

Your Neighbor

Bill Zacotinsky named 'Businessperson of the Year'

East Road Motors owner got his start working on NASA rockets

BY BOB DUMAS
FOR MAHOPAC NEWS

Bill Zacotinsky has always had mind for all things mechanical.

And he's parlayed that ability into a lifelong passion and successful business endeavor.

The longtime Mahopac resident started East Road Motors – a full automotive service shop and then some – more than 30 years ago, and was recently named the Greater Mahopac-Carmel Chamber of Commerce's Businessperson of the Year.

"It's phenomenal because this [award] is something you are getting from your peers," he said. "These are all business owners who are very smart people and who have been very successful at what they do. I respect them all."

Zacotinsky said the seeds for the idea of East Road Motors were planted during his childhood when his father, an auto mechanic himself, would take him around town on errands and visit businesses throughout the community.

"I remember running around with my father to all these businesses," recalled Zacotinsky, whose family roots in Mahopac go back more than 70 years. "These were all mom and pop stores – the hardware store, the lumber store, the meat store. There were no big chains back then like Home Depot. And I thought it was cool that these guys owned their own businesses. I figured they must be someone important. That never left me."

However, Zacotinsky's dad warned him away from the automotive repair business.

"He said it was a lousy profession," Zacotinsky said. "He never wanted me to be one. He said you don't get paid."

Consequently, Zacotinsky went to college and studied to become an aerospace engineer, landing jobs working for McDonnell-Douglas and NASA. But after the space shuttle Challenger disaster in 1986, the landscape for the aerospace industry changed dramatically.

"They were great jobs, but they were funded by the government," he said. "After the Challenger disaster, the business kind of came to a halt. They laid off thousands of people. I was offered the option of moving to St. Louis [and keep working in the aerospace industry] or go find a new job."

But Zacotinsky didn't want to leave Mahopac. He considered it his town. The idea to become a



PHOTO COURTESY OF BILL ZACOTINSKY

Bill Zacotinsky is honored at the office of the Greater Mahopac-Carmel Chamber of Commerce after being selected as Businessperson of the Year. He is seen here with past winners, from left: Joe Tock, Dominic Zecca, Laurie Lee Ford, Richie D'Andrea, Grace Vinciguerra, Marjorie Ciucci, Kevin Bailey and Lillian and Charlie Melchner.

businessman like those he remembered from his childhood began to take hold.

"I said, 'Let's give this a shot,'" he said. "I had to do something. I was married and had a baby on the way."

At first, East Road Motors, which is located in Carmel, was a weeknight/weekend business, but by 1987, it became a fulltime venture and Zacotinsky hasn't looked back. While he says he understands where his father's advice was coming from, he nonetheless figured out a way to make a success out of an automotive repair business.

"Times have changed since my father was doing it," he said. "I met some smart people who gave me good advice on how to do it right and create an upscale business. They told me to raise myself above the grease monkey image."

The advice has worked. East Road Motors has been cited by the state as a New York Shop of Excellence.

"That means we've met all the criteria and are one up over the regular [automotive] shop," he said. "We are a full automotive shop – we do computer diagnostics, tires, and brakes, all of it. But we do everything at a higher level. It's a totally different world here. Everything is clean and it's all computerized. Everyone wears a uniform. The result is we are con-



PHOTO: TABITHA PEARSON MARSHALL

The Greater Mahopac-Carmel Chamber of Commerce Businessperson of the Year is Bill Zacotinsky, who owns East Road Motors in Carmel. He is here with his wife, Pam, who works for Quarterly Magazine.

stantly gaining new customers. We do a fair amount of advertising, but word of mouth spreads it pretty quick. And once we get a customer, there is a better than 99 percent chance they are coming back."

And it's not just cars that East Road Motor services. They'll take on just about anything with a motor.

"We started doing outdoor power equipment as a quick way to bring cash in and it took on a life

of its own," Zacotinsky said. "John Deere asked us to be a service center representing them, which was amazing and practically unheard of. They are a 175-year-old company that has never been sold and is considered one of the best. Working with them has been very successful; it's really taken off."

The boom in the sale of home generators thanks to recent harsh winters and Hurricanes Irene and Sandy has also provided East Road

Motors with another service niche.

"It seems like 50 to 60 percent of all homes have a generator now and they all need service," Zacotinsky said. "A lot of mechanics can fix the engine, but most can't do the electrical. But with our aerospace background, we can."

East Road Motors can also service motorcycles, ATVs, quads, snowmobiles, Jet Skis and lawnmowers. If it has a motor, they'll service it. It's in their blood. And they not only like working on them, they like playing with them as well.

"Everyone in my family rides a motorcycle, a snowmobile, a Jet Ski," Zacotinsky says with a laugh. In fact, his son Andrew works at the shop and may take over the business someday.

"He is 26 and is looking to take over in the future," Zacotinsky said. "He does just about everything around here."

Zacotinsky has two other sons – the oldest is a construction management engineer in Manhattan, and his youngest is a senior in high school who does pick-ups and deliveries for the business.

When receiving the Businessperson of the Year Award, Chamber of Commerce leaders cited Zacotinsky's community service as one of the reasons for honoring him. He's been a volunteer for the Shop Putnam Business and Home Expo, the Mahopac Street Fair, and has served as a member of the Chamber's Board of Directors.

"It's a little bit of a giveback and you do get something out of it," Zacotinsky said of his volunteering efforts. "You feel better and it makes the community look better. I have been in the Chamber for 12 years, and I ran the street fair for five years. I am off the Chamber Board of Directors now, but I still serve on a lot of the different committees. I really enjoy it."

Chamber CEO Mike Bucci said that selecting Zacotinsky for Businessperson of the Year was an easy decision for the Businessperson of the Year Committee.

"Bill is the kind of guy who has volunteered hundreds of hours of his time for community, business and cultural events," Bucci said. "That's the kind of thing that should be recognized."

For more information, visit eastroadmotors.net or call 845-225-3503. East Road Motors is located at 58 Carolyn Road E in Carmel.