

Sinner's Paint and Body Shop a Wauneta icon since 1953

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Wednesday, 14 August 2013 18:39 -



Sinner's Paint and Body Shop opened its doors in Wauneta on Aug. 15, 1953. Today, the Sinner's team includes, from left, Sheila Alexander, Lonnie Alexander, Galen Todd, Michael Gardner, Gloria Sinner and Lloyd Sinner. (Breeze File Photo)

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By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

Most business owners strive to have their business name become a household name, the first that comes to mind when a particular product or service is needed.

Well, Sinner's Paint and Body Shop in Wauneta has established that stature from years of hard work and good customer service. Today, Aug. 15, 2013 marks their 60th year in business.

Owner Lloyd Sinner credits their long term success to loyal customers and good employees.

Today, Sinner's Paint and Body Shop provides automotive repair and refinishing for all types of cars, pickups, semi trucks and trailers, tractors and combines. In addition, they have the only large-truck frame machine between Omaha and Denver and offer the Bee-Line front end alignment system for semi trucks and trailers.

They also offer 24-hour wrecker service, something that has seen many changes over the years.

"Back in the day we would help get the accident victims out of their cars or trucks. Now, we don't get involved because every town has its own EMS crew," recalls Lloyd.

Employees

All this work is done with a staff of four plus owners Lloyd and Gloria Sinner.

Each staff person has their own specialty. Galen Todd, the oldest employee besides Lloyd, started at Sinner's in 1974. Todd does all the truck alignment and trailer alignments.

Lonnie and Sheila Alexander started at Sinner's in 1986. Sheila works in the front office where she does the company's books, inventory, orders paint and parts and does the shop's scheduling.

Lonnie specializes in car and pickup repairs and painting. He also drives the wreckers along with Lloyd.

Michael Gardner is the newest Sinner's employee, starting in 2009. Gardner works on trucks and trailers. All shop employees help with wrecker calls and with the truck frame machine.

Equipment plays an important part

Sinner has always managed to stay ahead of the game when it comes to upgrading and adding new equipment.

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When they purchased their robotic wheel polishing machine in December 2009 the closest one around was in Omaha. Sinner purchased the machine from a company in Florida.

The company's owner was so taken by a shop in sparsely populated southwest Nebraska purchasing the machine that he had to drive out here to see the shop and meet the man who bought it.

Looking back, Lloyd wonders where they would be today if they hadn't invested in the equipment they did over the years.

"It's been amazing the differences I've seen in my lifetime—going from the frame car to the unibody with no frames and watching farm trucks go from being single-axle trucks to semis," said Lloyd.

Today, they do alignment and frame straightening work for customers all over northwest Kansas, southwest Colorado and, of course, southwest Nebraska.

Today, Sinner's Paint and Body Shop has a total of nine wreckers, the oldest is a 1929 Model A and the newest was purchased in 2013.

The Model A holds a special place in Lloyd's heart as the boom on the truck was a Christmas gift from then-employee Duane Dreiling. Shortly after Dreiling gave Sinner the boom, he and Gloria found a Model A truck to mount it on.

Business takes its toll on the body

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Lloyd recalls two major injuries he has sustained during the past 60 years.

In 1972 he and the boys in the shop were working on a Ford Mustang, trying to get it started. Lloyd says he got impatient and put a little gasoline in the carburetor, which resulted in an explosion and fire that burnt the majority of his body from the waist up. The fire burned shirt and hair completely away. He recalls how his skin looked like burned bits of black newspaper.

Estes Jones put the fire out and Frank Smith took him to the hospital in Imperial, where he made his recovery under the care of Dr. Shop and Dr. Yaw.

Then, in 2003 Lloyd was on Wauneta's main street at around 4:00 a.m. trying to tow a Schwan's truck. He was working to remove the drive shaft when it hit him in the head, crushing the left side of his skull and face.

Gerald Longhurst, a custom wheat harvester from Oklahoma, found him and Frank Smith took him home. Longhurst and Gloria drove him to the Imperial hospital in a car. After he arrived at the hospital he was flown to Greeley, Colo.

His mouth was wired shut for 13 weeks and three days due to a broken jaw, a time Lloyd remembers as being a very, very long time.

The road to Wauneta

Prior to starting Sinner's Paint and Body Shop in 1953 Lloyd Sinner, owner, and his dad, Ed, were working for Chipman's Chevrolet in Trenton and living in Culbertson.

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Sinner said he and his dad knew the garage in Trenton was getting ready to split up, so they started thinking of what their next move would be.

Lloyd and Ed had a conversation with Art Cardomy, who farmed south of Trenton. They asked him where in Nebraska he'd move if he had his choice.

Cardomy told the Sinners he'd move to either Ogallala or Wauneta so they began looking into the aspects of opening a repair garage in either town.

Ed and Lloyd knew Fred Dobish in Ogallala, who ran a good repair business in Ogallala and didn't want to compete with him so they looked into Wauneta.

In Wauneta, they talked with Orval "Shorty" Hamilton—who they had done business with before—and Hamilton talked them into locating their new business in Wauneta.

Hamilton went so far as to rent the Sinners their first shop—located behind the present-day Mercy Meals building.

Sinner's early years

Lloyd and Ed packed every tool and piece of equipment they owned into the back of a half ton Chevy pickup and moved it to their new shop in Wauneta.

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Sinner's Paint and Body Shop stayed in that location for a little over a year, when they rented the present-day Good Times Bar building from Albert Krausnick and moved their enterprise there.

After a time, Fred and Maxine Heldenbrand, who had a dry cleaning business in the area that now houses Good Times' off sale liquor store, moved across the street.

Lloyd and his dad rented that portion of the building as well to house their paint mixing machine. Until that time, all the paint they used on the cars came premixed in cans. Since the purchase of their paint mixing machine, Sinner's has always mixed their own paint.

They also cut door glasses and housed their office in that area. Later on, Ed also sold fishing supplies from there.

Those who frequent Good Times today are familiar with the walkway between the bar and off sale area—well, Lloyd and his dad knocked out that wall and built that doorway so they could move between the two sections of their shop without having to go outside.

In 1956 Lloyd was drafted into the U.S. Army. He went to Fort Bliss, Texas, for basic training, was transferred to Fort Eustis, Va., and was transferred again to Fort Story, Va., where he served out most of his duty.

While at Fort Story Lloyd was part of an amphibious training and truck group. He eventually transferred into the shop where he had shop maintenance and records division duties.

He was honorably discharged from the Army in July 1958 and returned to Wauneta to work at Sinner's Paint and Body shop with his dad.

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Just a month after he returned from the Army, in August 1958, Lloyd and his dad bought their first wrecker.

Lloyd says wreckers in those days were very different from the ones they use today. The wreckers were "very mechanical" and required a lot of hard work to operate. Today, there's work involved but most of the heavy lifting, so to speak, is done by hydraulics.

In 1961 Lloyd and Ed purchased their first frame machine.

Move to present location

In 1963 Lloyd and Ed purchased the land where their present main location sits from Les Walgren and Cecil Rowley. Rowley had been running a television shop from the location. When they bought the building and property they added on to what is now the office.

Ed Sinner retired in 1970 at the age of 62. Prior to that time he and Lloyd had been the sole employees of the company, though Gloria Sinner did the company's books up to about 1987 when Sheila took over.

Some of the first employees of Sinner's included DeWayne Fanning, Lloyd Bley and Estes Jones, Gloria's brother. Lloyd recalled that at one time there were five of them working in the shop.

In 1971 or 1972 they bought the rest of the property south of their shop to the corner and leveled the ground to the point it is today.

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Their first large truck wrecker joined the lineup in 1979.

In 1980 they expanded onto their building again when they built on the garage on the south side to house their truck frame machine, which featured lasers to align the semi trucks and trailers.

In partnership with Dale Bischoff, Lloyd bought land across the street from the shop (what used to be the old sale barn) where they had a wrecked car and salvage business.

Sinner's wreckers got a facelift around 1995 when he bought air cushioning for them, which allowed them to lift semis.

In 1998 Sinner bought Bischoff out and put up the current-day truck alignment center.

They added on again in 2005 when they built the building on Highway 6 to store all their wreckers and trucks.