



Exterior of White Auto Body's shop in O'Fallon, Mo.

"Mighty oaks from little acorns grow" is a saying that certainly applies to White Auto Body - because the firm started as a one-man, one-shop operation.

And today, proof that great things often start with small beginnings, there are two shops and 44 employees.

It all began in June of 1986 when Steve White opened White Auto Body in Florissant, Mo. The shop was 3,600 square feet in size. Four years later, the company moved to a different location in Florissant, expanding to a 12,000-square-foot facility. Then, in 1998, it opened a second location in O'Fallon, Mo.

White was the sole employee for approximately two months. He has added employees as the business has grown. Today, the shop in Florissant does 80 to 85 repairs a week, and the shop in O'Fallon handles 40 to 45 repairs a week.

The shop in Florissant is expected to do \$6 million in repair work this year; the O'Fallon facility, \$4 million.

White's wife, Valerie, is also active in the business. She serves as director of marketing. The two have worked together for almost 10 years.

White started doing collision repair work before he started high school. During and after high school, he attended North County Technical School and graduated from its auto body repair program.

His wife had a successful career in the health care industry and performed marketing and patient case management duties in her last job before coming to work at White Auto Body. She is a registered nurse and holds a bachelor of science degree from the University of Missouri and a master's degree in health management from Lindenwood College in St. Charles, Mo.

They are also charter members of the Metropolitan Vocational-Technical Assistance Program that supports the collision repair programs at area technical schools. In addition, they are active participants in the Acoat Selected National Benevolence Program, through which they have donated more than 11 vehicles to individuals in need of reliable transportation. Acoat is a community relations program designed to generate good will at the local level while improving and promoting the image of the collision repair industry.

White currently serves as president of the Alliance of Automotive Service Provider's Gateway Collision chapter. He also is a member of the Ferguson Florissant Special School District's Technical School Advisory Board.

The couple has been honored with many awards, including:

- White Auto Body has been voted the No. 1 auto body repair shop by readers of the North County Suburban Journal.
- Valerie received The Dove Award for Personal Achievement in June this year.
- The Alliance of Automotive Service Providers named Steve Missouri's outstanding member of the year in 2003.
- Steve was named one of Business Saint Charles magazine's "Forty Professionals Under Forty" in December of 2001.
- The couple received the 2001 Automotive Service Association Chairman's Humanitarian Award.
- The O'Fallon Chamber of Commerce named White Auto Body Small Business of the Year for 2000.
- Akzo Nobel named Valerie one of the most influential women in the collision repair industry in 2000.



This group photo shows White Auto Body's employees at its facility in O'Fallon, Mo. Steve and Valerie White are in the middle of those sitting on the curb.

Asked what he likes best about his job, White replies that he enjoys "working with a group of true craftsmen." His wife says she likes the freedom she has to work with her marketing team to develop ideas and incorporate them into marketing programs. "One of the best marketing-type activities we do is host continuing education classes for insurance agents and adjusters," says Valerie. "In Missouri, insurance agents and their representatives are licensed. They are required to earn a certain number of continuing education credits to renew their licenses. We are certified by the Missouri Department of Insurance to teach nine continuing education classes.

"These sessions give us an opportunity to educate the insurance industry about our industry. Normally, when people come to us, it is because they have had an auto accident and they are not usually happy. When the agents come to us for the classes, they want to be there and it is for a reason that is non-emotional.

"Some of the courses require a hands-on demonstration, so we incorporate a shop tour. The shop sells itself. The agents can see a collision repair business in action. We hope they have a pleasant-enough experience to tell others."

Say the pair: "We feel our business is unique because we take care

of our employees. Our employees are integral to our success. Without the skill and artisanship of the technicians and the customer-focused attitude of the management team, we would not be successful. We truly value our employees for the contributions they make."

The Whites recognize their shops' successes by having celebratory luncheons for employees who have reached a service milestone or after having their first baby or are getting married. "We try to have fun while we work because we spend more time with each other than we sometimes spend with our families," say the Whites.

As for the future, they just want to continue providing top-quality repairs and never compromise. Obviously, that business philosophy has brought them a long way - and we have a hunch it'll keep on spelling success.

Shop Stats

Name: White Auto Body

Location: North, 8300 North Lindbergh, Florissant, Mo.; West, 811 East Terra Lane, O'Fallon, Mo.

Square Footage: 10,500 square feet

No. of Employees: 44

No. of Years in Business: 20

Web Site: www.whiteautobody.com

Why White is a member of ASA: "I am only one business and understand the need for a voice that speaks for the whole industry. I highly encourage every shop to join ASA. It is a small price to pay for somebody looking after your industry on a daily basis."