

Above and Beyond:

Two local companies recognized for business ethics

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Jerry Griebing lives by the motto “the customer is always right.”

“We have a no-argument policy when the customer is concerned about the way things just went,” said Griebing, owner of Jerry’s Auto Repair in Pullman.

If a car has been brought in for an oil change and the left headlight doesn’t work anymore, the gets a free re-inspection, Griebing said.

He said he always gives customers the benefit of the doubt.

“It makes the customer much happier,” he said. “It is possible that when you did the oil change, the headlight did get disconnected.”

It’s this philosophy of putting the customer first that set Jerry’s Auto Repair aside in the eyes of the Better Business Bureau.

Jerry’s Auto Repair was a recipient of the bureau’s Torch Award for marketplace ethics in the category for companies with fewer than 13 employees.

Judges look at management practices, community relations, marketing practices, and industry reputation.

Moscow’s First Step Internet took home the Torch Award in the 13-99 employee category. The awards were presented at a ceremony in Spokane last week.

The BBB called for ethical businesses in eastern Washington, northern Idaho and Montana last fall and then passed on the nominations to teams of Gonzaga University business students.

The students looked at the nominations and sought out businesses with reputations for good ethical practices, and then helped the businesses fill out the applications.

The international Torch Awards have been handed out for a long time, but this is only the third year regional Torch Awards have been awarded.

Judges selected one winner in each size category, with the top including companies with more than 1,000 employees.

Jan Quintrall, president of the Inland Northwest BBB, said she received 60 completed applications.

John Cullen, a professor in WSU's management department, said he approached the Inland Northwest BBB after noticing students around the country were involved in similar competitions.

"It gives students the opportunity to get into a real organization and see how companies deal with ethical issues," he said.

His class split into six teams, each focusing on a business, and worked on the project for a semester.

Griebling said he never expected to win the award.

"It's been a morale booster," he said. "It's been very encouraging; a lot of things we do day-to-day didn't seem too remarkable, but we do our best to do a good job. This shows we must be doing something right."

Jerry's Auto Repair has seven full-time employees and three part-time employees.

Griebling has owned businesses in the automotive industry since 1977, when his boss at the Shell Car Wash in Pullman sold him the business for \$1, thereby handing all the company's debt to Griebling. He also owned a gas station next to Neill Public Library, and now owns and operates the repair shop on South Grand Avenue.

Griebling always has focused on treating his technicians fairly, as well as providing excellent customer service.

He said there was a time when there was an excess of skilled technicians in the area.

“There would be two or three people waiting for your job,” he said. “If you had a bad week you were disposable.”

Technicians weren't always paid billable hours and could be let go for any reason.

Although the industry has changed, Griebing always has made sure to treat the technicians with the respect they deserve.

He said Torch Award judges also were impressed by Jerry's Auto Repair's 100 percent AAA rating, as well as the business donating scrap metal and aluminum to a woman to help pay her husband's hospital bills.

The business also has a clean environmental record. Griebing uses motor oil to heat the building.

He said a major day-to-day challenge is the conflict pressures between technicians and customers.

“Most technicians want to bill as many hours as they can,” he said. “On the other side, you have to keep the customer budget in mind.”

He tried to be as fair to both parties as possible.

Quintrall said judges were impressed that such a small company like Jerry's cared so much about the community.

“The way he cares about his employees was impressive and the way he will do whatever it takes to do things right,” she said...

...Quintrall said working with WSU students was successful and the BBB will continue its partnership with the university.

“Next year we want to expand to other schools,” she said. “The big thing is what kids learn.”

Cullen said the competition is good for both students and the community.

“It's a way of providing recognition of companies that go one step further and it brings ethics to the forefront,” he said.