

Steve Bowles celebrating 20 years in Shelburne with Auto Centre Dufferin

Written By **PETER RICHARDSON**

Entrepreneur, business leader, community leader, husband, father, grandfather and an outspoken citizen, Steve Bowles is well known on many fronts in Shelburne.

The sixty-one-year-old local businessman has operated Auto Centre Dufferin for twenty years, on Industrial Road, but that is only the tip of the iceberg. Until recently, he also owned the nearby car wash and the Rust Check undercoating business, as well as two buildings and rental properties in town.

Steve is the current Vice Chairman of the Shelburne Economic Development Committee and, through his businesses, helps to support several sports teams and organizations in town.

However, Steve is the first to emphasize, that all of his successes are a team effort and that without his team it would all fall apart. A perfect example, is the fact that most of his employees are long-term members of his workforce, including his General Manager, Patricia Hunt, who after more than 12 years working for Steve, is still happy to come to work each and every day.

Steve began life in Corbetton, not far north of Shelburne, before the family moved, to the hamlet of Duncan, near Collingwood. He still owns the family homestead in Duncan and retreats there with family to relax and escape the daily grind whenever possible.

In 1978, Steve moved to Orangeville, where he and his wife Joanne, still live, in the home on Zina Street that they purchased in 1985. Before setting out on his own, Steve worked for Davenports in Orangeville selling automotive parts and accessories. However, in 1998, he took the plunge and opened his automotive service facility in Shelburne and by 2003 had grown it to the point of building the present domicile at 710 Industrial Road.

Steve's outlook for business is the same as that of the EDC. Both organizations are looking ahead, planning for three to five years down the road. Today, will take care of itself, but tomorrow is where one must look to. Planning for the future demands of customers and the ever evolving changes in technology and the work environment, is where success and continued growth lay. Where we once had garages and mechanics, we now have automotive service facilities and automotive technicians and who knows what tomorrow will bring.

For now, the service industry is healthy and resilient, but in as little as five years time, Steve is predicting big changes in the way an independent service facility will have to operate, if it expects to remain relevant and competitive.

The car dealers are offering more and more incentives for people to rely on them for their service needs and that means more pressure for independent shops to adapt and evolve. Today, having a courtesy shuttle and a nice waiting room are just normal expectations, not something special. New ideas and better services are going to define the future of the industry.

Recently, Steve has been considering a new career move - retirement. He and Joanne want to travel, relax and enjoy their next life stage. The family has started on their own paths to success, all of their six children are moving on with their lives and so Steve and Joanne are looking to their future also.

Steve has sold his car wash and the Rust Check operations and is now better able to concentrate on the Auto Centre and his community service requirements and, once again, it will be a team effort. Every member of the staff is relied upon, daily, to make the business succeed and they are regularly shown, how much they are valued and appreciated. Steve hosts staff lunches and wing nights as well as other staff celebrations and the results show. The staff is cheerful and efficient and they make the customer feel as valued and respected. Auto Centre Dufferin may not be a family, in the traditional sense, but they are one, in every other way.

For Steve Bowles, his future, in Shelburne, is secure. He is looking forward to one day soon, joining his wife, in retirement and he

hopes to continue to be a force in the community. He may even start a new business venture, one where the team will only be one person, himself.

What that might be, is unknown, for the moment, but it is a thought, in the back of his mind. For Steve Bowles, you get back, what you put into a venture, whether that is a business, a community, or life. It is a strong belief that has guided his decisions in the past and that still guides him today.