

"THIERIE'S A GUY" SM



Parts & Labor with David Moyer Wrench and Hammer

I came for the cars. I stayed for the people. *It's a popular saying among car collectors. The camaraderie, sense of shared purpose, technical advice, social events, and perhaps even an occasional romance enrich our lives. At some point, we've all turned to other LCOC members and asked where to get something fixed or where to buy an obscure part. "Is there any way I can locate this rare gadget that goes between the phramas and the fitzmosis?" you ask helplessly and hopelessly because you're 90% sure there isn't. Ask the right friend, though, and as a thin smile forms, he leans toward you and triumphantly replies, "there's a guy."*

"There's a guy" begins countless discussions that solve countless problems. I was delighted to find a Lincoln service specialist within my small state when I bought my car. I was amazed to learn of a man whose only job was convertible tops on a single make and model of car built over only seven years. Someone else within driving distance specializes in windshield wiper refills for classic cars. How in the world do these businesses come to exist? "When I grow up, I want to be an astronaut." "Not me. I'm going to rebuild power brake boosters for half-century-old Lincolns."

It got me wondering who these resources are as people. What led them into their businesses? Why do they do what they do? What mistakes did they make along the way? How did they discover secrets of engineering not in the manuals or correct flaws in original designs without infringing on authenticity? What makes them tick?

In this series, you'll get to know the backstories of some of the people you've dealt with for years, be introduced to a few newcomers, and find out more about names you may only know from internet websites, forums, Facebook pages, or from an LCOC meet where you asked a question, and another member gave you a wink and said, to your relief, "there's a guy."

From Digital to Analog

There's a saying that "when one door closes, another opens." In January 2019, the door closed at Baker's, the well-known Lincoln service and parts facility in Putnam, Connecticut. Less than 30 miles down the road, another door was opening around the same time. Mike Raucci, an engaging 30-something computer programmer who'd been working on Lincolns in a small rented garage, leased a cavernous 3,600-

square-foot building just across the border in Coventry, Rhode Island, filling it with tools, lifts, and his own and customers' 1960s slab side Lincoln Continentals. Former customers of Baker's didn't have to look far for a fresh alternative.

Drive down a state road a few miles from I-95, duck between a woodworking shop and a boatyard, and you'll find that door, marked "Wrench and Hammer." There isn't any neon, just a businesslike space filled with the cars we enjoy. I visited two weeks

after Easter in a snowstorm. Ah, New England weather! The shop had three Lincolns in various stages of repair on the main floor, another undergoing a full restoration on a "rotisserie" in the sandblasting bay, and a parts car in the paint booth. Three other cars were tucked into corners. Lounge space and parts racks were under construction on a balcony level.

Mike and his helper/tool caddy/billing and administration honcho/wife Ashley (a nurse, which comes in handy when



skinning knuckles on these cars) showed me the platinum '64 they own and a pewter '67 in for sprucing up. Both cars had stock exteriors and cabins with lightly restored engine bays featuring electronic ignition, enhanced graphics on valve covers, dual electric radiator fans. Many of his customers favor the original look with improvements in reliability and warm weather operation.

The Road to "Wrench"

Mike's history is akin to many of what the Lincoln Forum calls "The Usual Suspects" who work on our cars. His dad admired "Tri-Five" Chevrolets. Mike got to like '60s muscle cars. *The Velocity Channel* drew him in closer. Serendipity put project cars, his own cars, friends' cars in front of him.

At his job, he met Chris Kemp, a former U.S. Army diesel mechanic who'd moved into computers. Kemp shared Raucci's passion for classic cars and mentored him as they worked together on Kemp's 1969 Plymouth Roadrunner, a 1950 Ford coupe, and the 1963 Lincoln Mike acquired in 2009.

He learned by doing, talking to others, experimenting, and reading. Four years ago, he had a block of time when he could

devote all his attention to restoration and repair. Computers would wane in his professional life as collectible cars waxed. Word of mouth brought an increasing number of customers. He flirted with other marques, but the clean lines, size, and sweep of 1960s Lincolns had unique appeal.

ABOVE Mike and Ashley, the heart and soul of "Wrench and Hammer." **BELOW** Engine compartments often get subtle resto-mod touches in the shop.



Fast start, ambitious plans

People have been learning about Wrench and Hammer through social media and in-person visits to car shows. Mike is busy enough now to be looking for another employee. Upgrades to the paint and sand-blasting booths are planned. His long-term goal is for Wrench and Hammer to grow to the size and capability Baker's had in 2018.

Even now, Mike has been contracted for everything from minor repair to complete restorations. Upholstery and full paint jobs are the only things W&H doesn't handle in-house. Trusted subcontractors are nearby. Mike will repair convertible top mechanisms; new top fabric comes from outside. He's begun fabricating some hard-to-find stock parts and unique resto-mod parts for sale via the web at www.wrenchandhammer.com.

If you bring your car to Coventry, you can specify discreet projects like a dual-circuit brake conversion, transmission rebuilding, or headlight relay. Mike can suggest other improvements or repairs as he gets into the vehicle. "I treat every car as if I'm building it for myself," he says, and that results in high-quality, thorough work. It can also reveal hidden issues. How much or how little he tackles is then totally up to the customer. He's accessible and communicative, and the close working relationship fostered with owners keeps projects on budget and limits surprises.

ABOVE RIGHT Another slab side getting the magic touch from Mike's skilled hands. **ABOVE** The 3,600 square-foot space provides enough room for several projects to be underway simultaneously. **RIGHT** Wrench and Hammer is waiting to help you with your Lincoln needs, from a small repair to major restoration work.





Lucky in Lincolns

One of the issues facing car collecting is that experienced car restoration specialists are retiring. Some posts on The Lincoln Forum have discussed this. We're lucky in the Lincoln world to have a new crop of restorers entering the fold. That may not be the case with some other marques. Some of that is due to resto-mod people. I'm a stock guy myself, but the resto-mod crowd's interest in slab side Lincolns adds critical mass that lets suppliers like Steele Rubber and Christian Paul Deck Lids manufacture parts for all our cars. A combination of the traditional and modern attracted Mike Raucci to the world of Lincolns. Wrench and Hammer fills a void left in the Northeast and has at least a 25-year runway. A 1961 model will be 85 years old then. That enhances our enjoyment of our cars today and their resale value tomorrow. If you're in New England, get to know Mike, and even if you're not, say "hi" and welcome him if you're at a meet together. This is good news for us and our cars.

David Moyer is an LCOC member from Wilton, Connecticut. Photos courtesy of the author. © 2021 David Moyer

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