

# The DAMM BODY SHOP

## Turning Everyday Accidents into Works of Art for Over 25 Years

It took a minute or two before Jerry Damm would say it out loud, but like a lot of down-home, small-business owners, he didn't want to appear to be bragging.

After he mentioned that word of mouth was his biggest and best advertiser, the owner of Damm Body Shop finally got around to acknowledging that the quality of work is what leads to that word of mouth.

"I guess doing quality work speaks for itself," Damm said. "We get them fixed up and taken care of."

Damm Body Shop, 1910 16th., specializes in everything from major collision repair to replacing a mirror.

"We take care of anything to do with the body of the vehicle from front to back – but not the mechanics," Damm explained. "We also do the painting. We get it back to you just like it was before."

In keeping with his laid-back humility, Damm gives his employees credit for the good customer service. "The people who work here are the backbone of the business," the body-shop owner said. "They have been here for years and are dependable self-starters.

"They make my job easier and do quality work," he continued. "They treat the vehicles like they were their own."

Terry King has been with Damm for more than 20 years, and Tyler Hinson for eight. Annette Burton, who manages the office, is a 15-year veteran. "Hopefully, the customers are happy with what we do," Damm commented. "But if there ever is problem, we will get it handled."

Just as Damm and crew know what to do with a vehicle in need of repair, they also know what not to do. "If there is something we cannot do," Damm said, "I will be up front about it. We don't want people wasting their money."

For example, people who want to repair old, rusted-out vehicles, might want to seek service elsewhere.

"If you have an old car that you dug out of a creek bed, you will spend a ton of money and it will not be worth it when it is done," Damm said. "You will spend x amount of dollars and it is money out the window."



Owner Jerry Damm poses with his three staff members, Tyler Hinson (8 years), Terry King (20 years), and Annette Burton (15 years). Damm Body Shop is located at 1910 16th Street in downtown Great Bend.

"People sometimes think if they put \$1,500 into a car it will be worth \$50,000 later," he added. "It is not going to happen."

Damm did note the situation would be different if someone wants to refurbish a car for sentimental reasons.

Damm, who many people know as Lumpy of Lumpy's Bar & Grill, bought the body shop in January 1988 from Marvin Basgall of Basgall's Body Shop. Before then it was Spruills Ford Body Shop – all at the same 16th Street location.

"I have been in this business all my life," Damm said. "This is all I have ever done. Right after high school I went to Wichita Automotive and Body school," he said, noting he is a 1973 Great Bend High School graduate.

He started working at age 15 for Kottwitz Motors, the local Pontiac dealership at the time. He also worked at Bud Stein Body Shop and a few other shops in the early years. "Then the opportunity arose to purchase this place," he recalled. "I thought I would try it on my own. Now I have been in body repair for 40 years. So, I might be one of the few old timers still doing it.

"A lot of independently owned body shops are gone now," he elaborated. "Now there are about four, plus the dealerships. There used to be twice as many independents here."

There also have been changes in the way the body-shop business is conducted. "The repair process has changed a lot over the years," he noted. "We used to do mainly repair. Now it is more replacement because of the design and manufacturing.

"There are now more plastics, fiberglass and different metals," he explained. "They are not building the big bulky machines like they used to. Even though there is more replacement, there is still a lot of repair. It depends on the availability of parts and then the cost of those parts. It is often cheaper to replace than repair. Back in the day, they didn't have a choice - repair was the only option."

Hours at Damm Body Shop are 8 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday or by appointment. The crew works on any domestic or foreign car, sport utility vehicle or pickup in six work stalls and the paint booth. "We also have a frame machine," Damm pointed out. "If there is structural damage, we have the equipment to handle it. It is a full line of collision repair.

"Some of these big major-collision jobs can run \$12,000 to \$15,000 or more," he said, shaking his head. "Most vehicles, however, are totaled when they get to be that high. But we have done some big jobs."

Smaller jobs include repairing or replacing items such as door handles, mirrors and glass. Business stays pretty steady at Damm Body Shop, whose territory includes mainly Barton County but also Rush, Stafford and Pawnee counties.

"Great Bend is my hometown and I have been here all my life," he commented. "I admit I was kind of skeptical when I first went into business for myself. But we have had good customers who support smaller local businesses. I have been here for 26 years so I must be doing okay." —

