

John Gean - Protown

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

The car was damaged in Texas. The repair is being done in a body shop in Kansas. That is one example of the work of an entrepreneurial autobody specialist who chooses to live in rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

John Gean is founder and owner of Protown Glass and Body, Inc. in Protection, Kansas. John is originally from Wichita where he took vo-tech autobody classes. Even while in high school, he was working on cars for his friends.

John's uncle owned a ranch near Protection in Comanche County west of Wichita, and John started spending summers there. He found he enjoyed the country life and so he stayed. After graduation, he cleaned out a small workshop and started doing autobody work. His first business was called John's Auto and Body.

"I was like a sponge," John said. "I took all the classes I could and asked different body shops how they were doing things." John continued to upgrade his skills and equipment and went into auto salvage in a neighboring community for a time.

In 2000, he moved back to Protection and founded Protown Glass and Body. Protown sounds like it's professional, but John said that Protown was simply the nickname for Protection as used by the local kids.

Protown Glass and Body is a full-line autobody shop which offers high quality workmanship, specializing in collision repair, glass repair, and auto towing. Through the Comanche County Economic Development office, John was put in touch with the Small Business Development Center regional office in Garden City. Pat Veasart, since retired, was the regional director.

"She was so much help," John said. "She helped me understand the numbers and really got me thinking."

John continues to learn. In 2011, he began a program with Management Success from Glendale, California. "It's one of the most valuable things I've ever done," he said. "They really taught me to read a customer and make sure I understand what the customer is after."

Perhaps the best guidance came from his father. "The best advice I ever got from my dad was to treat the customer's car as if it was your own," John said. The emphasis on caring for the customer's car has paid off over time. In 2006, Protown Glass and Body won the Existing Business of the Year award from the Kansas Small Business Development Center.

Today, John's business has jobs booked several months ahead. In addition to the local market, he has cars coming to him from as far away as Colorado and Texas.

How has this Wichita boy adjusted to living in rural Kansas? "I wouldn't want to go back," John said. "I don't have the hustle and bustle here. It's friendly and quiet. There's good schools. You know your neighbors and they really are neighbors, people who will help you."

John and his wife Patricia raised twins here in Protection. "It's a beautiful part of the country," he said. "I appreciate the freedoms of living here."

Protection is located approximately 60 miles from Dodge City, 60 miles from Pratt, and 60 miles from Woodward, Oklahoma. "That makes us dependent on each

other,” John said. “It makes the town closer.” Protection is a rural community of 555 people. Now, that’s rural.

Technology has aided efficiency and helped bridge the distance of rural Kansas. “Most of my jobs are done with the Internet in some way,” John said. “I enter information into my software system and it will create estimates, do invoices and go directly to Quickbooks.”

His advice to other rural businesses? “Find something you love doing,” he said. “I love Monday mornings. I enjoy coming to work. It’s rewarding to give someone back a car that is even better than it was before,” he said. “Don’t give up, keep it honest, and learn all you can. Forty-some years later, I’m still learning,” he said.

The car was damaged in Texas. The repair is being done in a body shop in Kansas. We commend John Gean of Protown Glass and Body for making a difference with entrepreneurship, lifelong learning, and a commitment to rural Kansas. Sounds like a pro.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.