

Glenside News Globe Times Chronicle > News

## Jenkintown automotive technician wins two awards

Sunday, February 26, 2012

By Linda Finarelli

[lfinarelli@montgomerynews.com](mailto:lfinarelli@montgomerynews.com)

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Thomas Palermo wears a lot of hats at Preferred Automotive Specialists Inc. in Jenkintown, and now he has some feathers to stick in those caps.

The vice president, general manager and lead diagnostician of the automotive center at 119 Township Line Road, Palermo was recently named Best Tech of the Year by WIX Filters. The 38-year-old Mount Laurel, N.J., resident was selected based on his 20 years as a service technician in the automotive industry and his multiple certifications and extensive training.

He was also recognized for his community service work with the Fox Chase Cancer Center, Temple University Athletics, the Cheltenham Township Athletic Association, Holy Redeemer Health Systems and Charities, Cheltenham Township Car Show and the Fox Chase Business Association.

The award followed on the heels of his receiving the 2011 AAIA-ASE World Class Technician Award from the Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association and National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence.

Co-owner of Preferred Automotive with his father, Joe, and Joe's wife, Cathy, Palermo said he started learning about cars after his father opened his first shop in the late 1970s.

"I remember when I was a kid going to work with him ... wanting to get involved as soon as I could," Palermo said. As he got older, he spent his summers in his father's shop, "learning about vehicles, how they work, how to diagnose problems and how to repair them."

That hands-on experience along with an interest in science led him to Penn State University, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering technology. He also holds numerous certifications in the automotive field as well as an associate of science degree in Microsoft network engineering from Southwest Florida College, earning him another hat at Preferred Automotive — "I'm the IT guy here, too," he said. "I'm a jack of all trades."

"Customers place an extraordinary amount of trust in professional technicians, from recommending the best parts to properly repairing and maintaining their vehicles," said Mike Harvey, brand manager for WIX Filters in a press release. "During his 20-year career, Thomas has displayed a passion for his customers that rivals only his desire to continue learning while performing his best work every day."

"I'm a big proponent of education," Palermo said. "We do a lot of training here."

Palermo's shop is a NAPA Auto Care location and he is a "big proponent of ASE — my guys are all certified," he said, noting the business pays for all the training and certifications for the seven mechanics including him.

With alternative energy vehicles entering the market, Palermo and his employees attend classes on various subjects about once a month, he said.

“A lot of education needs to go with that,” he said, referring to hybrid, electric and compressed natural gas technologies for autos. “You need to know how the systems work and the safety considerations.”

Different vehicles have a lot of similarities, “but the differences are big,” Palermo said.

“We’re a family-run business and we view our people” — about 25 employees — “as part of our family,” he said.

The service manager has been with the business for more than 20 years and one of the diagnosticians for 15 years.

“We value the relationship with our employees; it has to be a win-win,” he said. “We view our customers the same way. We’re really in the relationship business,” he said, noting the shop has “many loyal customers.”

“There’s nothing we don’t service,” Palermo said, in the six-bay service center and alternate location where large vehicles, like the compressed natural gas buses for Temple University, along with trash trucks, box trucks and bigger diesel trucks are serviced.

“Pretty much if it moves, we will work on it.”

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