



JULIA CARR / Cottage Grove Sentinel

Larry Woody cleans grease from his hands after working on restoring his 1968 El Camino.

Blind mechanic has a love for cars

JULIA CARR

Cottage Grove Sentinel

One would be hard pressed to challenge Larry Woody's passion for cars. An auto technician for 25 years and recent owner of D & D Automotive, 48 Highway 99S, Woody's career evolved from a tire buster at Montgomery Wards to a pit mechanic at Cottage Grove Speedway into buying and racing an IMCA Modified car. After an auto accident in 2002 left him blind, he has continued not only working on cars but racing them, too.

On April 16, 2002, Woody was traveling northbound on

Interstate 5 south of Gettings Creek rest area when a wood chip truck travelling southbound lost control of two trailers. Both trailers ran over Woody's car. As a trained race-car driver, Woody tried using the passenger side to absorb the impact. His permanent injury, however, ultimately took his sight.

The floor buckled onto the dash, the truck lid ripped off and the engine broke in half. Woody was lifeflighted to OHSU in Portland to Casey Eye Institute after suffering knee lacerations, a compressed

Please see **MECHANIC**, Page 5A

MECHANIC: Full time at new auto shop

Continued from Page 1A

pressed lower back, cracked ribs and damaged bones from his top lip to his upper eyebrow.

Fortunately, a nationally acclaimed reconstructive surgeon from John Hopkins University happened to be performing two surgeries at that time for teaching purposes and asked Woody to be a patient. The result of the operation left Woody's facial disfigurement practically unnoticeable.

"I have felt very fortunate to be here since it happened," said Woody.

"He conducted business while he was in the hospital," said his wife and business partner Della Woody, an educational assistant with Lincoln Middle School.

Woody said, "I'm the type of person that idle time is hard. I like to be busy. It was business as normal — get me out of the hospital so I can get back to work."

He attended a program through the Automotive Management Institute and graduated in 2004.

"As far as I know, I'm the first blind person to go through the program," Woody said.

Woody's blindness is practically unnoticeable to the sighted person. His overall composure, body language and ability to work on cars, including restoring his 1968 El Camino, exceeds the skills of many sighted individuals.

He uses a computer program called JAWS that reads information on the screen using synthesized speech that allows him to scan printed material and hear it read aloud. His acute hearing also plays a major role in identifying engine problems.

Della Woody said that at the races, Larry knows which cars are on the track by hearing the engine.

"Once you get used to listening to it, every car has its own distinct sound," he said.

In 2003, a driver asked Woody's permission to change his number to 771 (Woody's racing number) as a tribute.

Woody agreed yet said, "There's only one catch, I get to drive your car."

The next year, Woody met

Mechanic tips

Some things to consider when looking for a good mechanic:

- Ask coworkers, friends and neighbors for a reference.
- Don't let coupons determine a good mechanic, just because they offer low prices, does not validate their skills.
- Ask a parts store representative for a reference.
- Parts store maintain business relationships with shops in town and can be a valuable resource.
- Check the Automotive Service Association, a nationwide association comprised of independent and dealership automotive services. They monitor shops and put out a directory of shops that must agree to a certain code of ethics. The local chamber of commerce should have this directory.
- Go visit and interview the prospective service representatives.
- Look at the facilities, it where you'd feel safe leaving your car?

with the safety crew and hopped into the Modified car.

"My only link to sight was



JULIA CARR / Cottage Grove Sentinel

Larry Woody, owner of D & D Automotive works on his 1968 El Camino at his shop at 48 Highway 99S in Cottage Grove.

by a two-way radio. He talked me through about 30 laps," Woody said. "It was an awesome feeling. Indescribable."

He was asked to do it again in front of an audience.

"I wanted to do it to let anyone in the stands know that if they have a disability, they can do anything they set their

mind to," he said.

The next year he drove during a demolition derby where the rule is "paint to pass" or hit the car in order to pass. Ernie Owen, head of the safety crew, rode with him at the July Fourth race where they placed seventh out of 14 cars.

Woody's first full-time

employee started Monday at D & D Automotive and the ex-owner, Mark Schnear, will continue working in the shop.

"I can't let this blindness beat me," Woody said, "I've got to do what I've always done. The purchase of this shop is just another chapter of that story."