

## KNIESEL'S COLLISION CENTERS

### Family enterprise

All business is family business at Kniesel's Collision Centers

**B**ehind every top shop is a great story. The story of Kniesel's Collision Centers begins immediately after World War II when founders Richard and Lilo Kniesel left a refugee camp and immigrated to the United States. The Kniesels were small business owners who lost everything during the war. Yet, within five years of emigrating,

they had opened a mechanical and auto body repair business.

In 1968, they and their five children opened what is today Kniesel's Collision Centers. Since then, they've expanded to two more locations in the Sacramento area. What was once a "mom and pop" shop is now 80 employees strong. Still, Kniesel's is very much a family business, built upon

the values carried across the Atlantic more than fifty years ago. Sons Tom and Robert currently run the operation and stress that the shop's success and continuing growth are founded upon family – specifically, upon extending familial bonds and traditions to an ever-expanding family of customers and employees.

One key to keeping any family happy,



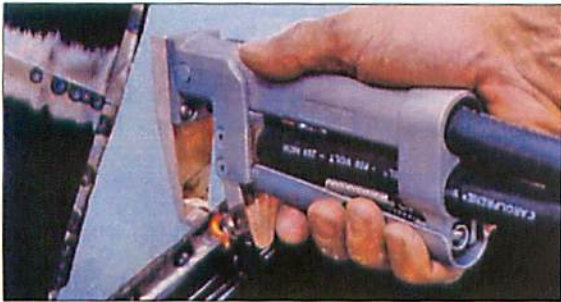
If it didn't say Kniesel's Auto Collision Center, you might mistake this building for a swanky office.

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prosperous and working together is communication. The same holds true at Kniesel's where communication is recognized as vital to the business. Communication is particularly important, says operations manager Dan Fischer, because with an organization as large as theirs, making a misstep can be far too easy.

Kniesel's therefore utilizes vehicle mapping, production work boards, work flow charts, blue-printing and X-ray estimating. These steps minimize problems while maximizing productivity, permitting the shop to continue what it calls a tradition of delivering quality work, on time to its customers.

Training also is part of this tradition. "The best way to ensure future success for all is to continue our tradition of consistent and progressive training throughout the organization," says Fischer.

Technicians receive advanced factory training along with training on aluminum and hybrids. Kniesel's employs techs who are Toyota Master Certified, BMW Certified and I-CAR Certified. With this training comes the necessary equipment: aluminum vehicle rivet extractor, specialized vehicle frame rack clamps, resistance welders and dust-free sanding systems.

Unfortunately, customers aren't always aware of the actions – perhaps even the extremes – a shop like Kniesel's takes to provide value to a repair. Knowing this, Kniesel's takes steps that add value customers are more likely to catch, steps that give each repair a decidedly personal, family touch. Kniesel's adopts a philosophy that states, "When we touch a panel we own it." That means repairing stone chips on hoods or repairing door dings that are not related to the claim. Every vehicle is detailed inside and out at no charge. Employees buff out scratches and touch small chips on panels not being repaired.



1 The shop's detailing location resembles a family garage. 2 Customers are greeted in grand style at the front desk. 3 High-tech equipment such as this overhead IRT curing system helps keep work on time. 4 A "rocky welcome" at the Kniesel's Citrus Heights location. The exterior of the shop looks more residential than commercial, a nice touch for a family-owned business.

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This strategy and Kniesel's entire approach to customers appears to be an overwhelming success. While the business stresses that it can't gauge customer satisfaction on numbers alone, they have won the California State Automobile Association Autochex CSI award the last five years in a row.

"We work to ensure that each customer enjoys the kind of service experience that Kniesel's has become known for," says Fischer. "Our loyal customers have enabled the next generation of Kniesel's to expand our once-small business."

Kniesel's looks to build similar value-based relationships with its suppliers.

"Good deals come and go, but long-term, sustainable relationships don't. When having the choice between a better discount on product or better service, we choose service," says Fischer. "Our customers return to us because of our service, we return that kind of relationship to our suppliers."

Kniesel believes that just as customer service cannot always be quantified in simple numbers, the rate of return on service from suppliers is far too complicated to reduce to dollars and cents. Advanced yet reliable training, low return rate, and knowledgeable support staff helps the shop do a better job. Kniesel's stresses that the "good deal" is not nearly as profitable as the time-tested knowledge and relationships from reliable business partners.

The shop also works to build strong relationships with the community, though it believes this is about more than growing its business. For 40 years, Kniesel's has been actively supporting area families by backing a range of programs and charities, providing needed funds for survivors of domestic violence or children suffering from birth defects, or supporting local little league teams. They're also active in the chamber of commerce and use their locations to hold open houses for various organizations and causes.

As for the industry, Kniesel's remains heavily involved in the California Autobody Association and the Coyote Vision Group, and Kniesel's management sits on the advisory boards at both Wyotech and Universal Technical Institute.

Even with this notoriety and its financial success, Kniesel's still points to the significance of more ordinary events, such as employee appreciation barbecues, which are regarded as opportunities "to put down our work for a time and share stories about our children, marriages and friendships."

Fischer points

out once again, "The binding thread throughout every aspect of our business is family. We are self-starters, hard workers and forward thinkers." //

## SHOP TALK

### NAME

Kniesel's Collision Centers

**MAIN LOCATION** Rocklin, Calif.

**NO. OF SHOPS** 3

**YEARS IN BUSINESS** 40

**NO. OF TECHNICIANS** 37

**NO. OF EMPLOYEES** 66

**NO. OF BAYS** Rocklin 26, Citrus Heights 29, Natomas 34

**WEEKLY VEHICLE VOLUME** 113

**AVERAGE REPAIR COST** \$1,957

**ANNUAL SALES** \$11.5 million

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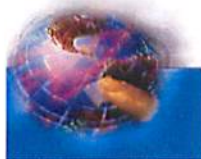
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