

SHOP PROFILE PTEN

By Jacques Gordon

Great Bear Auto Repair

Woman-owned shop caters to educating customers

Great Bear Auto Repair and Body Shop is located on the north side of Queens, one of the five boroughs of New York City. Family owned and operated since 1933, the current proprietor is the founder's great-granddaughter, Audra Fordin. "I grew up doing this. In our house if I wanted to be part of the conversation I had to 'speak car.' It was like living in a house that spoke a second language."

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Audra has always enjoyed her work and her place in the industry, but she recently found a new passion and a new purpose for her business.

During the economic recession, she asked her customers why they chose her shop. "They said it was me, I was the draw. They had never met a woman auto mechanic, and my approach is different."



A/C work is done outside.

This surprised her because "We've been the same for four generations; We take care of people."

Taking that approach further, Audra launched a series of clinics and a website called "What Women Auto Know" to teach women (men are welcome too) some basic facts about automotive maintenance, repairs and safety. The goal is to arm customers with the knowledge they need to make their own decisions about their car. "We want to 'tell not sell.' " These clinics are free "because I didn't want anyone to feel like there's a catch."

CHANGING UP THE SHOP

The clinics, plus her increasing involvement in the greater automotive service community in New York City, have Audra thinking about some changes to the shop. There are 11 lifts for only six technicians, but half the lifts are outside. Audra says they use them



Audra Fordin, technician and owner of Great Bear Auto Repair.

year-round, especially the big lift out back (they work on trucks for the city).

Right now there's a three-walled bay housing the old emissions dyno. The plan is to remove the dyno, enclose and expand



Audra appreciates the simplicity and reliability of her Electronic Specialties battery tester.

that bay to include the truck lift and install battery charging/electrical diagnostic equipment. That's where she'll work on hybrid vehicles.

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Top Tools at Great Bear Auto

1. Snap-on Verus
2. Impact gun
3. Lifts
4. Hunter DSP600 Alignment Machine
5. COATS Wheel Balancer
6. ACDelco Video Inspection Scope
7. Electronic Specialties Model 700 Battery Tester
8. OTC Leak Tamer Smoke Machine
9. Battery jump pack



The outside lifts are used year-round.