

## The Power of Personal Service.



Left to Right: John Reingardt, Dennis Kucera, Bill Valenti, John Hodas and John Fritts

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## PAM

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said. It also attracted some of the areas most experienced repairmen.

Master automobile technician Pablo Sarmiento, 50, has worked for Oakes going on 11 years.

"I've been doing this for about 33 years, and also having been a business owner myself, I work with (Pam) because she does straightforward, honest business," he said. "And I like that, it makes me feel good."

Oakes educates her customers on repairs, she said, and voices special empathy for women and people undone by the thought of facing the congenial smirk of a knowing repairman. To make things easier, Oakes wrote and designed a booklet called "Empowered Ladies Car Care Guide (or how I got stuck trying to understand how to maintain a car and how it works at the same time by default)." She also established a scholarship at Florida Gulf Coast University for women majoring in engineering.

"There is no reason (for women) to feel intimidated," Oakes said. "It's so easy to become car savvy. The big question to ask (when getting a repair), is 'Why?'"

Oakes delights in explaining to the befuddled what goes on in the nether regions of their costly, malfunctioning contraptions. It's no mystery, she said, just mechanics. "We're always doing show and tell out here. I love show and tell."

And if the car is making a funny noise, she wants to hear the customer make it too.

"We love to hear them make the noise," she said. "Others may laugh — but this is important."

Fort Myers resident Willin Petersdorff said Oakes is well known in her trade for

thoroughness and integrity.

"She just always had a good reputation," Petersdorff said. "That's how we know about her."

And that's how most people know about her. What they don't know is that a second love, that of words, immersed her in a 10-year affair with journalism during the 1980s and early 90s. She majored in English at the University of South Florida, and worked for papers such as the Cape Coral Daily Breeze and the Punta Gorda Herald.

"I enjoyed it, but...you know...I miss the press pass," she said. In 1992, she abandoned that business (it had lost touch with reality, she said) and a few years later, returned to the work of her family's three previous generations. Pam's Motor City services the entire vehicle, hoses, breaks, engines, alternators and all.

"I thought, 'I can do this, and better,'" she said. "It's all about the shop and the people in the shop. It's not me, it's the group, it's all of us. We're all blessed to be here with each other."

Having mastered cars, Oakes still avidly reads and seeks fresh knowledge. She's taking online courses in Science and Technology at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, where she travels once every semester ("It's better than watching TV"). And she's currently enjoying Steve Martin's new book, "Born Standing," about what it's like to be a comedian.

"He really had his heart in it," she said. "It's one of his better, if not best works...I think it's because it's so personal."

And maybe the reason why Oakes is a good mechanic is as simple as that, because she likes the way cars look, smell, work, and for her it's personal. ■



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