

Southern Maryland Advertiser

Friday, November 8, 2002 • Calvert County

Southern Maryland Automotive in Calvert is all about family

Shop employs two generations, treats customers like one of its own

By Barbara Graf
Special to the Advertiser

Southern Maryland Automotive off Skinners Turn Rd. in the Dunkirk Business Center in Owings is a family owned and operated automotive service center that has been servicing Calvert drivers and their vehicles since May 2001.

"Our two technicians are both our sons," said Jim Hitchcock of St. Leonard who, along with wife, Christine, owns the double-bay shop.

The Hitchcock's sons, James and Justin have been automotive technicians for six years and two years, respectively. He and his wife share the role of shop management.

Southern Maryland Automotive has recently become a member of the Tech Net Professional Auto Service Association.

"This is something we have worked toward," said Hitchcock of membership in this association, which requires automotive service companies to demonstrate the ability to live up to a rigorous code of ethics. "We are one of only two members in all of Charles, Calvert or St. Mary's counties."

Tech Net professionals are tested every two years to maintain an "Automotive Service Excellence" certification, according to Hitchcock.

"We also use quality Carquest auto parts which are guaranteed coast to coast within the network of Tech Net Professional Auto Service shops," he said. "More reputable shops do this. It is something to look for when looking for an automotive repair facility."

Hitchcock said he feels the Tech Net "Code of Ethics" is most important.

"We strive to maintain high ethical standards with a goal to make the customer's automotive experience friendly and successful," said Hitchcock, who understands that most people don't like to bring their car in for repairs. "It can be



Photo by Barbara Graf

The Jim Hitchcock's sons, James (far left) and Justin (far right) have been automotive technicians for six years and two years, respectively. He and his wife share the role of shop management.

costly, and come at the wrong time. We can alleviate some of the 'pain' by being friendly, and keeping the cost down by doing the job right the first time."

Hitchcock and family have had a lot of practice "doing the job right the first time." As members of the Hot Rods Car Club, they maintain their own vintage hot rods to show off at hot rod rallies held each Saturday evening at Chapline Place shopping center in Prince Frederick. They also work on vehicles belonging to others in the more than 200-member club.

The Hitchcocks have been involved with cars "ever since [they] met," said Hitchcock of he and wife.

"We met because of a car I was driving at the time," he said, "and cars have been an important part of our lives ever since."

Hitchcock recalled that after a period of servicing cars "on the side" at their home, his boys took an active interest in car repair.

"At a family get-together, one Christmas holiday, I posed the question [of going into business] to the boys, and three months later, we opened for business," he said.

Hitchcock believes a reputation of integrity is one of the "driving forces" that motivated him to open a shop.

"Before we even started this business, we were listening to folks telling us stories about what they were encountering," he said. "We realized that there weren't that many responsible shops. People were telling us some horror stories."

Southern Maryland Automotive is eager to "tackle just about any job a customer has a need for, from tires to a tune-up," according to Hitchcock. From computerized newer vehicles, to older non-computerized vintage autos, Southern Maryland Automotive has both the experience and equipment to diagnose and make repairs.

"We use the latest in computer diagnostic equipment, including computer scanners which attach to the car to gather data and forward to Carquest Tech Net," Hitchcock said.

Carquest Tech Net is a vast computer data base which contains not only manufacturer's technical specifications, but more than 10 years of what Tech Net calls "street knowledge" from thousands of technicians and mechanics who have filed data base reports.

"This primary function cuts down diagnostic time, which saves customer's time and money," Hitchcock said.

"One of the services we provide that a lot of shops overlook is that we like to educate our customer in the proper maintenance of the car for the long haul," he said. "We are not just a 'break and fix' shop. We keep track of maintenance records and manufacturer's maintenance schedules for customers. We're going to check mileage on the car, compare it to the maintenance schedule and let the customer know what the next needed maintenance is for the car; so they can plan for it."

Hitchcock stressed the importance of preventive maintenance.

Preventive maintenance really does help prevent repairs," he said. "It may not prevent the car from breaking, but with preventive maintenance, [repairs] may be less often and less costly."

Southern Maryland Automotive is open for business 7:30 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday through Friday and Saturday by appointment. The shop is closed on Sunday. Call 301-855-3700 or 410-286-9855. After hours call 301-672-2827, or visit the web site at www.calvertchurch.org/sma.