

Small town shop offers big time service

Peter Sziklai's Tsawwassen Collision is celebrating a quarter-century in Century Square

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Tsawwassen Collision might be located in a small town, but it's far from a small town shop.

"We're as well equipped as anyone in the province," says owner Peter Sziklai, whose Century Square auto body shop is celebrating 25 years this summer.

What started as a 6,000-square-foot operation in 1995 has since doubled in size and now employs 18, but it's the way the shop conducts business that makes Sziklai proud and has earned him a national reputation.

While running an auto body shop in Richmond in the early 1990s, Sziklai says a chance conversation during lunch with a friend led to the creation of Tsawwassen Collision. He learned during that lunch that a collision repair shop had closed at Century Square more than a year earlier and the space had

been sitting empty.

"I did the math in terms of how much square footage of repair space was in Richmond at the time and how much was in Tsawwassen, and I ended up negotiating a deal with Century (Group)," says Sziklai, who was living in Ladner at the time, but now calls Tsawwassen home.

It's a decision that has worked out quite nicely as the volume of work done at Tsawwassen Collision now puts it in the top 10 per cent of shops province-wide.

A veteran of the industry for almost 35 years, Sziklai says vehicles have become far more complex in the last few years.

"It's been called a technical tsunami," he says. "The systems in cars, the lane departure, the cameras, are much more complex. What used to only be on a \$100,000 car is now on a \$25,000 one, so it takes a certain level of expertise to fix them cor-



FILE PHOTO

Peter Sziklai's Tsawwassen Collision has doubled in size since opening in 1995.

rectly."

Sziklai says that increased complexity poses challenges for the industry and he's responded by revamping the roles and responsibilities of his employees. Rather than pretending a technician knows how to do every-

thing, he's split the work into distinct roles so each aspect is handled by an expert in that area.

He says the approach is starting to catch on in an industry that's been slow to adapt to change.

One of his most recent innovations is to create a

position he calls a pre-estimate researcher, a move that removes the research role from the estimator's many duties, a change he says will become more common throughout the industry.

Sziklai says he continues to invest in equipment,

technology and training to ensure Tsawwassen Collision is able to properly fix today's vehicles, an approach that has earned the shop certifications from a variety of noted organizations throughout North America, some of which only a select few operations have achieved.

At the end of the day, Sziklai says it's been a commitment to doing it right, and treating customers fairly, that has served Tsawwassen Collision well over the past quarter-century. He jokes that businesses in a smaller town don't stick around long if they don't treat customers well.

"If you provide good, honest service, it will work," he says of the philosophy that started the company and is still embraced today. "We're confident in the service we provide. We don't get caught up in saying we're the best or anything like that, but we take considerable pride in what we do."