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Karl Rove steps in it, soils Universal Forest Products

'Honest' approach to fixing cars. BUSINESS JOURNAL STAFF

Nothing but the truth

The Christian Brothers Automotive Corp. isn't related to monks or to the brandy. It's a Texas-based auto repair franchise planning to open a shop in the Grand Rapids area.

The firm's claim to fame is that its 70 repair shops, mostly in the south, are owned by "born-again Christians, abiding by the utmost ethical and honest business practices."

Is Christian Brothers on to something? Is auto repair due for a serious makeover?

"I do think it's a concern for women," said **Dianna Palmer**. She and her husband, **Bill**, operate Palmer Service Inc., an auto repair shop on Remembrance Road in Walker that marked its 25th anniversary in 2010.

Dianna, who runs the office and does the books, said female customers keep coming back "because they feel like (Bill) listens to them and he is honest with them."

She said it is important that auto repair shops not make women "feel stupid, like they don't know what's going on. Bill always told me a woman will know her car better than any man, because she's the one driving by herself, or she is the one transporting her children," and she knows what the car is supposed to sound like when it is running properly.

Its business model clearly targets women.

Its repair shop waiting rooms are said to have "hardwood floors, leather couches, artwork and decorative lighting — what sounds like a cozy family room or lobby in a posh hotel."

According to a press release, "Christian Brothers Automotive Corporation has created a 'positive culture shock' in the marketplace, particularly among women who are used to the dirty, dingy image of auto shops and questionable practices."

"Historically, the automotive repair industry has been plagued by negative perceptions, and women are traditionally more hesitant about the car service experience because of the dishonesty often associated with the industry," said **Mark Carr**, CBAC founder and CEO.

Are most repair shops pretty honest?

"No. I don't feel that way," she said. "There are people out there who will cheat people, unfortunately. I think they target women, and I think older people, too. Things have changed with cars now — computers, they're complicated. I think they just take advantage of that."

Incidentally, the public relations rep who contacted the Business Journal on behalf of Christian Brothers Automotive noted that the company's COO, **Lew Ten Have**, is originally from Grand Rapids.

He attended Hope College, "where he was captain of the football team," then graduate school at MSU, "and is very proud to bring Christian Brothers Automotive to the area."