

Houston auto repair franchise group nearing deal in Lubbock

Posted: October 21, 2010



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Avalanche-Journal

A Houston-based auto repair franchise that's had its sights set on a presence in Lubbock for a year is close to making its move.

An executive with Christian Brothers Automotive Corp. said this week the company likely will begin talks this week on a site for a repair facility in the Hub City, and is in its "mutual evaluation process" with a potential local franchisee.

"Lubbock's been on our radar for about the last 12 months," said Josh Wall, vice president for development for the business, which expects to have about 80 locations in 11 states operating by the end of 2010.

"It's a great market for us, and there's a good number of our core customers there," Wall said.

If everything falls in line, he said, the Lubbock location could be open in the third quarter of 2011.

Christian Brothers, which started in 1982 with one location in Mission Bend, near Houston, recently opened a location in Amarillo.

The potential franchise operators are scheduled to go to Houston to meet with company principals where "we'll decide if they're a good fit for us, and they'll decide if we're a good fit for them."

The company brings some different touches to its operations that set it apart from other auto repair businesses, starting with a waiting area with decor more commonly associated with professional firms.

“They say, ‘This is nicer than my doctor’s office,’” Wall said. “We treat their vehicle as if they were in a doctor’s office.”

The waiting area is the same in every location they’ve opened since franchising began in 1997 — hardwood floors, leather sofas, area rugs, art on the walls, Christian music on the sound system.

“And they’re greeted by someone looking clean cut and professional behind the counter,” he said. “We want to treat them like they want to be treated.”

One of the business’s governing principles is Jesus’ instruction to love one’s neighbors as they love themselves.

“We treat our franchisees as we would want to be treated,” Wall said. “And we want our franchisees to treat their team members, customers and vendors that way as well.”

The business will feature eight repair bays and one with an alignment rack.

When opened, the store will have between nine and 12 employees, he said, and the work they do is usually more involved with repairing and replacing equipment rather than doing deep work in engines and transmissions.

One reason for that, he said, is to manage the business’s noise, and keeping noise levels down enables them to find locations in neighborhoods where auto repair shops might not normally be welcomed.

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