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Clifford's Hand Wash owner Clifford Collins sits in the passenger seat of a 2013 Dodge Challenger owned by George Rosales, standing, as Collins works on cleaning the car's interior. Collins opened his hand wash station in early March, and Rosales is already one of his steady customers. L&T photo/Rachel Coleman

Clifford's Hand Wash pays attention to detail

By RACHEL COLEMAN • Leader & Times Clifford Collins knows that appearances aren't everything. Even so, the owner of Clifford's Hand Wash, 601 N. Kansas Ave., believes appearances make a difference. "When I wash my own car, it drives different," he says. "When it's dirty, it doesn't drive the same. The car is gonna treat you like you treat it."

Collins opened his corner car wash in early March. With its stucco exterior and former service-station vibe, the business is light on technology and heavy on the personal touch.

Dipping into large buckets of soapy water, Collins and his employee, Otis Ward, use thick sponges to wipe down customers' cars. They dry, polish and shine until the painted surfaces resemble mirrors. For customers who want the interior treatment, they vacuum, polish and

protect the interior.

“They detail my car to perfection,” said customer George Rosales of Liberal, who shows up for a weekly wash-and-detail job. When he purchased his 2013 Dodge Challenger, “the first thing I did was bring it here,” he said. “I really didn’t like the idea of taking it to the car wash. I look at that bar just banging down and I think it’s going to bust the windshield.”

Rosales isn’t the only person to feel protective of his wheels, Collins said. “Those machines can put dents in your vehicle. We see some of that. And, be honest, it leaves spots and smears. You don’t get that with the hand wash.”

Before he opened the business, Collins, a Liberal native, worked as a truck driver. Though he found the work lucrative, “I didn’t realize how dangerous driving truck can be until I started,” he said. Another drawback was the time away from his girlfriend Constance Anthony and three sons, Tyrique, Germoryon and Prince.

Driving a truck “left no time for my family,” he said.

Despite the long hours a start-up requires, Collins finds it allows him to schedule his time more flexibly.

“I like working for myself,” he said, adding “my girlfriend is actually the owner, and I’m just the manager.” Although his older sons are busy with school, Prince, at age 3, is eager to get into the buckets and help wash cars, Collins said, adding, “I have to keep an eye on him when he’s around.”

The corner property had fallen on hard times when Clifford’s Hand Wash took over.

“It had been empty for a while, and the ceiling in the office was all knocked out,” Collins said. “We had to give it some love.” The attention to detail that Collins and Ward lavish on the vehicles improved the office area, which gleams with fresh paint and a new ceiling. The outside of the property got a bit of TLC as well, with new paint including an image of “Clifford,” the big red dog of cartoon fame.

“Kids love it,” Collins said, “and it makes the customers smile.”

That’s the goal, he added.

“Who likes to wash their car? Who likes to do windows? It’s something you need, but nobody likes doing it, especially women. I’m a best friend to the husbands,” he said. “They can come in here, we’ll wash it and polish it up for \$10. If they want us to clean the inside, vacuum it, wash

the windows inside, we'll do that, too." When it's all finished, Collins says, "they're happy."

Rosales agrees.

"It's worth taking the time to do this. It's only about 30 minutes, and it doesn't cost that much. I come in once a week, and I get compliments on my car every day."

Clifford's Hand Wash is located at 601 N. Kansas. For information or to schedule pick-up and delivery, call 604-0036.

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