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tory and photos by robert pierce

In his lifetime, Jerry Easley has acquired a body of knowledge on the bodies of cars, and after nearly half a century in his line of work, he will be handing over control of his body shop to a new owner.

Easley's Body Shop at 722 S. Kansas in Liberal has been a family- owned business since 1961, and Easley said Chris Allen, who will assume operation of the shop in January, will do the same quality work the Easleys have provided since the business' early days.

"I'll keep the buildings, and basically, I'm just renting out the buildings, and he's going to go ahead and run the business," Easley said. "It's going to be his deal. It's going to be Easley Body Shop LLC. It'll be Chris Allen, owner."

Easley said the shop is an established business with 48 years of experience repairing cars.

"I had it for 33, and Dad had it for the rest," he said. "I worked for him basically when I was in junior high school."

Easley said he has appreciated the people of Liberal and doing business with the community in all his years in the business.

"It's been good to me," he said of Liberal. "I have no regrets or problems. The body business has been good to me. I'm going to miss it a lot. I won't miss the business end of it, but I am going to miss my customers. That's what's going to be the hardest thing for me – that I won't be going down there and seeing the old faces and old friends."

Easley said he has customers calling him frequently for guidance on how to repair cars, and he

said this will continue under new ownership.

"The advice line is still open if they can catch me," he said with a laugh. "That's the part that I'll really miss most of all is the people."

As he turns over control of the body shop, Easley will be kept busy with 19 rental houses he owns in Liberal.

"I'll have to take care of that, but I will be spending a lot of time at Canton, (Okla.)," he said. "I've had a place down there about 16 years."



Easley recalled one rather famous car he fixed in his days of repairing automobiles.

"They got over here to the truck stop, and they gouged the fender on it somehow," he said. "They called me. We unloaded it. It was the '57 T-bird that Suzanne Somers drove in 'American Graffiti.' We unloaded it, brought it over here and fixed the front fender on it. We loaded it back up on the transport, and he took it to Pennsylvania. We've done a lot of neat stuff over the years."

Easley said he now prefers newer cars to those from earlier generations.

"I've owned all the old junk I want to own," he said jokingly. "I don't want any more junk. If it doesn't smell new, I don't want it."

Easley's Body Shop was originally started in 1961 by Jerry's father, Ronald.

"He worked for Bob Hood, and he worked for Doll Motor Company," Jerry said. "We moved out here in 1948. I was 18 months old. Dad went to work for Dolls Body Shop. He worked in the body shop for them. He worked for them for about eight, nine, 10 years. He went to work for Hood for about 15 years, and then he started his business."

Jerry added Allen's family has also been a big part of the business.

"Chris's father worked for me for 15 years," he said. "Chris's uncle worked for me for about 12 years. This is the third Allen. I've known Chris since he was about 3 years old, and he's 33."

Jerry said although the business is going to be taken over, this does not mean his company's traditions are ending.

"It's going to be ran the same way because of how I know him," he said. "The business is going to be there under the same name with owner Chris Allen and the same quality workmanship carried on through all these generations."

Jerry will still own the two buildings Easley's Body Shop occupies, and Allen will rent the two buildings from him.

"With that rent, he'll assume all the equipment and use it," he said.

As his father did, the newest Allen has likewise worked for Easley for many years.

"My dad, Gary Allen, worked here for 15 years," he said. "My Uncle Dave worked here for 12 years, and I've worked here for 10."

Chris explained how his family became involved in the business.

"We all lived in the same trailer park," he said. "Gary's dad used to own that trailer park out there across the street from Kickschickers.

We lived out there, and that's how my dad got hired here. Uncle Dave came down from Wichita."

The elder Allens are currently still working elsewhere, according to Chris.

"My dad's a fieldman for Anadarko in Elkhart," he said. "Uncle Dave runs the City of Wichita's body shop."

As for the repair work Easley's performs, its new owner said if it's on a car, it can be fixed.

"We repair from start to finish on framework, paint, unibody," he said.