

Indiana Shop Owner Favors Chief for Quality, Durability & Support



by Autobody News Staff

Jimmy Lefler owns and operates five extremely busy body, mechanical, and glass shops based in Evansville, Indiana. He's repairing more than 200 cars per week, juggling eight DRPs, employing 80 people and doing approximately \$9 million in annual sales. So, when it comes to purchasing equipment to run his shops, CEO Lefler expects that his machines will perform day-after-day without breaking down or requiring extensive maintenance. That's why he's been buying his racks, computerized measuring systems and lifts from Chief Automotive Technologies, a leading manufacturer of pulling, measuring, anchoring and vehicle specification products.

Lefler is a third-generation body shop owner whose grandfather, Leroy, founded *Leroy's Paint & Fender Repair* as a dirt floor garage in 1952. Times have changed. For almost 60 years, Lefler has been a household name for fixing cars in the tri-state area on the borders of Indiana, Kentucky and Illinois. The Leflers have been winning national awards for the family's contributions to the collision industry, while expanding and succeeding in a very competitive market with more than 60 body shop/collision centers listed in the southern Indiana region.

Jimmy started working in the family's business in 1986 in the parts department. "I did it all in the beginning—fixed cars, washed vehicles, worked as an estimator and cleaned floors—anything and everything to learn the business. In 1996, I bought out my father and starting running the operation," he said.

The Lefler family has had a long-term mutually beneficial relationship with Chief, he said. "We bought our first rack from them in 1982, after we saw their demonstration. That was the key, because it was very informative and they showed us everything that the machines could do. We have one Chief machine right now that's been here for 18 years and it's still going strong. It's paid for itself several times over, that's for sure. Today, we own three Chief measuring systems, four racks and a drive-over lift/pulling system."

Chief Automotive Technologies started manufacturing its first pulling systems in 1972, and it rapidly became a leader in the industry. The company has stepped up over the years, driving technology changes, including the introduction of computerized measuring systems and comprehensive vehicle specifications.



Lefler Auto Body Tech Rodney Blandford works on a vehicle using the shop's Chief Impulse frame rack, one of the Chief machines that Lefler counts on to repair approximately 200 cars weekly

Lefler's VP/Operations Manager **Ed Dietz** praised Chief's exemplary customer service for keeping his techs informed and productive while they are working with the manufacturer's machines.

"Our techs can get a Chief technical person on the phone immediately, and that's critical," Dietz said. "It allows my technicians to resolve their issue and stay productive, which is so important to our cycle times. If they have to sit on hold or wait to get a call back, that's time that's been lost."

Roger Tutt, production manager for Lefler's Evansville North shop, has consistently received fast and accurate information from the Chief customer service team whenever he has needed it.

"They make it easy. The only time I ever need technical service from Chief is a computer-related issue, and the technical service hotline walks me right through it every time," he said. "The ability for a Chief technical person to log in remotely to see what the tech is looking at on the Genesis computerized measuring system computer is a 'game changer' for service."

Lefler has all his techs trained by Chief, he said, to ensure that they know every detail involved in the operation of these machines. "We recently brought **Ken Soupene**, a Chief instructor, on-site for a week of training for all of our technicians. It was great, because all of our employees were able to go through the training in a real-world setting, without costing us a decline in production or cycle times."

A big part of what Chief brings to the equation for Lefler is its training,

which allows techs to get certified and earn I-CAR credits in the process, Lefler said. "They make the training very effective and comprehensive," Lefler explained. "It's top-notch all the way. Soupene is one of the best instructors we have ever encountered from any company, and he taught most of my techs how to work these machines."

Chief's support starts with training and continues after the sale via the company's equipment reps on the ground, Lefler said.

"**Mark Lee** is our equipment rep and he has proven to be one of the best we have ever worked with," Lefler said. "He's very responsive and is always readily available to answer any questions after the sale. Customer service is a big deal, because we're using these Chief racks on a daily basis, and we work them hard. So, we need to have a guy like Mark who knows these machines inside and out and is dedicated to servicing our needs. I know that if we need a part in a hurry, he'll drive it over here, even though his company is in Indianapolis, a 3.5-hour ride from here. That's the kind of customer support we've been getting from Chief and reps like Mark."

Lee, owner of Lee Equipment, has been selling Chief equipment to Lefler for the past five years, and has a long history with the manufacturer, he explained. "Chief doesn't make cheap machines, but the quality is there and the products' longevity and durability is the proof. I have customers who are still using the same Chief machines that they bought 35 years ago."

Lefler Collision & Auto Glass Centers

Location: Evansville and Newburgh, IN

Telephone: 812-423-4044

www.leflers.com

Company At A Glance...

Type: Collision & Mechanical Repair

Facility Employees: 80

In Business Since: 1952

DRP Programs: Eight

Number of Locations:

Three collision body shops & two mechanical/glass shops

Combined Production Space:

47,800 square feet (combined)



All of Lefler's shops are busy day and night, doing \$9 million in annual sales despite a rocky economy



Jimmy Lefler is a third-generation body shop owner who owns five locations in Southern Indiana

Chief Automotive Technologies

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