

DJ's Repairs

David Birkner is a young man with a passion for fixing cars. Just out of school, Mr. Birkner decided that he wanted to own his own garage and found the help he needed to achieve his goal from the Rend Lake College Small Business Development Center.

Mr. Birkner, 21, recently completed a certificate in Automotive Repair Excellence as part of his Associate degree in Automotive Technology from Rend Lake College in Mt. Vernon Illinois. Raised in McLeansboro, Mr. Birkner comes from a family of farmers who own other small businesses. His interest in cars was sparked early in life, and he says "I started working on cars when I was 14, and I seemed to have a natural talent for it." He decided to attend the Rend Lake College Automotive Technology program to round out his education and learn the most advanced methods. During high school and all through college, he worked part time at various garages in the area putting his book knowledge to practical use.

During one of his college classes, the professor asked each student to describe what they wanted to be doing five years from now. In his essay Mr. Birkner noted that he wanted to own his own garage, but said, "I was only 18 at the time, what did I know about owning a business?"

While working part time and going to school, Mr. Birkner began looking for an auto repair business to buy. There are several garages in town, and he approached them about whether they would be interested in selling. One owner was interested in selling, but the price was too high. Several months later, Mr. Birkner approached the garage owner again, and this time "the price was cut almost in half." He felt this represented a "good deal" and moved ahead to try to buy the facility.

With a garage available, he approached another professor for advice about how to get a loan to buy the business. The professor mentioned that Rend Lake College "had a Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and they helped people start businesses. He suggested I go and see them." The Rend Lake College Small Business Development Center is supported by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the US Small Business Administration.

At the SBDC, Mr. Birkner met the Director, Curt Mowrer, who "was a lot of help. I did not know where to start. He gave me the materials I needed to start writing my business plan, which ended up being 47 pages long. He took what I wrote up and put it in good presentation form so I could take it to the bank for a loan." "David Birkner is a young man, who knew what he wanted to do" said Mr. Mowrer, "he had good preparation and I know he will be successful."

Mr. Birkner approached the McLeansboro branch of People's National Bank for a \$70,000 loan guaranteed by the US Small Business Administration to buy the garage. "I met with the banker, and he said I had to come up with \$16,000 in equity. I think they were surprised that I came back two days later with the cash. I borrowed some, and had some from my own savings" added Mr. Birkner.

DJ's Repairs is a full service auto repair facility, offering transmission, front-end alignment and motor repairs for both foreign and domestic cars. Mr. Birkner can also repair farm equipment if needed. The facility has three repair bays and additional space for truck repairs. DJ's Repairs opened on May 25, 2003.

Mr. Birkner works full time and has a full time helper. He advertises in the McLeansboro *Times-Leader* the local newspaper, and feels that "word of mouth" is his best form of advertising. So far Mr. Birkner is pleased with the progress of his business and it is "doing better than expected. I have worked on hundreds of cars already, so I guess I am doing ok. Every week is different" Mr. Birkner concluded "I am thinking about hiring another part time helper, because we are so busy."

The Rend Lake College Small Business Development Center is a member of the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network, working in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the US Small Business Administration.