

JDM Collision Future-Proofs Business with Solidus Equipment Systems

SOLIDUS
EQUIPMENT SYSTEMS

by Autobody News Staff

John Melendez has spent his entire life in auto body shops, and he knows the auto body industry is changing fast. But if you want a template for what it means to future-proof a business, Melendez is a person to watch.

Melendez grew up around cars, working first in his dad's body shop and then in dealerships, where he moved into management positions. His journey as a business owner, however, didn't begin until 2005, when he bought a body shop, and renamed it JDM Collision, using his initials.

Melendez has seen ups and downs as a business owner, but the relentless pursuit of education has been a throughline of his entire career. He's a certified GM master technician and mechanical technician, and he is chairman of I-CAR for Northwest Indiana, an organization he speaks passionately about.

When it comes to thriving in the collision repair industry, Melendez also emphasizes the importance of holding certifications — JDM Collision is a certified GM repair center and holds I-CAR Gold Class recognition. The company is on the cusp of opening a new, advanced calibration center, and as he reflected on his competitive advantage locally, this is a strong theme.

"I'm one of the very few technicians in my area that carries 100% status as a master GM tech, so I'm on the rosters of three different GM dealerships," Melendez said. "That's a huge advantage, considering the demographics of the area — and I'm continuing my education and certifications to the present day. Couple that with our I-CAR recognition, it just puts my business on a completely different level."

That heart for education was what led Melendez to Solidus, which has been a transformative business partnership for JDM Collision. Melendez was representing I-CAR at a student career day when he met **Julie Lombardo**, head of AASP-Illinois. She invited Melendez to their annual meeting and trade show, where he met **Mike Hildebrand**, owner of Solidus. He was initially intrigued by



JDM Collision in Illinois has been all in with Solidus since owner John Melendez first heard of the company at a trade show.

the company, but skeptical.

"I was like, all right guys, it sounds good. But as a business owner I'm apprehensive because after the sale, it's like pulling teeth to get a company to come out when a piece of equipment breaks down," Melendez said.

It wasn't until Solidus invited Melendez to come to Kansas City to help judge a welding competition that Melendez began to see what sets Solidus apart. Working alongside Solidus at that competition convinced him the company wasn't selling empty promises.

"That's when I went, 'My God, these are car guys!' They've all been in the industry from the get-go. And how they talk to and treat people who are our future customers, how they actually could perform the workmanship and truly stay behind the product they sell, that sold me," Melendez said.

Since then, Melendez has been all in with Solidus, purchasing, among other equipment, multiple Celette benches, the NAJA electronic measuring system and Solidus 300 amp welders approved for multiple manufacturers—and, crucially, by JDM's 20-year-veteran welder.

Melendez is especially excited about the company's new Solidus medium-duty spray booth, which was being installed at the time of this interview.

"It has the latest in robotic curing by Infrarr to accommodate the electronic platform, and the size means we'll be able to take larger electric vehicles, like Rivian," he said. "I emphasize the technology

because the average shop is not going to be able to do the less invasive repair that electric vehicles need."

Melendez said using Solidus equipment gives his business what it needs to serve the cars of the future. "Equipping my shop with Solidus equipment means that I'm not going to be limited — so I can pursue Rivian certification, for example, and we're going to be set up to take on those cars."

Melendez also had much to say about the quality of customer care at Solidus. He's been deeply impressed by employees like **Jim Korous, Chris Scanga and John Pankau**, who are kindred spirits in their commitment to excellence and advancing the industry.

"I can't emphasize enough their service team. I was just floored seeing how these guys are truly 100% quality-minded. They always follow through," Melendez said. "This is the first time I've been treated this way by any outside vendor that is supplying me. I just never expected this level of service and commitment. Our shop is being treated as if it's their shop, and it's hard to find that type of value today."

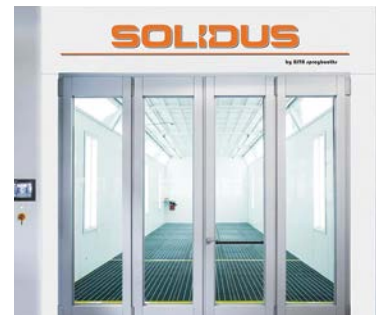
Melendez is very busy these days, taking JDM Collision through its imminent expansion, and readying his business to take on whatever the future brings.

"I hit a home run by going with Solidus because they're able to help equip this shop to be the most advanced in South Side Chicagoland and all of Northwest Indiana," he said. "I couldn't be happier to be working with them."

JDM Collision
Thornton, IL
708-877-7300

Company At A Glance...

Type: Collision Repair
Facility Employees: 16
In Business Since: 2005
Number of Locations: Two
Combined Production Space: 13,000 square feet



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Melendez said using Solidus and Celette equipment gives his business what it needs to serve the cars of the future.

Solidus
636-405-2800
solidususa.com
www.shopsolidususa.com
Info@solidususa.com
Facebook: @SolidusUSA
YouTube: @solidusequipmentsystems6572