

# Constant growth key to Auto Safety Center's success

By **JOE VANDELAARSCHOT**  
jvan@conley.net.com  
262-306-5054

The recession in 2008-2009 gave Auto Safety Center owner, Joe Valind, 38, valuable lessons he's used to spur his business' success.

"I am the third owner of Auto Safety Center," Valind said. "It was started back in 1965 by Ralph Schmidt, who owned it until 1983 when Roger Berth bought it from him. It was called Schmidt Safety Center, but when Roger bought it the name was changed."

The business was on North Main Street.

"I know a lot of businesses in 2008 and 2009 that didn't do well. But auto repair for us — those were two of our best years. People weren't buying new cars and were working their best to keep their old car running," Valind said. "However, after that our sales leveled off and fell some. It was really a challenge and it was during those struggles and trials that it really got me to look at my business and become much more committed to it and just say how can we come out of this stronger than we were before?"

Despite his youth, Valind, who has owned the business since 2005, has seen his company grow, move to a new location and continue to improve its service and areas of expertise. Valind, a 1996 West Bend East graduate, worked at Auto



John Ehlike/Daily News

Auto Safety Center owner Joe Valind stands on a staircase overlooking his shop Jan. 12 in West Bend.

Safety during his final two years of high school through a co-op program where he earned credits toward graduation.

"I worked there after high school and while I was going to Moraine Park," Valind said. "After that I went to work for another area shop that offered more services so I could grow my job skills. Then I came back to work at Auto Safety and within 15 minutes the then owner, Roger Berth, asked me if I ever thought of owning my own business. I did have that goal ever since high school."

Valind said the move

turned out to be a perfect fit.

"You talk about fate and things just working together that was it," he said. "It took about a year and a half to finalize the deal, but we did and in April of 2005 I came into work that day as an employee. Went to lunch, headed to the bank and signed the paperwork and I came back as an owner and a boss and sat down in the chair and got after the work."

Valind said that point was the start of his story.

"Have you ever had a goal in life and when you achieve that goal and it's like what do I do next?" he said. "After buying

the place, I kind of went through a couple of (moments) when I thought 'Now what?' and it wasn't until later that I decided I can start running my business and really try to take it to the next level and grow and just provide better service and experiences for our customers."

Valind said "failure can teach you a lot and those years after 2008 and 2009 I learned a lot."

"I learned that it's hard to run a business and if I'm not committed to learning I'm not going to make it," Valind said. "It was because of those trials

## 40 UNDER 40

### JOE VALIND

that I said if we want to make it I need to change myself. It was at that point that I started reading more books on business, operating businesses. I linked up with some great other shop owners and learned from them."

Valind said he started looking at many things to help grow the business. One was the business' location.

"We needed to have a new location to better serve our customers and to just do it in a better environment. That took about two years to happen," Valind said. "Then we moved out here (3700 W. Washington St.) in 2013. Overall it was a great move for us. We lost some customers, but we gained way more. It made sense."

Valind had already taken steps to modernize the business.

"When I came in in 2003 we didn't have any computers. Everything was a handwritten invoice," Valind said. "The former owner did things old

school and if we were to move on and grow we needed to do things in a new and improved way."

Another lesson Valind said he's learned through owning a business is, "If you're not growing you are dying. So if you are not investing in your business and constantly changing and tweaking it you are going to be stagnant and if you're stagnant you die."

He said he's taken several steps over the last year that followed that lesson.

"We've increased our warranty to three years and 36,000 miles on all repairs. We are taking steps toward specializing in Volkswagen and Audi. Last year we became a Continental Tire dealer," he said. "And hopefully in the next month or so, I will become owner of this part of the strip mall. We just came to terms. We have a few other hurdles to clear including an appraisal."

Valind said he has always leased his location, but had in the back of his mind that he wanted to some day own the property where he operates his business.

"What it's going to mean for me is that we have our location secure. I am in control of my own destiny," Valind said. "We have room to grow. I don't see any reason to move because of all of the recent development along Highway 33. It's a good time to own this property because business is moving this way."