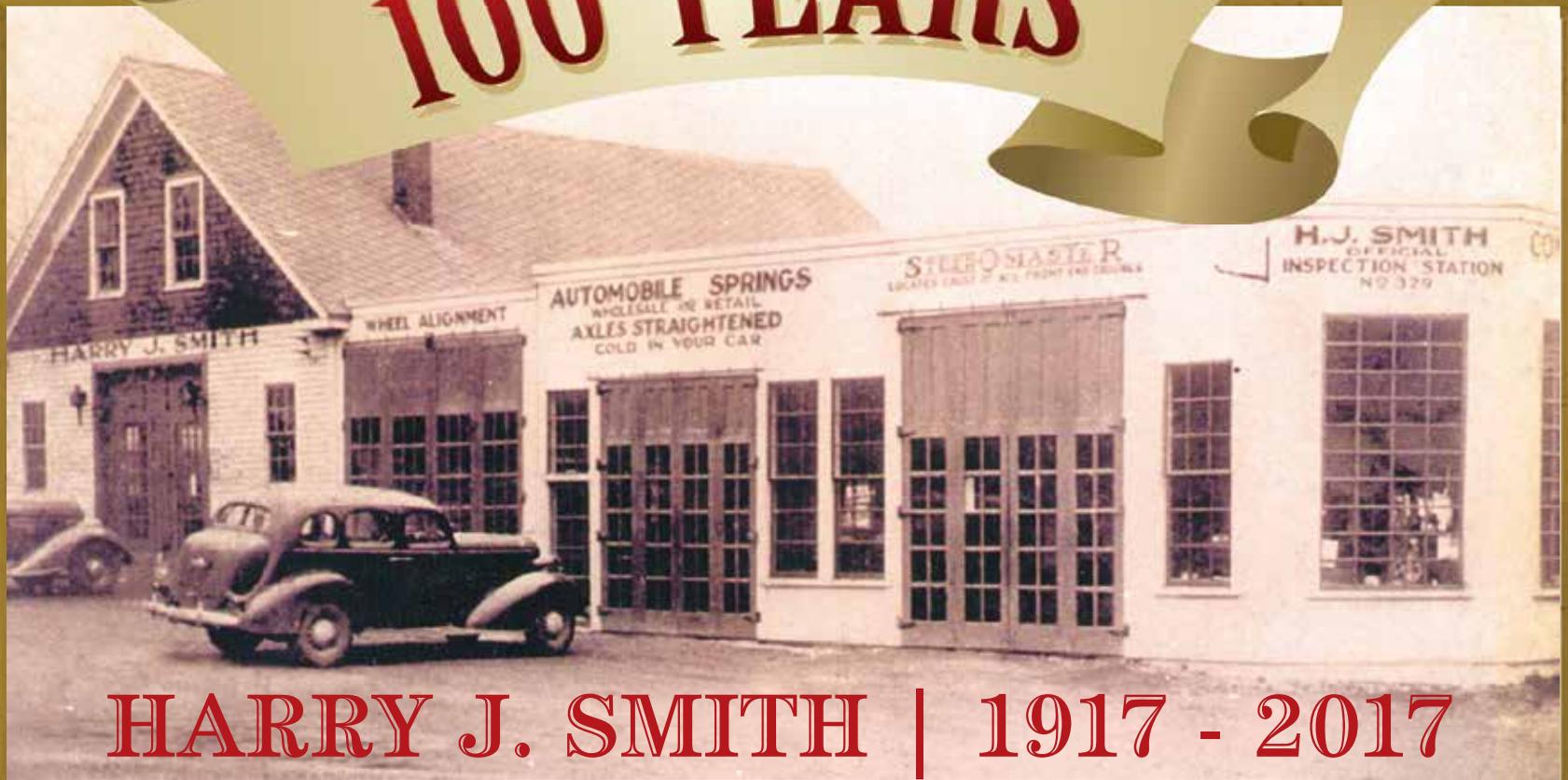


100 YEARS



HARRY J. SMITH | 1917 - 2017



From wagon wheels to RV alignments: Harry J. Smith Co. spans 100 years

BY NANCY GALLAGHER
Correspondent

In 1917, Boston transplant Harry J. Smith first began keeping written records for his Sanger Avenue blacksmith shop in Waterville. The “J” stands for Jasper.

Smithy services included re-ringing wagon wheels, shoeing horses and repairing leaf spring—an under-the-carriage-seat suspension system serving the same ride-smoothing purpose as today’s vehicle suspension systems. He used a coal-fired kiln to generate the required heat.

Foreseeing the advent of the automobile age, Smith later traveled by wagon from Waterville to Pennsylvania, loaded it with steel, and returned to Waterville to begin repairing automobiles instead of wagon wheels.

When the workday was done, Smith often cut a dapper figure about town in his top hat and cane. That cane hangs in the Harry J. Smith office today.

Smith’s dedication to his Masonic Lodge demonstrated a belief in giving back to the community, a tradition subsequently carried forward from owner to owner.

Harry J. Smith died in Tucson, Arizona in January 1960.

Enter Robert Godfrey in 1962



Harry J. Smith, pictured with his wife, first began keeping records in 1917 for his Sanger Avenue blacksmith shop in Waterville.

in the role of owner/bookkeeper/office manager. Donald Abrams, a respected local artist, assisted Godfrey in the office and as a road salesman.

In his 26 years as owner, Godfrey witnessed a fundamental evolution in the vehicle repair industry: electronic components. The prohibitive cost of matching diagnostic gear precluded most vehicle owners from DIY (Do It Yourself) repairs, and “corner gas stations” simultaneously lost interest, according to Godfrey, presenting

Harry J. Smith Co. with a promising business opportunity.

By keeping pace with a changing business environment and continuing to offer its special brand of personal service and attention, the Harry J. Smith Co. prospered during this transition, Godfrey said in a 1988 retirement interview.

Thomas College graduate Danny Veilleux began his road to Harry J. Smith Co. ownership in 1983 as a leaf spring technician. Subsequent upward moves to the parts department and the

office led to laddered purchasing and supervisory responsibilities—and an “awakening” that accelerated his acquisition of business experience.

“I really was not qualified as a mechanic, but I did have a degree in business management and that was what I wanted to do—help run a business,” Veilleux said when he purchased the business in 1988. What began as a way to get his foot into a business door to expand his knowledge worked out better than he ever imagined, he said.

In 1992, Veilleux undertook a \$250,000, 35-foot building expansion that incorporated 14 1/2-foot service bay doors, a specially-designed pit large enough to service the undercarriage of anything from an RV (Recreation Vehicle) to a bus to an 18-wheel tractor trailer, and the computerized equipment to “do any large vehicle front end alignment.”

Current owner Randy Belanger joined the Harry J. Smith workforce in 1989, the year following Dan Veilleux’s purchase of the business. Prior to coming to Harry J. Smith Co., Belanger worked for GM from 1982 to 1986. After three years working at Motor Supply, Belanger joined the Harry J. Smith Co. family.

Early in Veilleux’s ownership period, he and Belanger discussed the option of ownership

succession, continuing the historical track of a long grooming process leading to eventual ownership.

From parts manager to general manager, Belanger progressed in responsibilities to become “Dan’s right-hand man,” he said. After 24 years as an employee, during which he grew to love the business, Belanger purchased it from Veilleux in 2013. In addition to the business having a “great reputation” and a “huge clientele,” Belanger says he has “become friends with all of my clients.”

Belanger enjoys living in Norridgewock with his wife, Kelley, son, Zachary and their dog, Remi. They also have a grown daughter, Kayla.

Does he have any changes in mind?

Belanger continues to provide the services that the past five owners have.

“Chances are that if we work on your vehicle, we may have worked on your grandfather’s vehicle. The overall business has always had a wonderful outlook on how things should be done ... honesty, stand behind your work, charge a fair price, don’t try to take advantage of people—and I don’t see any reason to change that,” Belanger said. “Keep it simple, keep it fair and things work out for themselves.”

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Company garners awards, rewards over a century in existence

BY NANCY GALLAGHER
Correspondent

The Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce honored the Harry J. Smith Co. with a Certificate of Achievement and Support the year the company added its 3,500 square foot large bays.

Since then, the Harry J. Smith Co. has continued to enjoy the reward of a new class of business that now accounts for half of its annual business volume.

In recognition of sustained, high-quality customer service, the company has received the Auto Value Sales and Service Award for the past six consecutive years. As an Auto Value Certified Service Center, Harry J. Smith Co. will honor any repairs, labor and warranties from any other Auto Value Certified Service Center nationwide—

and vice versa. The Auto Value Company gave the awards, and Harry J. Smith Co.'s quality customer service has rewarded the company with multi-generational return business.

Certificates of Appreciation for past assistance from the Consolidated Firefighters of Waterville and the Maine State Fire Academy hang prominently in the business office. Sometimes goodness is its own reward.

Also hanging on an office wall is a metal stencil displaying the company's old telephone number, #890. A Boston firm cut the stencil in the 1930s for use in stamping the barrels used in shipping U-bolts to customers. It may not be an award, but it is a rewarding reminder of how far the Harry J. Smith Co. has come while remaining in the same location for the past 100 years.



“The overall business has always had a wonderful outlook on how things should be done ... honesty, stand behind your work, charge a fair price, don't try to take advantage of people—and I don't see any reason to change that.”

**— RANDY BELANGER,
OWNER HARRY J. SMITH CO.**

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From horseshoes to hydraulics: Creating service solutions

BY NANCY GALLAGHER
Correspondent

So what happens inside those high, wide and deep shop bays at Harry J. Smith Co.?

Savvy technicians are using up-to-date equipment coupled with old-fashioned know-how to service automobiles, tractor trailers, large RV motor homes and buses, says owner Randy Belanger.

The company is best known for its spring shop, probably because it has the rare ability to repair springs, Belanger said. A spring may have five leaves. If a customer comes in with just one broken leaf, the technicians at Harry J. Smith Co. can disassemble the spring, replace that leaf, and thus avoid the expense of purchasing an entire new one.

A spring can cost as much as \$1,000. Replacing a single leaf

will cost about \$100.

"Having a full blacksmith shop has, I think, brought us to where we are today," Belanger said.

Yes. Blacksmith shop.

Far from its manual beginnings with a coal-fired kiln, the current shop uses a 20,000-ton hydraulic press to bend and shape leaf springs. Need a U-bolt to attach that spring to an axle? Harry J. Smith Co. makes those, too. The two, long-time company blacksmiths continue honing their craft, expanding their metal-crafting skills by doing it. "There's no school for it," Belanger said.

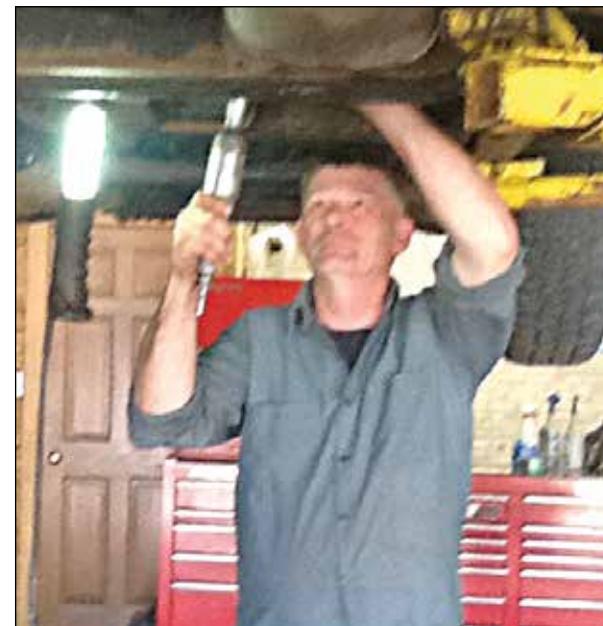
At least half of the company's business comes from heavy duty work—servicing tractor trailers, RVs and buses in its two, 60-foot bays. Harry J. Smith Co. offers

More SERVICE, PAGE 5



Staff photo

Chief Operating Officer Dan Veilleux, has been with Harry J. Smith Co. for 44 years.



Staff photo

Mike Picard works on a vehicle in the shop at Harry J. Smith Co. on Sanger Avenue in Waterville.

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Service

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

half day walking beam service. "In by eight, out by noon," Belanger said.

What's a walking beam? It's the rear beam in a dump or pulp truck that hooks to its suspension to allow the rear wheels to work together. So when time is money, this service is a "chaching" money saver, he said.

For regular size vehicles, Harry J. Smith Co. has separate service bays, so he can offer a range of services including:

- air conditioning repairs;
- exhaust repairs (lifetime mufflers);
- tire sales, mounting and balancing;
- brake rotors and pads;
- regular and commercial state inspections;
- oil changes, including a ten point inspection.

Two Hunter alignment machines (with a new Hunter 2018 on the way) meet heavy duty and light duty alignment needs.

A statewide reputation for quality wheel alignment service is probably due to the meticulous technicians not accepting "close enough" as their work ethic, Belanger said.

A heavy duty alignment technician, two heavy duty repair technicians, a light duty alignment technician, two light duty repair technicians, and the two aforementioned blacksmiths (aka spring shop technicians) comprise the mechanical team. A service manager and an office staff of four round out the Harry J. Smith Co. "family."

"We're all family here. Most of us have worked together for 30 years...we spend 10 hours a day together," Belanger said. "My name is on it (the business), but it takes all of us together to make it work."

And just how does it work? Start with some pioneer-era skills and heaping measures of fair pricing and dedicated customer service. Broaden the customer base by adding new facilities and technologies. Continue blending well for a century or more, And there you have it — the recipe for Harry J. Smith Co.'s century of success.



Staff photo
Sidney Hodgkins and Larry Davis are certified technicians at Harry J. Smith Co.



Staff photo
Joshua Crowell is the friendly face behind the service desk.

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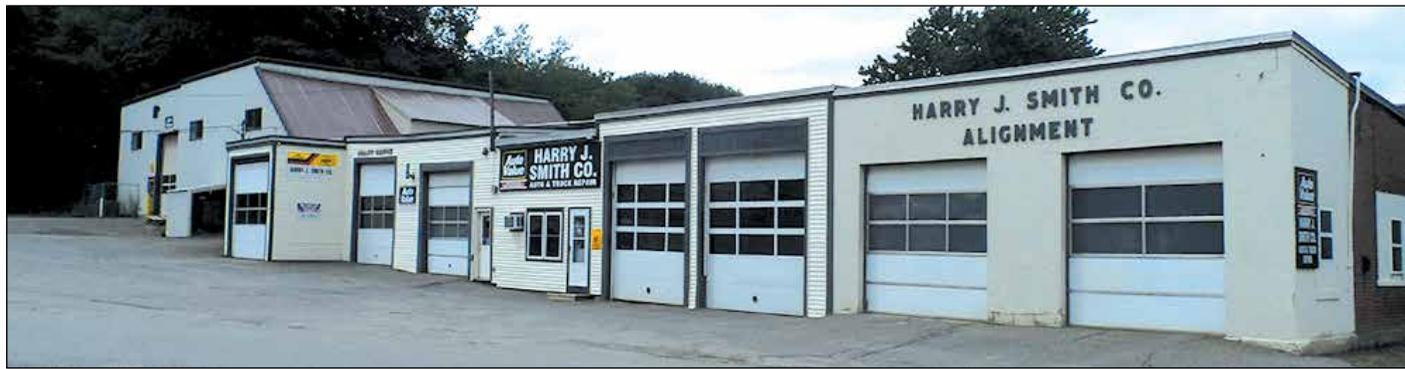
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Meaningful involvement aligns company with community giving

BY NANCY GALLAGHER
Correspondent

For some, it's volunteering time and expertise. For others, like Randy Belanger, those options are not available.

Belanger works 12-hour days, yet strongly believes in supporting his local community. His support as a business owner and local resident, therefore, takes the form of financial contributions.

"Local businesses should be ... involved as they are able," Belanger said.

Harry J. Smith Co. donates its charitable funds to a diverse group of local organizations and causes, including and not limited to the following:

- Long-term Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce member, economic development;
- Waterville Main Street, civic engagement;
- Waterville Rotary Club, service organization;
- Corpus Christi Parish, food insecurity;
- Waterville Elks Lodge, service organization;
- Cruisin' for a Cure, New Dimensions Federal Credit Union's fundraiser for the Maine Children's

Cancer Program;

- Temple Academy, education.

It's not only Belanger who's participating. Company employees have dedicated their after-hours time and effort to their children's sports and music programs for generations.

This bedrock belief in community participation threads its way, unbroken, from Harry J. Smith's Masonic Lodge activities through each successive owner's philosophy of doing business — always setting an example for employees as well as the community at large.

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Staff photo

Sheila Brockway, Kelley Belanger and Donna Veilleux keep the office running smoothly.

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