

# It's all in the family at Rairden's Auto Salvage

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If you ask Paul Rairden at Rairden's Auto Salvage and Towing if he has a fuel line for a 1992 Ford Ranger somewhere in the acres of salvage cars, he can point you to a row of Rangers that may have what you need.

"That's more memory than anything," Rairden said.

The salvage yard, which has been in operation since 1967 keeps most of its inventory on paper, however. Rairden said they are working towards getting more computerized and able to use services like cars-parts.com.

The business was started all those years ago by his father, Carroll, who did time in the service. He forged his mother's signature at the age of 16 to get into the U.S. Air Force, but was found out in basic training and released. He then joined the U.S. Army when he was old enough.

Paul said a funny thing is, when his dad passed in 2019, they could not find his Army discharge papers, but the discharge papers from his two weeks or so in the Air Force were available, so that was used to get his burial spot in Keokuk National Cemetery.

After the service, he spent several years working at various factories in Keokuk. Paul said his dad worked

almost everywhere, Foote Mineral, Sheller Globe, OK Rubber welding and even before that, he washed cars for car lots and more.

Paul said his dad did not enjoy the factory work. He started parting out cars at the family's home, he shared with his wife and six children. He got a chance to buy a small salvage yard and took it.

Over the years, Carroll bought pieces of land and eventually got up to about 13 acres. Some of that was lost when a new bridge to Missouri was put in, but now the business is up to about 13 acres again, after acquiring some more property next to the original yard.

"I didn't know there was going to be this much to it," Paul said.

After Carroll passed way, his son Steve ran the business for a few years. Paul retired from the Iowa State Patrol and he and other family members ended up buying the business. He, wife Denise and son Isaac can often be seen in the office.

He said, in all, there are seven owners, including Paul's Brother, Dan Rairden and they have five full-time and two part-time employees as well.

The family and employees definitely stay busy; just during the 30 minute interview for this article, the phone rang a dozen times and at least five



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A portion of the Rairden family, from left, Isaac, Denise and Paul, are seen here. Carroll Rairden opened Rairden's Auto Salvage and Towing in 1967 and the business has been a go-to for generations looking for used parts to repair vehicles as well as those needing towing services.

people came into the office asking about parts.

Paul said a big part of the business is the towing aspect. And that includes getting a call at 2 or 3 a.m. to come and tow a vehicle.

"It's not always convenient," Paul said. "But it's really not convenient for the person who's car is broken down, of they've just been in a wreck."

He said it's kind of like thinking of the railroad workers.

"It's more of a way of life," he said. "I remember a lot of time (when he lived at home) getting up from Christmas dinner and going on a wrecker

call."

It's not all bad. He and Denise said they had a lot of dates in a tow truck. Before they were really dating, his friend couldn't go to Chicago with him to get a vehicle and the friend suggested Denise go with him.

Five hours there and five hours back lends a lot of time to get to know each other.

When your family runs a salvage yard, it just lends itself to a teenage boy in the 1970s and 80s being into hot rodding. Paul said he got a 1966 Mustang convertible when he was a kid, but mostly had driven "beaters." It wasn't unusual for his dad to

bring home a car from an auction, drive it awhile and sell it.

He said they were more into stock cars. They could put one together from parts they had and get out to the track.

"Dad sponsored half the cars anyway," he said.

Paul said Keokuk has been a great place to have a business. He said sometimes people say negative things about Keokuk, but he remembers a family who had their camper catch on fire by their old UHaul shop on 16th St. The fire department had Wendy's bring the family some Frosties, Marvin Alberts, who operates

Double A Glass across the street, offered to give the family a ride home to Illinois, and it really showed there are a lot of good people in the community.

"I wouldn't want to be in business anywhere else," Paul said.

He said working with family is great. Sure, like anything else, they have their ups and downs, but "at the end of the day, we're still family."

And being at the salvage yard kind of keeps him close to his father as well.

"I grew up here. It's just part of every day, normal life," Paul said. "Working down here's like coming home."



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