

business

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Allie Hinga, Managing Editor
allie.hinga@THmedia.com
563-588-5648



DAVE KETTERING • Telegraph Herald

John Curwen, owner of John's Body Shop, speaks with customers in his shop located in Hazel Green, Wis. Curwen, 75, leads the shop that has operated on North Percival

Street in Hazel Green for about seven decades – ever since his dad, Eldon “Barney” Curwen, established a gas station there in the late 1940s.

Community rallies behind John's Body Shop

Longtime Hazel Green businessman reflects on life's work, challenges

BY ERIK HOGSTROM • erik.hogstrom@thmedia.com

HAZEL GREEN, Wis. — Photos of stock cars fill almost every inch of the walls of John Curwen's small office, and his adjacent shop is packed with car frames, side panels and other elements of his longstanding body shop business.

"It seems like everything centers around cars and racing with me," Curwen said.

Curwen, 75, is the owner of John's Body Shop, a business that has operated on North Percival Street in Hazel Green for about seven decades — ever since his dad, Eldon “Barney” Curwen, established a gas station there in the late 1940s.

"John's dad started this out as a little Shell gas station, and John has always done body work," Jim Simmons said.

Simmons, 77, of Hazel Green, has known Curwen for 65 years. He said the Hazel Green community has relied on his friend's body shop for decades.



Curwen (right) works with customer Tom Jeffrey.

"John has had the body shop going for years and years," Simmons said. "John has hung on and kept it going."

Nearly 17 years ago, Curwen relied on the community to help him keep himself going following the death of his son.

Mark Curwen died in December 2006 in a crash outside Hazel Green. He was 34.

"That was a big setback for me," John Curwen said. "Anybody who loses a child, I know how they feel. A lot of

close friends and people in the community helped me through it. It was depressing. When somebody gets sick, you can get ready for it, but (when) somebody dies in an accident, it's different."

Mark's death came as John was preparing to pass John's Body Shop along to his son.

"He was in business with me," Curwen said. "He had just become a legal partner with me just months before he passed away."

John Curwen had con-



John's Body Shop

Location: 3520 N. Percival St., Hazel Green, Wis.
Employees: 1
Phone: 608-854-2341

structed the current home of the body shop in the late 1990s with his son in mind.

"I built this new building for him," Curwen said. "I figured he could take it over and I could fade away like my father did. I could run for parts or sweep the floor or whatever."

'KIND OF RAISED RIGHT HERE'

The gas station built by Barney Curwen happened to sit next door to the family home — a circumstance that helped

facilitate John Curwen's entry into the family business.

"I was coming out (to the business) since I could crawl," John Curwen said. "I was kind of raised right here."

Originally a Shell station, the business eventually became a Sinclair station.

"Shell stations in the whole area became Sinclair," Curwen said. "Then, we quit selling gas and became mostly a repair shop."

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