

FOR THE UP AND COMING
AND ALREADY ARRIVED

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Our FRONTreport
on
Wine
From the Region

Mike Harper,
Wine Gourmet



Phil Barker (left) and Michael Klimchuk of Colors on Parade in Salem.

A pretty car a while longer >

Executive Summary:

Colors on Parade, a "body shop on wheels" finds its niche fixing smaller dents, dings and scratches as people keep their aging cars longer.

By Randolph Walker

After someone backed into a door on his black Mercedes, Larry Sultze got one repair quote for \$725. The body shop believed the repair would require painting, recalls Sultze, co-owner of Elderberry's cafe in Salem. Sultze declined. At the suggestion of another body shop, he called Phil Barker, specialist in paintless dent removal.

After Barker worked on the car for a few hours, "it was just like new," recalls Sultze. The bill: \$300 to fix that dent plus two others. "Just wonderful. I'm very high



Randolph Walker

on Phil and his group," Sultze says.

Barker likes to get that reaction. He and his partner, Michael Klimchuk, own the Southwest Virginia area developer franchise for Colors on Parade, a "body shop on wheels" that is prospering during the recession by using innovative car repair techniques.

Colors on Parade was founded by classic car enthusiast Robert Lowery in 1987, using techniques based on Lowery's

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patented processes for car restoration. The first Colors on Parade opened in 1988 in South Carolina. Barker and Klimchuk came on board in 1990.

Barker, 58, a Virginia Tech graduate and Salem resident, taught industrial arts and sold cars before joining Colors on Parade. Klimchuk, 52, a transplanted New Englander, was in car sales and rental.

As co-owners of the Southwest Virginia area developer franchise (www.colorsva.com), Barker and Klimchuk provide assistance to the 14 Colors on Parade owner/operators in the region. These independent business owners are home-based and specialize either in paint repair or paintless dent removal.

In addition, both Barker and Klimchuk have their own independent businesses. Barker removes dents, while Klimchuk repairs paint. They fix dings and scratches resulting from accidents other than collisions.

"We're efficient at doing the small jobs that the body shops are not efficient at doing," says Barker, adding that a small job ties up a body shop just like a larger job. Furthermore, "The quality is as good as a body shop. The convenience is the major thing that we offer."

A Colors on Parade van pulls up to the customer's car. The specialist gives an estimate and comes back later to do the



Phil Barker fixes a dent.

repair, or he may do everything in a single visit. Paint repair vans are equipped with mobile labs that mix and match paint on the spot.

A repair typically takes four to five hours. The quick turnaround often eliminates the need for the customer to rent a car, making the cost "extremely competitive" with a body shop, Klimchuk says.

While the retail segment—dealing directly with individual car owners—is growing, 80 to 85 percent of Colors on Parade's business is wholesale, according to Klimchuk. Car dealers, body shops, fleet owners and rental car agencies sometimes use Colors on

Parade for smaller repairs, rather than in-house technicians. Colors on Parade specialists possess "a skill set that takes a very long time to develop," says Klimchuk. "It's more cost effective for them to call somebody who's trained in it, than to send somebody to school."

In the future, Barker and Klimchuk would like to add more owner/operators. They expect the retail segment to grow.

When the recession hit in 2008, "nobody was selling cars, there was nothing for us to do," says Klimchuk. Now, "we're back up where we were in 2007."

According to a recent survey of car owners by AutoMD.com, nearly 80 percent of respondents planned to put more miles on their current vehicle than they put on their previous cars—meaning more work for Colors on Parade. "We're not a necessary service for the longevity," says Barker, "but we are able to keep the cars looking good for much longer." ■