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GREEN REPAIR

New E. Iowa auto body shop uses environmentally friendly technology

George C. Ford The Gazette

MOUNT VERNON -- A new auto body **repair** shop in this Linn County community may be one of the most environmentally friendly in the state. Lynch Collision Center, 810 Highway 30 W., employs technologies that reduce energy costs as well as providing a brighter and quieter workplace.

Owner Jim Thompson said the business, which opened in July, uses waterborne paint that does not require high temperatures to dry and cure.

"With traditional solvent-based paint, we would take the temperature in the paint booth up to about 145 degrees," Thompson said. "With waterborne paint, we take the temperature up to about 80 degrees and use fans to keep the air circulating.

"We're getting a better appearance because the metallics in the paint stand up. Waterborne paint is used by most vehicle manufacturers, so this allows us to have a better match."

Thompson, 63, who also owns the Bob Mickey Collision Center at 4813 Center Point Rd. NE in Cedar Rapids, said the lighting in the shop is corrected to approximate daylight.

"The lights also are smaller, so they use about 50 percent less electricity than traditional lighting," he said.

One of the things some notice about Lynch Collision Center is how quietly the shop operates. Thompson said a system developed in Australia recycles compressed air, which reduces the amount of noise.

"The compressor runs about 35 percent less than it would traditionally, which will reduce our electric bill," Thompson said.

"The waterborne paint, our lighting system and the compressed air system will provide a better working environment for our employees," said Trent Thompson, 37, operations manager at Bob Mickey Collision Center.

The front lobby of the Lynch Collision Center features a large number of windows.

Jim Thompson said that will lower electricity cost by using more ambient sunlight and is designed to put customers at ease.

"Fifty percent of our customers are women," he said. "Research has shown that they feel uncomfortable entering a dark office, particularly one where most of the employees are men. This makes our business bright and inviting."

Thompson said he may open additional collision centers in other communities if the customer demographics make sense.

"We also would have to find a strong dealer to affiliate with like Lynch Ford in Mount Vernon," he said. "That's really been a key to our success in Cedar Rapids."

Comments: (319) 398-8366; george.ford@gazcomm.com
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