

I-CAR Helps Huntington Beach's Gustafson Brothers Stay Ahead of the Curve



by Autobody News Staff

Like many automotive repair shops, *Gustafson Brothers* began with a couple of boys working out of their father's garage. Brothers Frank and **John Gustafson** eventually grew out of the garage and officially founded their company in 1971. The shop was situated in Huntington Beach, CA, where John Gustafson is still very present in his role as president.

Trish Ostrander, Gustafson Brothers' training and marketing manager, said the business has come a long way since those early days. According to Ostrander, it now operates on two sites. One site provides mechanical services, while the other, almost three acres, provides mechanical and auto body services. Combined, the business services around 750 cars per month.

Ostrander said the company's long-term success is tied to the business's core values of help first, world-class service, and loyalty to its community.

"We stay very competitive due to our being a champion shop. We are very loyal. People know that they can come here, and they're not going to get misguided. We have guests that have been coming to us for decades; that's something we pride ourselves on," said Ostrander.

One aspect of that local commitment is Gustafson Brothers' role in providing youth education in the community. The Huntington Beach High School (HBHS) auto tech class takes place at the Gustafson Brothers' facility, and a long-time employee, **David Baylor**, has become CTE credentialed to teach the class.

"Our collaboration with HBHS has been remarkable since the first wrench turned," said Ostrander. "We've witnessed students dive head first into the intricate world of automotive mechanics, learning invaluable skills from the tires up. They have mastered the nuances of suspension systems to troubleshoot and repair some of their vehicles confidently."

That passion for education runs through the whole culture of the company, attested to by the company's longstanding relationship with I-CAR. The international nonprofit organization has a mission to provide the information, knowledge and



Gustafson Brothers has served Huntington Beach, CA, since 1971.

skills required to perform complete, safe and quality repairs.

"We began with I-CAR in 1993," said Ostrander, "and our location is among the elite 1% of Gold Class shops (the highest role-relevant training for business designation recognized by the collision repair industry) that have maintained status for over 30 years. John [Gustafson] is very passionate about education, and every employee is required to have four hours of training per quarter."

Most technicians and estimators at Gustafson Brothers have achieved I-CAR Platinum recognition, the highest level of role-relevant training for technicians. Ostrander credits that training with keeping the business ready to take on the new technology the automotive industry is continuously developing.

"We want to stay up to date on what's relevant, and I-CAR helps us do that. The training is above par and keeps us well ahead of the curve. For example, we had people training on EVs before most shops were thinking about that. I-CAR keeps their training updated, and that's of huge value to us," said Ostrander.

While I-CAR training helps keep Gustafson Brothers' business future-ready, the training is also of huge benefit for its employees, who are acquiring knowledge and skills that will make them highly employable in the future.

"Our goal is to keep them here as family. But if for some reason they leave, this training goes with them everywhere, and it will advance them. Ultimately, better training leads to better pay, it is a part of their

career path," said Ostrander.

Gustafson Brothers has such a strong relationship with I-CAR, they were asked to be an early adopter for the new I-CAR Academy program, the first industry-neutral, comprehensive early career program designed specifically to attract, train and retain technicians.

"It's an on-the-job training apprenticeship program that provides the fundamentals and the curriculum as they start. Now they can start out with that extra knowledge of 'why' things work in conjunction with their hands-on training. They'll master their craft quicker with this duo," said Ostrander.

Because of her position, Ostrander has been in contact with many people at different levels of the I-CAR organization, and she speaks very highly of the culture at I-CAR.

"It's a wonderful organization. I think a lot of people don't realize that some of I-CAR's activities are carried out by volunteers," Ostrander said. "All my interactions have been great."

Unlike some organizations that, over the years, become entrenched in a certain way of doing things, Ostrander said I-CAR actively seeks input from the industry, looking for feedback and hearing about their experiences. This openness creates a mutually beneficial relationship between I-CAR and Gustafson Brothers, bound by a shared love of learning, that promises to continue into the foreseeable future.

"They're just very honored that we've had this Gold Class recognition for over 30 years," says Ostrander, "and we love working with them."

Gustafson Brothers

Huntington Beach, CA
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Company At A Glance...

Type: Mechanical & Collision Repair

Facility Employees: 68

In Business Since: 1971

Number of Locations: Two

Combined Production Space:

87,000 square feet



The shop is proud to be in an elite group of businesses that have maintained I-CAR Gold Class status for more than 30 years.



Gustafson Brothers' passion for education has led the shop to host the local high school's auto tech class.

I-CAR

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