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CJ's Tire AND AUTOMOTIVE SERVICE

OVER A HALF CENTURY OF KEEPING DRIVERS AND THEIR VEHICLES SAFE

By Kathy Hunt

Vehicle safety should be at the forefront of every driver's mind. In inclement weather do you find your tires skating across, instead of gripping, the road? Do your wipers clean your windshield or leave streaks of water, sleet or snow behind? When you step on the brake pedal, does your automobile respond immediately or shudder slowly to a stop? At CJ's Tire and Automotive, keeping cars and trucks road-worthy while making automotive maintenance "better, faster, more affordable" is the top priority. Winner of Berks County's "People's Choice Award" for the past eight years, the family-owned and operated business has a proven track record of providing reliable, consistent and reasonably priced service in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

Over 50 years of automotive care and customer service

Many businesses profess to have a lengthy list of satisfied customers, but very few can back up that claim with a half-century of happy consumers. In 2021 CJ's Tire and Automotive celebrated 50 years as an independently owned and operated business. A former employee of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company in Pottstown, Paul "Skip" Levensgood Sr. opened CJ's Tire in Birdsboro, Berks County in the spring of 1971. He was motivated by the belief that people should receive better customer service than what he had experienced himself.

"We recognize that what we sell, tires and automotive service and repairs, are commodity products," explains said Bill Bainbridge, vice president of marketing and business development at CJ's. "There are a lot of people right down the street, so to speak, who sell the same thing. The difference between our competitors and CJ's comes down to our people and the experience customers have when they visit our website, call us on the phone, or come into our stores and work with our staff. We emphasize exceptional customer service. At the end of the day, that's what makes us different," he said. CJ's 4.5 star Google ratings seems to back that up.



Seated: Paul "Skip" Levensgood, Sr.
Standing: Paul Levensgood, Jr. and Haley Levensgood (Paul's son).



PHOTOS BY STYLISH IMAGES



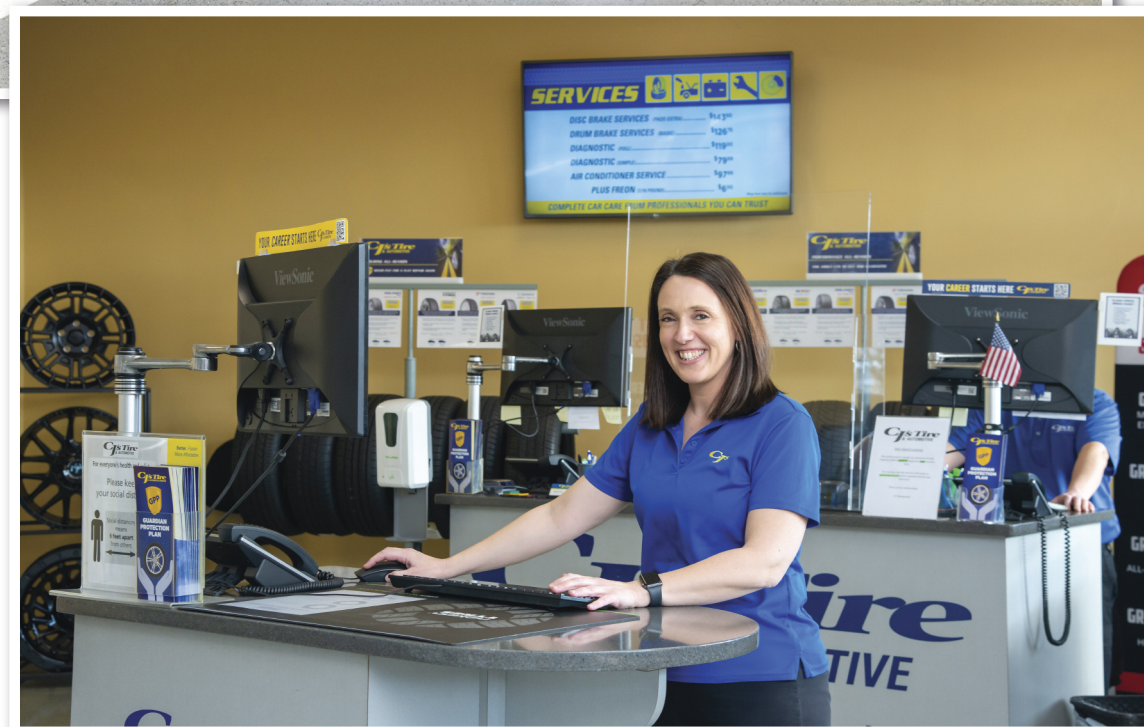
This dedication to a positive customer experience has paid off. Although it began as just a tire shop, CJ's has evolved into a much larger enterprise. Over the years it has added automotive services, repairs, and aftermarket custom wheels to its offerings and developed a strong business-to-business (B2B) as well as retail consumer client base. Today, small to mid-sized businesses take their fleets to CJ's not only for tires but also scheduled maintenance.

Over the past 50 years, CJ's has increased the number of its retail locations from one to 17 and operates six distribution centers (with more than 90,000 tires in stock!) and servicing their own stores and wholesale customers in 21 Pennsylvania counties. If the area's population is growing, and the right real estate is available, CJ's will consider opening additional locations.

Although Skip Levensgood has stepped back from day-to-day operations, his son Paul serves as CJ's president and oversees the business. All three of Paul's children are involved in the family business.

Serving customers and the community

To better serve its customers, CJ's has created two rewards programs. In its *Loyalty Rewards* program, consumers earn points valued at between two and five percent of every dollar that they spend. Accrued points can be applied to anything sold at CJ's, including tires and service. The *Loyalty Rewards* program includes monthly promotional deals, such as \$10 off a car inspection or special tire financing, and free enrollment bonuses. "It really does reward customer loyalty," Bainbridge said.



"Routine maintenance and other automotive expenses add up so getting a little cash back does help."

Customers should remember that Loyalty Rewards points must be used on future purchases and are not redeemable for cash. Also, commercial, fleet and government vehicles are excluded from the loyalty program.

Where commercial vehicles are included is in the *Commercial Advantage Program*. Aimed at helping fleet owners know and control their costs, this rewards program includes discount pricing on tires and installation and on parts and labor for vehicle repairs. These discounts apply not only to a company's commercial

vehicles but also to its employees' personal automobiles. Both the business and its employees save money with *Commercial Advantage*. Additionally, the program provides customized pricing on automotive maintenance and keeps maintenance records so that service reminders can be emailed at the appropriate times.

"Whether it's a fleet of one or 100 commercial vehicles, our retail stores can keep those vehicles operating and take care of all scheduled maintenance, tires and unexpected events," Bainbridge said. "Doing that for a business ultimately saves time and money."

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COVER STORY

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Another avenue for saving is CJ's price match promise. If a customer finds the same tire advertised for a lower price or has a verifiable price quote from a tire retailer within a 25-mile radius of a CJ's location, CJ's will match that price and then take an additional five dollars off each tire. The only restrictions are that the tires must be in stock at both CJ's and the competitor's store and the price must include the tires and complete installation. Special orders, special buys and discontinued tires are not eligible for price matches.

Along with ensuring that customers receive top-notch service and financial incentives, CJ's believes in giving back to the communities in which it works. It's a principle to which everyone at the business adheres, and a key element of the company's mission statement.

"Over the past year we raised over \$30,000 that went back into the communities, supporting everything from the Pennsylvania Breast Cancer Coalition to the Animal Rescue League of Berks County," Bainbridge said. "We're really proud of the fact that we were able to bring so much back to our own communities."

In addition to the regional organizations mentioned above, CJ's employees participate in food drives for local food banks and in fundraisers for such national charities as the Muscular Dystrophy Association and Ronald McDonald House Charities.



Caring for your vehicle with two "car care" months

Every April and October, CJ's Tire and Automotive celebrates "car care month." These are the months when people typically begin to prepare their cars for changes in the weather and in their driving habits.

"Spring is a time of people getting out and putting more miles on their vehicles," Bainbridge said. "It's also a time when people start thinking about vacations and about how often their cars' air conditioners will need to run in the coming months. In the fall, people start thinking about being prepared for cold weather. They want to make sure that their tires are in good condition and provide the traction to get them where they want to go, when they need to go there. They also want to

know that their wipers are working, they have enough antifreeze in the cars, and their batteries aren't affected by the cold temperatures," he said.

One of the newer technology products that CJ's carries and about which drivers should be aware is the all-weather tire. Comprised of different rubber compounds than all-season tires, an all-weather tire provides close to the same grip of a traditional winter tire in cold weather and on snow and ice-covered roads. However, if driven year-round, winter tires simply can't last as long as an all-season tire.

"A nice thing about the new technology in all-weather tires is that, even when it's cold and winds are blowing, the tread remains flexible and grips a slushy, snowy road as if it's dry, but the tires will last for up to 70,000 miles. And the great news for consumers is that all-weather tires really don't cost any more than premium all-season tires," Bainbridge said.

Global manufacturers including Bridgestone, Goodyear, Continental, Hankook, and Nokian are all now producing all-weather tires.

In April and October, CJ's offers several preventative maintenance packages to prepare drivers and their vehicles for the upcoming season. Information on these special offers can be found on CJ's website and in print.

A way to guarantee that your vehicle performs optimally, not only in the summer and winter, but also year-round

is to have it checked by one of CJ's licensed technicians. Their tire technicians are trained and recertified each year through the Tire Industry Association. CJ's Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certified technicians must stay up-to-date on the latest technology and retake their ASE certification test every five years.

CJ's technicians work on such issues as brake repairs, cooling system repairs, air conditioning, steering and suspension, battery health, wheel alignment, scheduled maintenance, tune-ups, oil changes, and PA state inspections and emissions. They do tire installation, tire balancing and rotation, and flat tire repair. They perform Valvoline™ Professional Series (VPS) brake fluid exchange, VPS coolant exchange, VPS power steering flush, and VPS transmission service.

Because they are trained in current automotive technology, CJ's staff can perform some diagnostic evaluations and also maintain the brakes, tires, lights and wipers on gas-electric hybrids and fully electric vehicles (EV).





Failsafe methods for determining when to replace your tires

Have a penny or a quarter tucked under your seat or rolling around on the floor of your car? Then you have an easy and accurate tool for determining when your tires should be replaced.

If you have a penny, slide it into the lowest, most worn tread on your tire so that Abraham Lincoln's head is upside down and facing you. If you can still see the top of Lincoln's head, your tire has less than 2/32 of an inch of tread remaining. This is much too low. You need to replace the tire now.

If you have a quarter, slip that into the lowest tread so that George Washington's head is upside down and facing you. If you can see the top of Washington's head, the tread depth is 4/32 of an inch. You have roughly 90 to 120 days left before you must replace the tire.

So, if you're wondering what to do with that stray penny and quarter, use the coins to follow CJ's simple test for determining tire safety. It's a quick way of protecting yourself and others on the highway.

Being a consistent presence in uncertain times

Since early 2020 businesses small and large, near and far have felt the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its rapid spread forced global industry shutdowns and prompted the shortage of raw materials, products, and labor. Supply chain issues grew, and with them so did production costs and consumer prices.

"Over the last 20 to 24 months, we have faced some challenges, especially in finding and securing economy and value tires as well as replacement auto parts," Bainbridge said. "A lot of our key products are manufactured outside of the United States. At our business, it's about a 50-50 mix. Many factories around the world have been affected even more dramatically by Covid than we have been in the United States. And Covid has not only affected manufacturing, but also supply and distribution."

"Container ships are docked off shore for months and when they finally reach ports, Labor shortages in the trucking industry has created even more delays in distribution. All of that has driven up costs. For consumers who haven't purchased tires in several years, they may be surprised that costs have gone up so much. These increases haven't come from the local dealer-distributor side. It comes from the manufacturers and their raw materials, labor, production, and distribution costs being higher," Bainbridge said.

He added that, although tire prices have gone up during this time, CJ's has

tried to hold the line as much as possible on its service prices. He also noted that, in spite of the ongoing Covid pandemic, supply chain issues, labor shortages, and the rising costs of energy, all of CJ's stores remain open. They continue to operate safely and at normal business hours.

CJ's retail locations are open Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 6 PM and

on Saturday. As Saturday hours vary, it's best to contact the specific store or consult CJ's Facebook page for details.

For consistent exemplary customer service and fair prices during an uncertain time, CJ's Tire and Automotive is there for its customers and communities. For more information about locations and service, please visit <https://cjtire.com>.

