

# THE ART OF THE CAR AT FIRST LUBE PLUS

It is hard to miss First Lube Plus, which is located in the business district of Salem, Oregon. With a mural of a Chevy Camaro on the side of the building, you know immediately it is a place where auto lovers will find solace. What might not be so readily realized is the connection the auto service shop has to the local church.

The building that now houses the shop had been operated by the DeLon Auto Group and was home to various car dealerships on the surrounding properties. When the owners put the property up for sale, Salem First Baptist Church stepped in and bought it as a way to further efforts to give back to the community — and also to ensure the properties wouldn't be vacant for long.

Pulpit Minister Mark Hanky had the idea to not only create a business that would serve church parishioners and nearby residents, but could also be used to help those who had fallen on hard times or worse.

"This business is there to provide work to those who are still struggling after the economic downturn, as well as providing a reentry for those coming out of corrections or just chronic homelessness," said Steve Hunter, the Operations manager for First Lube Plus. "We have a gamut of opportunities for those turning their lives around. This was Minister Hanky's



By Peter Suci





idea to help engage those who need some help.”

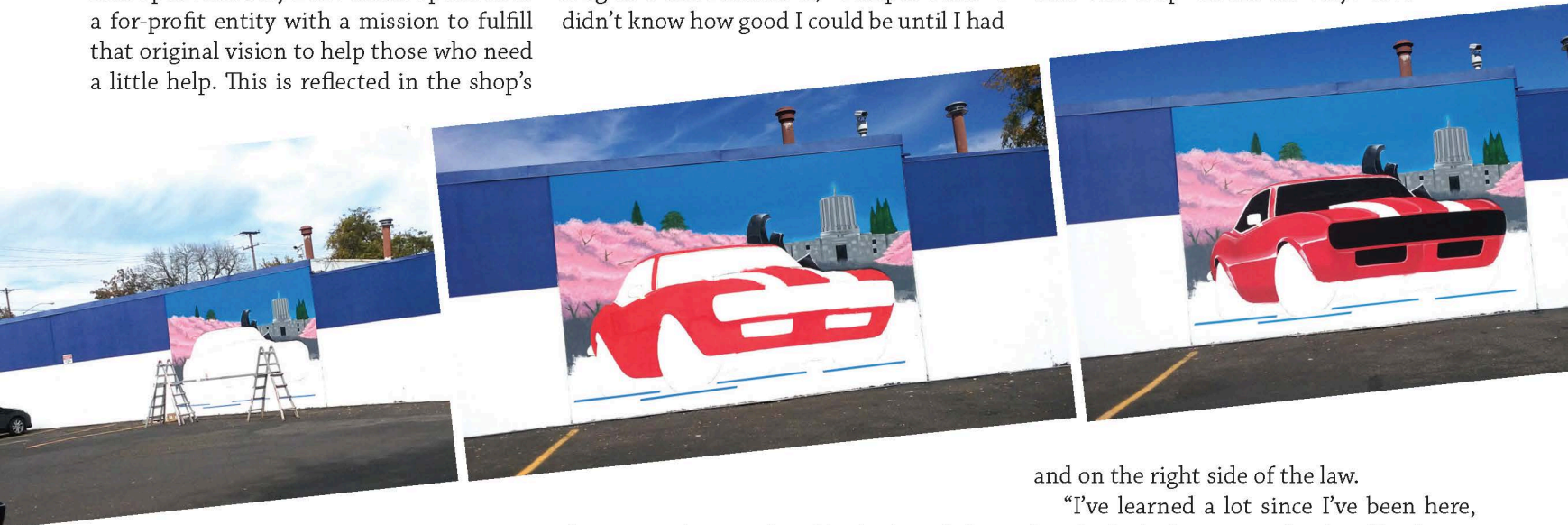
Hunter, who has been a CEO for a number of organizations, came from a traditional, professional business background and was hired by the First Baptist Church to buy the property and to develop and manage the businesses. After acquiring the property in December 2015, First Lube Plus opened in July 2016 and is operated as a for-profit entity with a mission to fulfill that original vision to help those who need a little help. This is reflected in the shop’s

Campos has already left his mark — and quite a bit more — on the walls outside First Lube Plus. He painted the massive mural of the Camaro and is quite proud of this accomplishment and the attention it has brought to the shop. While he was someone who always had artistic skills, he honed those while behind bars.

“I’ve been drawing and doodling for as long as I can remember,” Campos said. “I didn’t know how good I could be until I had

es,” Campos said. “I’m always envisioning the next piece of artwork, too, and want to continue to improve how I do it.”

This includes experimenting with drawing, painting and other aspects of art — and, most importantly, he said it keeps him out of trouble and keeps him free. At the same time Campos, who had little skill working on cars, has now learned a new work skill that will help ensure he stays free



hiring practices, job training and mentoring program.

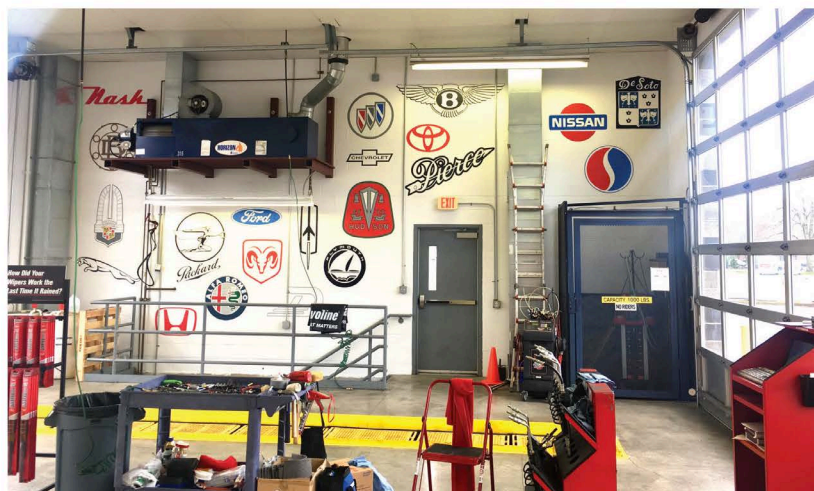
“Like a lot of communities around the country, there are those people who are doing well, but many others who are still struggling to get back on their feet,” Hunter said.

The focus of First Lube Plus is, thus, more than just to provide a quality automotive service to the downtown Salem population, as it also offers jobs and mentoring to recent parolees and other struggling members of the downtown community.

### The Deal with the Art

One of the individuals who has benefitted from this program is David Campos, who since being hired at First Lube Plus has become an accomplished technician, mainly because of his desire to do things correctly. He is grateful for this opportunity to put his life back on track after serving time in jail.

that extra time, and as I had a lot of time in jail I worked on it and found out I was pretty good.”



David Campos, technician at First Lube Plus in Salem, Oregon, has been using his art skills to add some character to the shop.

Now embracing change, Campos said he has gotten rid of the bad elements of his life and will instead focus on his two passions — art and automobiles. The way he has embraced each does bring a smile to faces.

“I work hard on the cars and with my art; I like to see the expressions on people’s fac-

and on the right side of the law.

“I’ve learned a lot since I’ve been here, but I admit that every day is still a learning experience,” he said modestly. “I try to get better at my job every single day. This is about working hard and trying to do the best I can while taking care of someone’s car. This isn’t about taking the easy route.”

Campos has tried to share his love of art and provided some art for First Lube Plus.

“Any time I see a blank wall, I can see it as a canvas,” Campos said. “When I met Steve, he started to see what I was capable of not only as a possible technician but also as an artist. He took a chance with me in both ways, and he gave me a shot to show my stuff

on the wall. We agreed, if it didn’t look good we could always paint over it!”

Far from being an eyesore the mural has become a statement piece that has earned the respect of local artists, the community and, of course, the daily customers.

“I’ll be honest; this was my first mural on



such a large canvas, but I was happy with how it came out and happier still with the response,” Campos said. “People seem to appreciate it; there is always someone taking pictures of it. I am really moved when someone stops by and asks who did it. There has been no negativity; it has been all positive.”

If there was anything that wasn’t positive it was from other “car guys” who wondered why only a Chevy was up on the wall! This has already led to discussions on what should be done next.

“We haven’t made it public,” Hunter said, “but I can say we are discussing what we will do next. We have a Camaro, and yes I’m a Chevy guy, but maybe the next one will be Mustang. We do have to make everyone happy, after all.”

Considering there is still a lot of real estate for Campos to work with, he will have options to satisfy more automobile owners.

“Part of the reason for putting this mural up is that we do have a blank slate that need-

ed something,” Hunter said. “This building sat vacant for a long time, and we wanted to put our own imprint on it. That part of the long wall has eight or nine sections, and our intention is to put a mural on each one.”

This could include vehicles of different years and different models, but one part of the mural has already been getting a lot of attention from the customers and that is the badges and logos of various cars over the years.

“We tried to include everything from the Dodge Brothers in the early 1900s to today’s Toyotas and Hondas,” Hunter said. “We’re trying to provide a range of logos, and we’ve been surprised by the reception this has gotten. Many of the older ones people don’t know, but some other customers come in and it puts a smile on their faces as they recall older cars. I’ve heard stories like, ‘I remember that from dad driving his old Plymouth.’”

After being part of a local car show last

Labor Day, the opinions for what should go up next on the walls really started to come in. While this included favorite cars and other ideas, Hunter said they’ll consider what to do next.

“If we did a contest, I know we’d get a broad spectrum of ideas,” he said.

For now Campos is thinking of — and working on — other projects, too.

“My art is going to continue, and I’m going to do a lot of new things with it,” he said. “There is a lot of blank canvas in Salem. I started at the shop, but who knows where I’ll go.”

Already, Campos has painted a food truck that services nearby businesses and a mural for a daycare center.

“I didn’t think I’d be labeled the local muralist, but I’m happy to provide some art around town,” Campos said. “Of course, I’m a car guy, so this is still a natural place for me to work and get inspired about my art.”

Campos’ finished Camaro mural at First Lube Plus

