

FIX AUTO HAS ARRIVED IN ATLANTIC CANADA!

By Terry Waterfield

FIX AUTO, A NETWORK OF BODY SHOPS WHICH BEGAN IN QUEBEC IN 1991, ADDED ONTARIO IN 2002, THEN EXPANDED INTO WESTERN CANADA, NOW TOTALS MORE THAN 350 LOCATIONS IN CANADA, UNITED STATES AND EUROPE. UNTIL RECENTLY, FIX AUTO WAS NOT PRESENT IN ATLANTIC CANADA. THAT IS UNTIL, FIX AUTO ONTARIO OWNER AND PRESIDENT, STEVE LEAL ACQUIRED THE FRANCHISE RIGHTS TO ATLANTIC CANADA AND REACHED AN AGREEMENT WITH PAUL, MARK AND MARVIN WEEKS TO REBRAND THEIR SHOP IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND UNDER THE FIX AUTO BANNER.

Fix Auto Central PEI, located in Breadalbane, Prince Edward Island is strategically located on the - Highway 2, between Charlottetown and Summerside, Prince Edward Island's the busiest highway.

Why would a body shop celebrating its 40th anniversary this year which has doubled in size over the last two years, suddenly make such a drastic a change?

General Manager Marvin Weeks explains it this way: "We need to keep up with the times. That was always one of our goals."

"Our main objective is always to offer top quality and service. Fix Auto has the resources to allow us to maintain and even raise the bar on our dedication to the consumer and insurance industry.

Pretty much eve-



ry facet of the network will help us out," says Weeks.

Fix Auto is an international network with a strong technology base allowing franchisees to benchmark their performance within the industry. The network is a leader in customer service with a 99.08% satisfaction rating and an aggressive marketing strategy.

"This allows them to be proactive and stand out against the competition," says Weeks.

Week's Autobody now branded as Fix Auto Central PEI, is a 5600 square foot shop with a total of seven employees. Over the past forty years the shop has seen a number of changes in the industry. The importance of staying competitive and continuously adapting to changes is a high priority for the shop. The shop's philosophy and mission measured comparably to the Fix Auto code of ethics.

After meeting Steve Leal and the Fix Auto team the decision to join the network became clear.

After studying Economics at Wilfred Laurier University, Leal began his career by working for a national rental car provider. Shortly after he purchased a

body shop and immediately branded under the Fix Auto network.

"Fix Auto's mission to develop and maintain a reputation of excellence in the auto body repair industry by combining essential resources with key innovation to offer the best service at the best price. Joining the Fix Auto network was parallel with my mission and in line with where the industry is headed," says Leal.

Leal's passion for the industry and the strong belief in Fix Auto's mission has led him to acquiring the rights to the Fix Auto franchise for Ontario and Atlantic Canada.

"I strongly believe that no matter how much money we throw at investing into individual shops, we will never be able to reach critical mass unless the shops unite," says Leal. "Putting the shops under the same brand name, uniting in numbers and having a strong marketing presence in the industry only makes sense."

"Fix Auto supports the franchisees we sign by operating under three departments; operations, marketing and sales," Leal explains.

"Operations have always been a key aspect of the Fix Auto corporate culture. Through our exclusive Web-CMS technology we are able to measure and benchmark each franchisee throughout the network. This coupled with the repair vs. replace philosophy enables our franchisees to be more profitable and achieve



the targets set by our insurance partners. Body shops that join our network receive the necessary tools to succeed in today's industry," says Mike Kaplaniak, Director of Operations at Fix Auto Ontario and Atlantic Canada. "We believe in strong support for our franchisees"

That support runs deeper than operations, Fix Auto's sales and marketing strategy has given the network an edge allowing them to be recognized and stand out in the industry.

"Insurers today are more data driven. DRP negotiations with insurers are happening at higher management levels and are becoming more complex," says Athena Hiltz, Director of Sales and Marketing for Fix Auto Ontario and Atlantic Canada. "In addition, insurers are interested in a one point of contact solution, offering a brand image that is an extension of their service is the reality of today. A proactive marketing presence is a must."

Joining a network like Fix Auto brings additional advantages. Strength in numbers and cost saving through our buying group, results in better prices for customers and a better profit margin for body shops.

"Fix Auto's buying group is getting stronger and stronger, so as a franchisee you're able to get things at a better price," Weeks states. "It's sheer volume and numbers."

Adding to the number of franchises

is an ongoing aim for Fix Auto, who now list 57 locations in Ontario and are aiming at 100 in the next few years. Likewise, Atlantic Canada, which just opened their first location, is a prime area for expansion.

The criteria, however, for joining the Fix Auto network is high.

"Before we sign a body shop we perform several reference and quality checks to ensure the potential location meets Fix Auto standards," Leal explains. "Our operations team performs a Quality Audit quarterly to make sure Fix Auto's Code of Ethics are being applied."

For Paul, Mark and Marvin Weeks, joining the Fix Auto network was a win-win situation. "We were researching Fix Auto and they were researching us too. It's just the way the industry is going, it's becoming harder and harder to be an independent."

"When you look into the future of centralization and upgrades in technology facing the industry, you've got to be a more of a global player. Fix Auto will give us an infrastructure in those areas," says Weeks.

Joining Fix Auto was not an overnight decision for the Weeks. "They first visited us out here and then we went up to Ontario to their corporate office." "They're very good and very professional, it's easy for us to adapt to them. It's going to be good for Atlantic Canada. The atmos-



phere and professionalism, all that's going to change, going to be improved."

"They have an exclusive technology that's available in the industry that is well respected by insurance companies. They know where their cars are and who's fixing them at any given time."

"Plus, franchisees are able to measure shop performance. Instead of having to wait until the end of the month to get reports in, they can go on Fix Auto's Web-CMS system and get updates at any time, every day."

Marvin Weeks expects Fix Auto to expand in the region. "It will take them a year or two to get well established in the Maritimes," he says. "But they're not looking for huge numbers in shops. They're pretty strict on what they want. They want good medium-sized shops that are well run already and have the potential of becoming better at what they already do."

"Fix Auto is excellent support for any independent shop looking to succeed in the new generation of collision repair."

