



PROFILE

West Springfield

Advancing Confidently in the Direction of a Dream

Mike Zabik decided to take the plunge as an entrepreneur two years ago in West Springfield.

The water was crowded, but that didn't worry him much.

An ASE-certified master technician, Zabik, 37, had dreamed of running his own shop since he was a teenage mechanic working after school at auto dealerships.

Within a three-mile radius of his new venture, Mike's Auto Service and Repair, there were at least 40 other small, independent garages doing more or less what he does. "And that doesn't count the tire and muffler guys," said Zabik.

So what gave him the chutzpah to face a sea of competitors?

"I wasn't thinking so much about the competition as I was about how much I wanted to have my own place and put my own ideas into practice," said Zabik, who did enjoy the advantage of being one of only several state-registered emissions repair technicians in the area.

Zabik does allow that he's confident of his marketplace knowledge. "I understand what a customer wants in a service and repair station, and I know I can give them what they want at a fair price," he said.

It helps that Zabik grew up in West Springfield, that he graduated from the vocational high school in nearby Westfield, and that he has many friends and family members living in the area.

Zabik's previous job also proved an invaluable prelude for his new role: in the six years prior to founding Mike's Auto Service and Repair, he worked at the Applus+ Technologies Diagnostic and Training Center (DTC) in West Springfield.

Initially, Zabik served under Walter Moran, the original manager of the West Springfield DTC. But when Moran was promoted in 2000 by then program contractor Keating Technologies, Zabik replaced him in a seamless transition.

"Working for the (program) contractor, and training inspectors, gave me a good grasp of how important it is to do every inspection right, and to do everything possible to repair an emissions failure, no matter how old the car is," said Zabik.

Approximately 200 vehicles a month are inspected at Mike's Auto Service and Repair.

Sometimes the owner of an older car will fail for emissions and right off the bat ask Zabik for help getting a waiver. And sometimes a potential customer will call him out of the blue with the same question.

Zabik's answer is always the same: "I don't do waivers."

Handling an average of two emissions repairs per month, Zabik has successfully fixed every one, earning a five-star rating on the Station Report Card. He believes his experience in an area where the fleet tends to be a little older than average shows there are few emissions failures that can't be fixed.

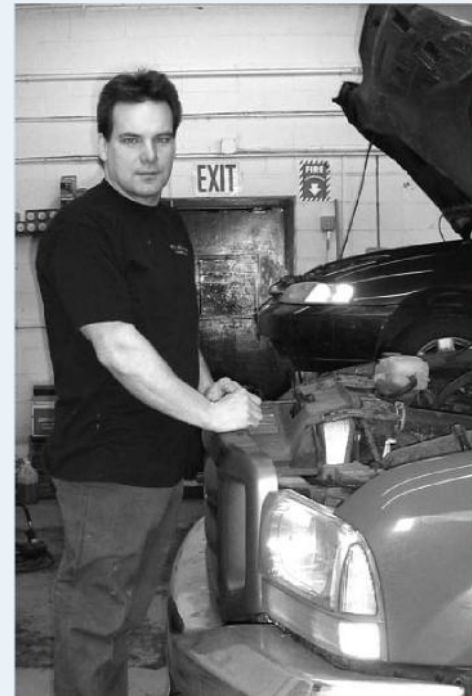
"You have to be willing to put out the effort -- on the diagnosis, the test drive, the research, and the (repair) work itself. It's a lot of work, and it can be frustrating at times, but that's just the way it is," Zabik said.

Zabik strongly supports the safety component of the test, too. Interestingly, his perspective on mandatory safety inspections is colored by his proximity to Connecticut, West Springfield being right on the border.

"In Connecticut, they only require an emissions test, and if what I see of the cars with Connecticut plates going through town is any indication, and there are a lot of them, their older cars tend to be in worse shape than in Massachusetts," he asserted.

When a vehicle fails the safety inspection at Mike's Auto Service and Repair, the most common reason is a defect of the front end, while emissions failures predominantly involve problems of high oxides of nitrogen (NOx) or high carbon monoxide (CO), according to Zabik.

Zabik relies heavily on his wife, **Lori**, who performs many of the tasks associated with running a small business, whether it's



Mike Zabik thought about opening his own shop for years before founding Mike's Auto Service and Repair in 2005

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Jannoni: 'The More We Share, the More Successful We Become'

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the clue, the thread, I'm hunting for. If he doesn't, he'll call the manufacturer, and we'll be talking with some big brain in engineering in no time."

Recently, a technician contacted Jannoni about a readiness problem with a 1996 Nissan Maxima. "This person is an excellent board mechanic," he said, "but he couldn't get the car ready because the problem was so unique and all the standard procedures don't work on it."

"I laughed because I had once been as frustrated with the same problem until I drove to the Nissan dealership on the Auto Mile, and the guy at the dealership said, 'Hey, we've got a special bulletin on that,' and handed it to me. That helped me fix my first '96 Maxima, and, after that, it helped a lot of other people fix them, too."

"The Auto Mile has been a tremendous help, as have the Herb Chambers dealerships in Burlington, where I go when I need help with Audis and Porsches."

Massachusetts improves air quality, in part, through the *Enhanced Emissions & Safety Test* and the work of technicians who fix failing vehicles. Technicians, in turn, depend on the vigorous exchange of information and insights to keep their skills sharp.

"The more we share with each other," said Jannoni, "the more successful we become, and the more successful the program becomes."

WHAT TO DO WHEN A VEHICLE IS 'NOT READY' FOR EMISSIONS RE-TEST

1. Determine if it is retaining live memory, and if its continuous power source is working.
2. Make sure it has been put through the specific drive cycle for that make and model.
3. Make sure enabling criteria, the vehicle-specific conditions within OBD that must occur before various monitors will set, have been met.
4. If the vehicle still isn't ready, take it for test drive with scan tool attached to observe enabling criteria during actual conditions.

Source: Paul Jannoni, Applus+ Technologies.
Need assistance? Contact Jannoni at Emissions Repair Assistance Hotline, 781-251-0753.

ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

January 1 - March 31, 2007

Violations Issued to Inspectors: 107

Violations Issued to Stations: 112

Inspector Privileges Revoked: 2

Inspectors Required to Retrain: 0

Inspectors Suspended: 22

Stations Suspended: 24

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answering the phones, paying bills, maintaining records, or calming anxious customers. Their work days often stretch to 12 hours; many suppers are eaten quickly at the desk in the office, and juggling child care for their young daughter, **Samantha**, can be a challenge.

"The best part about working for myself is I can set my own hours; the worst part is I have to work long hours," Zabik joked. "But it's good to be working on something that we've put together ourselves - something we're building, slowly but surely, into something better."

In other words, the water's just fine in West Springfield.

Mike's Auto Service & Repair,
173 River St, West Springfield, MA 01089,
413-737-7806

**Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and
2-5 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.**

