

Former Mechanic Back In Business As Franchisee Of Christian Brothers

By CASEY MURPHY | Business Editor | Sunday, March 13, 2011



Tyler location July 11.

James Proctor began working on cars more than 30 years ago and is returning to the business he loves after more than a decade in the industrial field.

"I've always wanted to own my own business but the opportunity had never really presented itself," he said. "I hadn't come across what would be a perfect fit" until Christian Brothers Automotive came along.

Proctor is the franchisee of what will be the first Christian Brothers Automotive chain to come to East Texas and he hopes to open the

"You never really can get out of the automobile business," he said. "If it's in your blood, you love it."

Proctor, 52, moved to Tyler when he was 5 years old and began working on cars in 1978. Two years later, he began working on Mercedes Benz vehicles and for 12 years worked as a technician for Oge Oldsmobile in Tyler, now Classic Toyota. But in 1992, he switched gears, attending The University of Texas at Tyler and studying industrial production management.

After graduation, he worked for 14 years in manufacturing management for Horizon Industries. About two years ago, he left the industrial industry to begin a new venture.

It all began when he saw an article in the Tyler Courier-Times – Telegraph about Christian Brothers considering moving to Tyler. His wife of 34 years, Amy, told him, "This is you."

Because of the company's beliefs and focus on customer service, "It was just a perfect match," he said. Christian Brothers is an auto repair franchise with 81 locations nationwide. The Proctors spent a day at corporate headquarters, learning about the company and its belief systems.

"We decided they'd be a good match for us and luckily, they decided we'd be a good match for them as well," Proctor said, adding that people at Christian Brothers treat you more like a family member than a franchisee.

Proctor said there is nothing like the auto repair shop in the area.

"I believe in their whole philosophy, honesty and integrity," he said, adding he finds it impressive that the company promotes heavily to single women so they can feel comfortable having a place to bring their car for repairs and not be taken advantage of.

"We won't claim to be a discount shop," he said. "Our claim is to be honest. You'll get a fair job for a fair price. It's their philosophy of doing business that is very much a Christian-based philosophy on how you treat people and the way things are done."

It has been a long process to negotiate the franchise agreement, locate the property, conduct surveys and receive building permits, but now things have started to move much faster, he said. Winter weather has caused some delays at the site, where they have begun moving dirt and pouring concrete.

The 4,980-square-foot facility will be at 8730 S. Broadway Ave., next to Academy Sports + Outdoors. The \$5 million project will include a masonry building with nine car bays. Alan Utz Construction is the contractor for the job and has built four other Christian Brothers. Proctor said every facility looks almost exactly the same, using the same architectural drawings and prints, but his facility will have a different color scheme than most.

Proctor's days as a mechanic are over, but he will be on site running the business and shuttling customers back and forth to pick up their vehicles and to get to know them. It will be a repair shop for any kind of vehicle and will start with two technicians and end up with five, as well as a service manager.

COMPANY HISTORY

Mark Carr opened the first Christian Brothers in 1982 in Mission Bend, near Houston. He had worked as an outside salesman to the oil and gas industry and didn't like what he was doing, Josh Wall, vice president of franchise and strategic development, said when explaining the company's history.

One evening, Carr prayed to God to bring him a different business opportunity and the next day at church, a mechanic asked him for help in starting a business. And Christian Brothers was born; the name chosen because they were two brothers of Christ trying to glorify God with their business, Wall said.

Carr ran the business until 1996, when the second store and first franchise opened in The Woodlands. The company grew to Dallas, Austin, Nashville, Tenn., Tulsa, Okla., and Atlanta. After 15 years, there are 81 stores in nine states, with plans to open up a store in the 10th state -- Colorado -- this month, Wall said.

The company progressively grew to Tyler. After filling out major markets, they wanted to continue to grow in small to mid-size markets, he said. Christian Brothers was looking to open a location in Tyler when they were approached by the Proctors in 2009.

"We liked them immediately," Wall said of the Proctors. Christian Brothers assigned the Tyler franchise to the Proctors in 2009 and spent eight or nine months looking for the right location.

Over the last year to 15 months, several other people have approached the company wanting to open a franchise in the Tyler area but they want the first store to open here and give it a chance to grow healthy and strong before a second store is planned, Wall said.

One of the first things that set the auto repair shops apart is the buildings themselves but once customers come into the business, that's when they really see the difference, he said. From aesthetics -- such as leather sofas and hardwood floors -- to being greeted by someone professionally dressed, smiling and ready to take care of your car that moment, Christian Brothers is not your typical auto repair shop.

They will do anything from simple oil changes to an engine removal and replacement but do not do body work or internal engine or transmission rebuilding, he said.

"We're really pleased to be growing out east toward Tyler," Wall said, adding that Dallas has been a good market for the company.