

TOP SHOP

NORTH AMERICA'S
TOP SHOP FINALIST

HORNSBY TIRE & SERVICE CENTER

Home may be where the heart is. But, with a family business, there's plenty of heart in a company facility, too, especially when it's the structural foundation of a rich family history.

For the Hornsby's, that foundation has been incinerated by fire, haggled for in business deals, annexed in mid-reconstruction, and eventually relocated, suffering precarious cracks

that all nonetheless led to the history's happy ending.

Today, after 78 years of keeping its heart where its facility is, Hornsby Tire and Service Center in Newport News, Va., grosses nearly \$2.5 million annually and remains a family affair, even with 14 employees and new digs imparted with what's been called "wow factor."

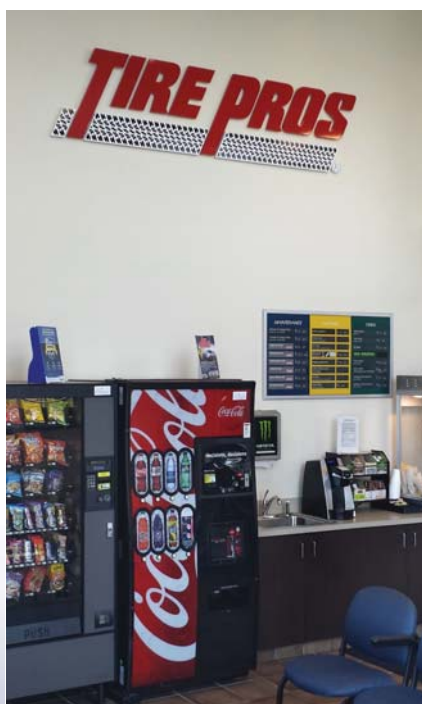
That perseverance and heart are just a couple of the reasons why the single-store dealer earned the new title of 2013 TIRE REVIEW Top Shop Award Finalist.

"We've had a long history of family," explains Mark Hornsby, the third-generation co-owner with

brother, David, who returned to the business after playing semi-professional baseball in the San Francisco Giants organization. "Before our dad was involved, many of his cousins and uncles were."

The Cliffs Notes version of the Hornsby family history, with all the twists and turns endured by its facility, might go something like this:

"Hornsby Tire Co. was established in 1935 by our dad's great uncle W.S. Hornsby and, 10 years later, his brother C.W. Hornsby joined him," Mark begins. "Our dad, Robert 'Bob' Hornsby, and his brother, Swanson, worked many hours during their high school years in what was then a



Hornsby Tire's immaculate three-year-old store offers huge showroom space, creature comforts, and a place for promotion.



JOANNE DRAUS KLEIN
Contributing Editor

Co-owners and third generation dealers David and Mark Hornsby have instilled a welcoming attitude to their entire team.

tire recap shop and general service station. After dad graduated from high school, he went to William & Mary on a football scholarship and played football for one year before being drafted into the Korean War. When he returned, he went to work for C.W. (Charles) doing outside sales of new and recap tires. After several expansions of that building, in November of 1959, dad became the vice president and manager."

But history doesn't proceed for long without turmoil. And, less than a year later, in 1960, part of Hornsby history went up in flames.

"There was a fire in the recap plant that burnt down more than half of the building," Mark says. "At that time, Charles was not going to rebuild the plant, so our dad decided he would buy the business from him and rebuild. Dad was very young and newly married, with two young children. He had no extra money or credit. Charles offered to finance the cost of the business, but

wouldn't sell the building. Dad went to his parents to borrow money for the down payment.

"After that down payment and a very high loan, my dad had a business that was doing well but that had no place to operate," Mark continues. "With the help of many great friends with whom he traded and bartered, he managed to open a recap shop within several weeks. From the early 1960s until the early 1970s, he had a five-bay store with a fully operational recap shop.

"Times were tough for several years," Mark adds. "But dad seemed to turn the corner, using his great people skills and great attitude toward everyone. For the many years that I worked for our dad, customers and employees would tell me on a daily basis that they never heard an unkind word come from my dad's mouth. To this day, some of my older customers remind me of how dad took care of them no matter what."

History Unfolds

Such was the beginning of a management tradition that Mark and David decidedly maintained, starting, as Mark says, at the bottom and leading once again to that notable Hornsby facility.

"In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, my brother and I would work every summer during high school and college breaks, in whatever capacity dad needed us," Mark recalls. "Unfortunately, the biggest need for both of us was for sweeping and cleaning, many times in the 115° heat of the recap shop, all day. I think that's why today we appreciate each and every employee. Been there, done that.

"In 1984, dad became sick with several medical issues, and he was unable to work at full capacity," continues Mark, who studied business management in college. "Leaving Radford University and returning home in 1985, I became the new

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A lot has changed in 78 years, including a new address and sparkling new building in 2010. But Hornsby Tire's focus on the customer first has not changed.

manager of Hornsby Tire at the very young age of 23. Jumping right into this was a large step. Without experience in management, I had many obstacles to overcome. And without the guidance of our dad, this would have been very tough, but he always guided me in the right direction: "Be a leader, not a boss. Lead people in the direction of our vision."

Two years later, David joined Mark at the company's helm, at first running the sales counter while father Bob supervised. The brothers assumed more control as Bob's health continued to fail, with Mark handling the bookkeeping and upper management while David ran the service operation. Within a few years, the brothers had turned a declining business into a thriving one. And that allowed them to buy the building they'd been renting for years.

Bob Hornsby was able to see that

successful change before he died in 1997. A few years later, the brothers might have made their father even prouder when they bought 25 adjoining lots to accommodate the potential growth of their facility.

"After 20 years of working side by side, David and I had collected enough real estate and buildings to expand our business," Mark says. "Our plans were to double the size of our working space, thus doubling the size of our business and going from seven employees to 14. Plans were drawn and construction had begun – and then the city of Newport News approached us about relocating. The city wanted both of our buildings and our 25 lots."

But how much damage could mere annexation do to the Hornsby business, the Hornsby facility, the Hornsby family history, when all three had already survived fire and business-based brimstone? The

Hornsby's knew how to go with the proverbial flow.

"After a long year of planning and negotiating, we were ready to build and relocate," Mark says. "Many hours and thought went into the layout of our new building. Hundreds of miles were traveled as we looked at other great businesses, deciding on what to have and what not to have. With the final drawings complete, we started construction in August of 2009 – just one block away from our then-current location. We moved into our new location, ready for business, on July 1, 2010.

"It's been just over three years," he says, "and the new location's wow factor has been a great turning point for Hornsby Tire and Service Center."



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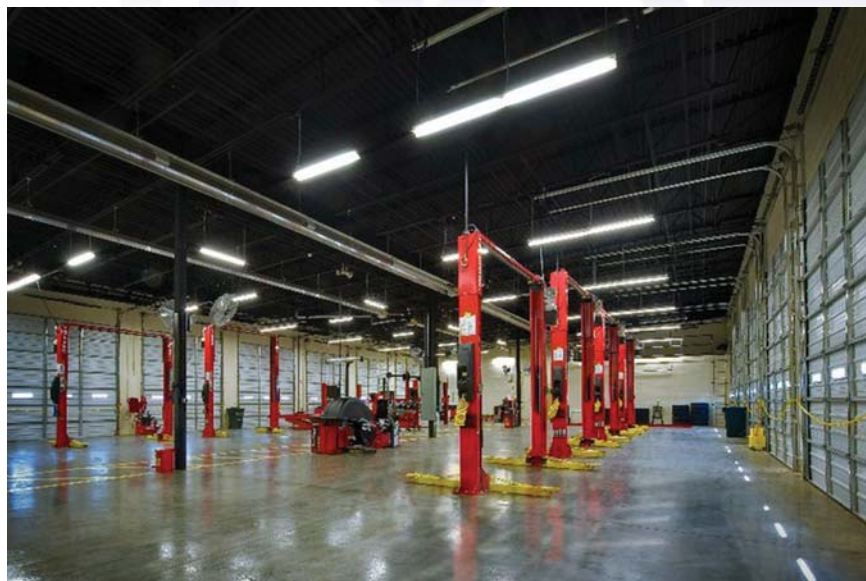
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EASY TERMS

Once a thriving retreader and Uniroyal dealer, Hornsby has expanded its product screen greatly while remaining loyal to its long-time lead brand.



daily basis, 'Thank you for not leaving like every other business has over the last 15 years.' We were the first business to step up and build in a Redevelopment HUD Zone, to hopefully change this area back into what it was years ago – a booming and thriving downtown area that people want to come to."

Mark says the dealership continues to give back to its community through church groups, Little League teams, high schools and colleges, city events and even a local soccer league made up of hundreds of local children. "Our company is viewed by the community very well," he states.

Meanwhile, inside that new Hornsby facility, it's as if the original shop's foundation still exists beneath the building's 13 bays and 7,000-square-foot walk-in showroom and warehouse. Even with all the bells and whistles – and partly because of them – the business is still all about the kind of customer service that Bob Hornsby made locally famous.

"This was a concept that we've dreamed about for years, and it's been the best sales tool we ever had," Mark says of the company's new home.

"Customers can see, touch and, yes, even smell the tires. Just a few feet away from our sales counter, with huge glass walls and great visuals from our waiting area, is our showroom and warehouse. The glass walls were designed to keep the smell of tire rubber in the warehouse so everyone can smell the fresh coffee and warm popcorn in the waiting area," says Mark.

"The outside of our building also is kept very clean and well-manicured. On a daily basis we pick up trash, clean, and sweep the entire smoke-free facility. Appearance is so important."

Customers, after all, are to be met with the utmost hospitality at the Hornsby's second home.

From The Heart

Just as Mark Hornsby's immediate family members all have loyally worked, at one time or another, at the dealership, so have the shop's customers remained faithful.



The new store gave the Hornsby brothers plenty of service bay space and an easy-to-navigate parking lot to help old and new customers alike. The 13 bays are kept constantly busy, and waiting customers can enjoy fresh popcorn and coffee.

Today, Hornsby Tire offers Firestone, Bridgestone, General, Continental, Michelin, BFGoodrich and Uniroyal tires, and 37% of its business comes from tire sales.

Retail makes up 57% of revenue, commercial the remaining 43%, and the company is members of multiple tire company dealer programs, as well as American Tire Distributors' Tire Pros marketing program.

Strong Foundation

Relocating the place where the Hornsby family's heart is to a new 20,000-square-foot state-of-the-art building, however, wasn't just a matter of upgrading equipment and facilities, though both have been tremendous boosts to the business. After all, "giving your employees

great equipment helps them to be more efficient in their work, and giving quality service to all customers improves the bottom line for everyone," Mark says.

Equally significant, though, is that Hornsby Tire and Service chose to remain in southeast Newport News when it was prodded by the city into relocating. That area, Mark says, "has been overlooked for many years." Old empty buildings abound, and Mark says Hornsby was one of the few businesses to survive in the district.

"With strong roots here, there never was a decision to move from this area," Mark explains. "We built our state-of-the-art building one block away from our existing site. And the reception we've received from the community has been overwhelming. Everyone says to us on a

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2013 Top Shop Judges

The **2013 Tire Review Top Shop Award** winner and three Finalists were selected through a rigorous multi-stage judging system. The first team of judges went through the dozens of original entries, selecting 20 semi-finalists.

That group of entrants was required to provide additional entry materials and undergo a detailed review. After that round of judging, eight semi-finalists were submitted for final judging.

Finalist Judges for the **2013 Top Shop Award** represent a range of disciplines, including advertising and merchandising, customer service, vehicle service and service operations, business operations, and community service.

Serving as judges this year were:



Jody DeVere, president of women's automotive and tire/service advice website and dealer certification service AskPatty.com.



Chuck Seeley, vice president of Canton, Ohio, marketing communications agency Crawl, Montgomery & Clark Inc.



Scott "Gonzo" Weaver, Babcox columnist, ASE-certified master technician and owner of Superior Auto Electric in Tulsa, Okla.



David Swan, president of market intelligence and competitive data analyst IntelliChek LLC.



Scott Shriber, former executive with Ford and now publisher of BODYSHOP BUSINESS and COUNTERMAN magazines, sister publications to TIRE REVIEW.

"CARE ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE, TREAT THEM THE WAY YOU WANT TO BE TREATED, GO THE EXTRA MILE TO HELP THEM, AND IN RETURN YOU WILL GAIN FAITHFUL CUSTOMERS FOR LIFE."

"My oldest brother, for a very short time during high school, worked here," says Mark, listing involved kin beyond those mentioned in the shop's early history. "My younger sister was, for about five years, our bookkeeper. And my mother had a short stint here as a receptionist. I think what helps set us apart from the big-box stores is our personal relationship with our customers. We want everyone to be treated as our best friend, and whatever it takes to make them happy, we will do."

Thus the company's motto, a phrase that Bob Hornsby was known to repeat for years: "Care about other people, treat them the way you want to be treated, go the extra mile to help them, and in return you will gain faithful customers for life."

"Your customers and your em-

ployees make you successful," Mark interprets. "Treat both with all the respect you can."

While customers may be the dealership's primary focus, the well-being of its employees does seem inextricably bound to customer satisfaction. "Employees are a big part of the company image," Mark says. "One bad experience can quickly change a customer's mind. I have the best staff and personnel that we've had in more than 30 years."

But Mark says maintaining a high-quality staff isn't always easy. "Training is a top priority for us, and having the American Tire Distributors Tire Pros program alongside us (for the last three years) has helped to improve training tremendously," he says. "Its many training modules have helped us as owners and managers. My managers are



The 7,000-square-foot combined showroom and warehouse is also used for some interesting displays, such as classic cars.

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constantly suggesting new classes for different personnel, keeping a training book listing every employee and what classes they've taken or need to take.

"Expectations are very high at Hornsby," he adds. "We expect the best from every employee, and if we see that's not happening, we try to lead them in the right direction. Leadership is very important. We have no bosses around here; we have great leaders, from store manager to office manager to shop and service manager. All of our employees are tracked to see if they meet our expectations."

It's not surprising that such tracking and attention are important at Hornsby, given that Mark considers word-of-mouth



Hornsby Tire's fleet of courtesy vehicles is pretty easy to spot, even near Newport News' busy shipyards.



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advertising as the dealership's best form of marketing. Even in the age of Facebook, Twitter and online marketing services – many of which the company uses since partnering with Tire Pros – Mark still values doing some things the old-fashioned way.

"We've been in business for more than 75 years and have used all kinds of advertising," he says. "We think word-of-mouth can help or hurt you quicker than any other kind, so we strive hard to make every customer happy."

"My dad cared about everyone else before he cared about himself, and sometimes that was a tough way to make a living," Mark adds about maintaining balance between time-tested tradition and smart progress.

"We can still make money while caring about people like they're family, and still feel like the small, family-owned business we've been for years."

"David and I had to make many changes to keep up with the competition," Mark reflects. "The future for Hornsby Tire and Service Center is always to continue to improve business and relationships every day. We've made some huge changes in our company in the last three years and hope to continue getting better."

After all, one of Mark's favorite philosophies, he says, is "Don't be afraid of change."

"Change is good and keeps everything fresh," he notes.

As fresh as a state-of-the-art place for the Hornsbys' heart, arisen from the ashes of family history. ■