

South Plainfield cycle shop personalized by patrons

By Jared Kaltwasser, Staff Writer. February 23, 2009

SOUTH PLAINFIELD — At Captain Jack's Cycle Shop, patrons bring their bikes, their stories, and even their own wall decorations.

"Look around the shop here. It's eclectic and its personalized," owner Jerry Joseph said. "People put their own signs up. It's very much a community ... like a neighborhood bar."

One sign honors James Dean, another says "Biker's Blvd." There's also an Edison Township police shield ... a nod to Jerry Joseph's father-in-law, a longtime Edison police officer.

The motorcycle repair shop has the neighborhood bar feel in more ways than one. Customers regularly congregate in the shop's office area to sit down, grab a drink from the refrigerator, and have a complimentary snack. Jerry Joseph's wife, Dianne, said she frequently brings brownies. The regulars have their own personalized Captain Jack's coffee mugs hanging on the wall.

Dianne Joseph said it's all about atmosphere.

"They don't even need to bring their bike in," she said. "It's like that old-school feel you don't see any more."

The Josephs opened Captain Jack's in October, cashing in their life savings after Jerry Joseph had spent most of the last two decades in the trucking industry.

"On a subconscious level there was a certain point where I felt like I had hit that plateau," he said.

Jerry Joseph has long been a motorcycle enthusiast, and Dianne Joseph said the couple had been pondering the business venture for a while.

"We had been thinking about it, and I finally said to him, 'Let's do it,'" Dianne Joseph said.

The Josephs' timing was seemingly perfect.

"The economy had nothing to do with it (the decision to open the shop)," Dianne Joseph said. "Right before we cashed in our 401K, right after that, everything (in the economy) started to tumble."

Although they started at a time of year when motorcycle-riding season was drawing to a close, Dianne Joseph said they had a busy October and November, and were financially prepared for a slow winter.

The shop was a sponsor of the Old Timers' Motorcycle Club's Run for the Children, an October fundraiser that benefits children battling cancer. The Josephs plan to stay active in the annual event.

Jerry Joseph said his staff consists of himself and another full-time mechanic, plus four part-timers. All of the mechanics are certified technicians, he said.

While the majority of the shop's business comes from Harley-Davidson owners, Jerry Joseph said they also work on Japanese-made bikes. The shop offers chrome plating, welding, powder coating, painting and full slate of mechanical services. They also offer winter bike storage.

But Jerry Joseph said the most important thing they offer is a passion for motorcycles. It's a passion, he said, that even outweighs his desire to make money.

"I want you to be comfortable here, whether you've been riding since you first could or whether this is your first bike," Joseph said.

That means he is not opposed to talking a customer out of a repair he thinks is unnecessary, and he said he also does not believe in talking customers into extra services. Loyalty and community are paramount, he said.

"My philosophy was I'd rather make one dollar on a guy a hundred times than \$10 once," he said.

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