

Spencer's Auto Repair and Quick Lube continues to thrive in Krum

By Lee Ann Lemons

Jerry Spencer moved to Krum in 2000, looking for a good school to educate his two sons – Jacob, now 10, and David, now 8 – and seven years later, his business, Spencer's Auto Repair, is thriving.

And, he says, he couldn't ask for more.

Opening his own shop was something Jerry had always hoped to do, so after working for a Chevrolet dealership in Lewisville for 12 years, he took the plunge six years ago and leased the old John Moore Chevrolet building in Krum, spending his weekends working on cars while keeping his job in Lewisville.

"Before long, I had two lifts in that building and it created a monster," he said. "It's hard to get your foot in the door in a small town, but once people figure out you're honest and you'll treat them right, it's like the floodgates opened. We've been busy ever since."

He quit his job in Lewisville, spent 18 months in the leased space, bought two lots off FM 156 just a few blocks north of downtown Krum, and built the shop that currently houses Spencer's Auto Repair.

"We've been busy ever since then. The business just continues to grow – the more people who move into Krum, the busier we get," he said.

Last month, the numbers soared, and May 2007 went down as the busiest month the shop has had since opening, as Jerry and his team of three mechanics worked on 336 vehicles in May alone.

Jerry's wife, Rachel – a lifelong resident of Krum and graduate of Krum High School – rounds out the five employees at Spencer's

and primarily works the counter and customer-relations side of the business.

"It's the best month we've ever had," Rachel said. "Every month, things just keep getting better. This month we've already doubled what we did last year at this same time."

Rachel's brother, Nathan Lanphere, was the first hire Jerry made, years ago, and, according to Jerry, is absolutely invaluable to Spencer's.

"There's no doubt in my mind that this business wouldn't be where it is if Nathan wasn't working here," Jerry said. "He's a permanent fixture here. I just can't say enough good things about him. He has five years of on the job training plus all the ongoing training programs he can go to. Really, the very best guy at one of the other places is maybe equal to one of our guys."

"Everything this year has clicked. We have hands-down the best crew of people we've ever had," Rachel added.

Jerry and Rachel know that competition is tough, and credit two factors in setting Spencer's apart from others.

"It's the honesty and the service. You're not a number. Everybody who comes in here knows us by our first names. It's on a personal level here," Jerry said. "We go out of our way to make sure we exceed the expectations of every customer. It's the little things."

Rachel agrees, adding that most women she knows completely dread bringing their vehicle in to a new place for service.

"I would definitely say that most women are afraid of mechanics – that you're going to get beat up when you go in there and be ripped off. But I've had several women tell

me that they are not afraid to come here because of how honest we are, that Jerry has always been up front with them, and can explain things well," Rachel said. "A lot of people say, 'Yeah, I took my car somewhere else and they just fixed it without me saying it was even okay.' We don't do that. We're up front about everything."

"Everybody who brings their car in, regardless of who it is, if they tell me 'just fix it if it's under \$1,000,' I will always call and tell them exactly how much it will be," Jerry added. "I'll say 'it's going to be 218 dollars and 16 cents,' and they'll say 'well, I already told you to fix it if it's under \$1,000,' but I will always make sure, up front."

Many customers share a fear of being upsold – told they absolutely must spend more money than they first anticipated or their vehicle will fall apart – so Jerry and Rachel are cognizant of giving detailed timelines of what needs to be done and when.

"We trying constantly to find way to improve business for our customers," Rachel said. "It's never about trying to upsell, but to educate the customer to understand why you need to do these things to your car."

"All we can do is inform you of what your car needs. It's up to you to make an educated decision on whether you want to fix it or not," Jerry said. "We're not here trying to upsell. We will never do that."

If, for instance, the air conditioning isn't working in a car and Spencer's determined that a new air filter was necessary, Jerry would tell the customer that it needed to be fixed immediately. "And if I saw that your

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Jerry and Rachel Spencer of Spencer's Auto Repair

Spencer's Auto Repair

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transmission fluid is dirty, I'm not going to lie and say it had to be fixed today. I'll tell you that you might want to budget \$80 sometime during the next couple of months to get that done."

Preventive maintenance not only prolongs the life of your vehicle, but can make a noticeable difference in gas mileage as well, Jerry said, noting that for example, on a vehicle that has 80,000 miles on it, bringing your car in to make sure the tires are properly inflated, getting an alignment and having an injector flush can result in receiving an extra 2 to 3 miles per gallon in gas consumption.

"It can absolutely make a difference," Jerry said. "Underinflated tires is the biggest reason for poor gas mileage, and preventive maintenance can catch that. We have customers who trade vehicles every two to three years, so yes, why do \$500 worth of maintenance when you're going to put 30,000 miles on it and trade it in. But if you're planning on keeping your vehicle and getting value out of it, you need to do those things."

"It's all about preventing it from breaking down in the first place," Rachel said, "instead of having you come in really, really upset because it is broken down. People come into sometimes and they're really mad – mad at the car – but after talking with them, they realize that we're here to help solve your problems."

"We bend over backwards to make the customer happy," Rachel added. "We'll go that extra mile."

With two boys in school, the Spencers understand that the lives of families with two vehicles can be thrown into chaos with just one car.

"There are a whole lot of people who are two car families, and if one car is down, it's a nightmare," Jerry said. "There's many times we'll stay until 8:00 or 9:00 at night if a part shows up at 6:00 because I know those people need their car back.

You're not going to get that at a lot of other places. I know what it's like. You need to empathize with the customer, and I definitely see their side of it."

Working with the same employees for a few years has meant they're all on the same pages, and know what their boss, Jerry, expects.

"They know the way I want things done – no greasy fingerprints left on the vehicle, no shop rags, no tools. One single greasy fingerprint on a panel can ruin a customer, even if everything else goes perfectly, even if we did it \$400 cheaper than anyone else. We test drive every car after the repair so that if there's a problem to arise, it will arise before you get your car back."

Electrical or emissions repairs, as well as standard oil changes and state inspections, make up the majority of the business at Spencer's Auto Repair, although in the summer months, work on air conditioning systems skyrockets. Spending money on training for his employees is something Jerry adamantly feels is necessary.

"Everybody here is A.S.E. certified, and we are constantly sending everyone – at least once a month – to some type of training to stay on top of the learning curve and to learn new products. We spend about three thousand dollars per mechanic each year on training, and it's worth it."

"These employees – as well as our customers – have made the business. We've been here to help guide it along," Jerry said. "We do our best to get your vehicle back in a day. If we tell you it's going to be done at 5:00, it's done at 5:00."

It's better, but certainly not necessary, for customers to schedule an appointment, and even a few hours of notice helps Jerry and Rachel make sure the vehicle can be checked out quickly.

"We've been trying to encourage our customers to schedule, but we also always keeps spots open during the

day because we know there are times you just can't call ahead," Jerry said. "But if you call and schedule an oil change and we know you're going to be here at 10:00, we can have two guys ready to look over your car completely. Even an hour of notice helps."

Reminder notices of recommendations to their customers will now be sent out, as Rachel recently launched a computer program at the shop to track previous work done and recommendations given to clients, as well as reminders of state inspections to customers who have had their vehicles inspected previously at Spencer's.

"Rachel has really helped the business tremendously," Jerry said. "I'm a mechanic, not a businessman. All I've ever been good at is fishing and fixing cars. With her up here, she's got it covered. She runs it like a business and gets on me regularly. People can know that whatever she's telling them about their vehicles, it's coming from me."

"Most people are coming here for that one-on-one personal service we give. They know who they're coming in and talking to," Rachel said. "We send out the letters to remind people of things we recommended they get done on their vehicles, as well as just general thank-you letters showing our appreciation to our customers."

Spencer's Auto Repair performs maintenance on all city vehicles – for the police, fire, and public works departments – and also offers fleet accounts for businesses. To date, Spencer's has fleet accounts for multiple oil companies in the area, which allows for employees to, for example, bring a company vehicle in for an oil change and have the company billed for it instead of paying up front.

Most of the business, though, is more traditional.

"It's absolutely mom and pop," Jerry said. "We have a lot of regular customers – a lot of them – and we're very grateful. There's still a bunch of them that I'll stop what I'm doing and sit down and have a cup of coffee with them – the older customers who have

gotten me where I am. They're the ones who have sung my praises. In small town Krum, if you're not doing something right, you don't stay in business very long. That old adage is so true – if you take care of somebody they'll tell everyone they know and if you don't, they'll tell everybody they know too. So we just always, always do our best to get it right."

At right – Jerry and Rachel Spencer at their wedding last year with David, now 8, and Jacob, now 10.

Below – Spencer's Auto Repair and Quick Lube is located at 103 W. Lloyd St. in Krum, just a couple of blocks north of the 4-way stop off F.M. 156, and can be reached at 482-6628.



SPENCER'S
Auto Repair & Alignment
940-482-6628
103 W Lloyd Street Krum, TX 76249
Monday through Friday 8am-5:30 pm