

## Zara's Collision Center embraces 'repair plan' process, team mentality as it embarks on 'PCE journey'



The Zara's Collision Center team in Springfield, Ill., consists of 23 people, including Owners Brad and Julie Zara as well as five body technicians, one apprentice, one painter, four preppers, two detailers, and numerous office personnel.

by Josh Nelson

Springfield, Ill.—Throughout the 23 years that Zara's Collision Center has been in business, Owner Brad Zara said he has upgraded his facility multiple times, going from 3,600 square feet and eight employees at his original location to 16,400 square feet and 23 employees at his current location.

Zara said his staff includes five body technicians (all with over 15 years of tenure), one apprentice, one painter, four preppers, two detailers, and various office personnel.

One recent alteration made to Zara's current facility was the retrofitting of the paint booth with an air movement system purchased from MJF Equipment Sales in Maryland Heights, Mo. Zara said the alteration was made to allow the use of Sikkens AutoWave waterborne paint.

Zara's Collision Center is involved in 14 DRPs, but only three or so of those provide a significantly large volume of work, Zara said.

"With the bulk of our DRPs, we may only do between zero and a half a dozen claims per month," he said. "It makes it a little easier on a customer who happens to be insured by one of those companies, but keeping up with the guidelines is really difficult.

"Fortunately, though, we don't get our cycle times shoved down our throats like a lot of shops that work with some of the other DRPs."

Zara said he uses the Bill Jacobs network

in Joliet, Ill., as his primary parts supplier but also uses Weir Chevrolet in Redbud, Ill., as his secondary parts supplier because Weir offers deliveries twice daily.

"Weir is heavy into parts," he said, "and they're good at it. Even being a backup for us, they still get a pretty good volume of our business.

"We hate not being able to buy from our local dealers, but with the way business has gotten and with some of the lean-type processes that we've put into place, we need the parts now," Zara said. "It seems like the local dealers want to be more into wholesale, but they don't have the inventory to be able to do it.

"The ones that have really tried to meet our needs, you could tell that they were really stretching to make it happen. You just can't beat the service of the dealerships that are really focused on wholesale parts."

Zara said it was the embrace of one particular lean principle that led him to prioritize frequency and efficiency of parts delivery over locality.

"About a year ago," he said, "we got away from writing estimates and doing preliminary parts orders on a very, very large percentage of our work. We just schedule it in, do a disassembly and what we call a 'repair plan,' sometimes called a 'blueprint,' to nail down everything in one shot, and then we order the parts.

"From that point, since we're already starting out in a bit of a hole, we need to get

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those parts by the next day as often as possible."

Despite the fact that implementing that lean "repair plan" process has created new demands for his business, Zara said the new approach to service yields undeniably positive results.

"It's actually worked out really well," he said. "We've uncovered other areas that we've had to correct in our scheduling in order to really maximize the complete repair plan and get our cycle times back in order, but it just makes sense."

Zara said he has also seen positive results from maintaining a consistent advertising campaign that features both striking visual elements and clever concepts.

"Our biggest form of advertising is billboards," he said. "We have four pretty major billboard locations around town, and



Members of the Zara's Collision Center team mask off a vehicle in the shop's paint booth. This booth was recently retrofitted with an air movement system purchased from MJF Equipment Sales to accommodate the use of Sikkens AutoWave waterborne paint.

we change the message every quarter. They've kind of become our niche. People are always commenting about them."

Taking a team approach to repairing vehicles has also been beneficial to his

**"We're looking at how much of the right thing we can get done at the right time."**

business, Zara said, but not committing wholly to a team system has created increased organizational demands.

"For most of my career in this industry, it's been more of a focus on individual performance," he said. "Now we're looking at collectively how much of the right thing we can get done at the right time. We're trying to make that work while still keeping an individualized pay plan, and that makes it even more of a challenge."

Zara said many of his business strategies are byproducts of the education he has received through the partnership he has with his paint supplier.

"I've been involved in Acoat Selected since 1994," he said, "so I've been exposed to a lot of really good training through that. It's a division of Akzo Nobel that provides body shop consulting. We do national performance group meetings—20-group meetings—twice a year.

"Their version of lean is called Process-Centered Environment (PCE), which is kind of a combination of Lean and Theory of Constraints and Six Sigma all mixed together. We're a little over a year into what we've been calling our 'PCE journey.'"

That PCE journey, Zara said, is aimed at improving the quality of his shop as a whole, and he is trying to make the



Production Manager Kim Woolard (l.) oversees the production process and Part Time Office Assistant Zoey Zara helps with the paperwork end of things at Zara's Collision Center in Springfield. Zoey is the daughter of Brad Zara's brother, Mike, who has been Zara's Parts Manager for the past 20 years.

transitions that accompany this journey as seamless as possible for his business and employees.

"Change can bring out the dark side of people," Zara said. "As we've really encouraged people to work as a team, we've found the need to bring in someone to help us understand how to work as a team, so for the past two years now we've been working with Steve Thomas, who teaches things like personal development, leadership, personality styles, and teamwork through his business called 'Lyf Stuff.'"

"We've been bringing him in to teach about once every quarter, and he's available between those times, too," he said. "It's been really big. Hardly a day goes by that we don't apply something from his lessons.

"Our team could really have corroded if it hadn't been for someone coming in to teach us about the things we probably should have learned in elementary school," Zara said.

More information about Zara's Collision Center is available at [www.zarascollision.com](http://www.zarascollision.com). ■

## Mitchell launches major enhancements in RepairCenter

San Diego—Mitchell International has announced the launch of RepairCenter Estimating and RepairCenter Carrier Communication modules with its upcoming release of RepairCenter. RepairCenter is the shop Workspace that allows shops to access accurate vehicle-repair data from a single solution, improving vehicle-repair workflow and shop efficiency.

The most notable enhancement centers on the integration of estimating functionality within the RepairCenter platform in order to deliver a seamless workflow experience, said Jason Bertellotti, vice president of Repair Solutions for Mitchell International.

"We're pleased to offer a solution that

allows our customers to review and complete their estimates all within their RepairCenter application," Bertellotti said. Previously, users accessed estimating independently from RepairCenter.

"With estimating integrated into the business-management workflow users no longer need to switch between the two applications," he said. "As a result, the workflow between the estimate and the repair is tightened to provide a seamless user experience and improved customer satisfaction."

The new RepairCenter platform also offers a communication interface that allows shops to receive new assignments from their insurance carrier partners, accessible from within the RepairCenter Workspace. ■

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