

PROFIT MOTIVE: YOUR COMPASS TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Support your local first responders

Training, outreach events reward your neighborhoods and your business

BY **TOM MCGEE** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

A few years ago, I was making sales calls with a rep. Early in the day, I realized we were basically visiting the same shops I had visited with the previous sales rep in that territory. We pulled into the parking lot of a shop.

I told him, "I've already been to this shop. Here's what we'll encounter: Inside there is a large wood counter, almost like the bar on the show *Cheers*. The owner, an older version of Norm, will be sitting on a stool behind the counter. There will be no computer or anything electronic in sight. And he will not be interested in anything new."

Sure enough, Norm was still sitting there on his stool. Nothing had changed in the year since I had last been there. In today's world, you can't be Norm, especially when it comes to your marketing strategy. The cars don't just show up anymore. So let's talk about using community involvement to boost your business.

Vehicle technology challenges

We all know that vehicle technology is changing. Every day we are seeing how changes such as advanced high-strength steels, multiple airbags and alternative-fuel vehicles such as hybrid and electric vehicles are affecting the collision industry. But we often overlook how these same technologies are affecting our communities. Consider first responders. These heroes work every day to save the lives of people in our local communities.

When they approach the scene of a col-

lision, vehicle technology has a direct effect on them as well. For example, where are the best locations to cut a vehicle with their extrication tools to avoid reinforcements or advanced high-strength steels? Where are the airbags and seat belt pretensioners? Where are the batteries and high-voltage lines on hybrid and electric vehicles? What do they need to know about hydrogen fuel cells?

The collision industry has the ability to provide training, awareness, practice and exposure on vehicle technology to our local heroes. At a minimum, go visit your local police and fire departments and make sure they know how to obtain the First Responder Guides available from the vehicle manufacturers. I recently discovered that the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has implemented an Electric Vehicle Safety Training project. This site, www.evsafetytraining.org, has free interactive training programs available to the fire service and also has a resource section that includes a depository of the vehicle manufacturers' First Responder Guides.

As you develop your marketing plan, consider building in an appreciation or fundraising event for your local first responders.

NABC vehicle extrication event

Hosting a National Auto Body Council First Responder Emergency Extrication (FREE) event provides local repair facilities with another opportunity to give back and strengthen community relationships. Many local fire departments are often tight on budgets and would welcome additional opportunities for first responders to receive ongoing training and practice. In addition, these live demonstrations are always crowd pleasers, enabling first responders to demonstrate their skills to the community. The result is a positive experience for all participants and spectators.

The FREE events include classroom training by an instructor from Holmatro Rescue Equipment. The highlight of the event is the cutting of salvage vehicles. Members of the fire departments receive valuable hands-on experience cutting vehicles with high-strength steels.

For more information, email FREE@autobodycouncil.org or call the NABC at 888-667-7433.

Support first responders

I would encourage you to conduct at least one first responder fundraiser or appreciation event this year. Sara Giddings, ATI Administrative Assistant, is also a volunteer at the Elkridge Volunteer Fire Department (EVFD) in Maryland. Sara, who is a firefighter/EMT-B, helped me in developing a list of suggestions that collision repair shops could consider for a first responder fundraiser or appreciation event. Try it free for a limited time by going to www.ationlinetraining.com/abrn1503.

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