

If you're not already a customer of Midwest Tire Company, Inc., you would probably never have guessed that the unassuming building on 13th and Pacific is one booming business. With satisfied customers raving about their experiences on local blogs, the business may soon lose its status as "Omaha's best-kept secret," says Mary Ehlers, who works in payables and benefits and is the wife of Owner Cliff Ehlers.

"We got an honorable mention in the 'Best of Omaha' this year, so that was a nice kudo," says Mary. One blogger summed up Midwest Tire's dedication to customer service this way: "I have been purchasing my vehicles' tires at Midwest Tire for about 17 years. They are always honest, competitive, and do not have 'junk' fees on new tires. They give you the total price, and you know exactly what it will cost."

As a third-generation owner of Midwest Tire, Cliff grew up in the tire industry and knows the business well. His grandfather, Walter Ehlers, opened the business in March 1944. Then in 1951, his father, Russell, took it over for the next 50 years. Cliff and his brother, Bernie Ehlers, have been running the business since 2000. Cliff started working there in 1971 when he was 14 years old. Mary has been with the business for about 20 years.

As one of the area's largest tire dealers, Cliff says they keep a full supply of inventory on-hand. They carry most name brands, such as Cooper, Goodyear, Continental, General, Carlisle, Michelin, Kumho, and BF Goodrich. "We sell a wide variety of tires at a wide range of prices. And if you're looking for a model that we don't have we sure can get it for you," Cliff says. Midwest Tire also carries tires for lawn mowers, golf carts, lawn and garden tractors, and even electric wheelchairs.

Mary shares that they have a lot of customers who own high-performance cars. Cliff and several other employees offer a huge knowledge base for these customers. Cliff is typically able to find the right tires for more exotic cars such as BMWs, Range Rovers, and Jaguars.

In addition to selling tires to their retail customers, Midwest Tire also is a wholesale tire dealer. "We have a good wholesale operation going," Cliff says. "We deliver twice every day to a lot of the car dealers, area service garages, and mechanics. They rely on us to provide different brands and choices."

While the name of the business has the word "tire" in it, the business does much more than sell and change tires. They also offer full brake services; chassis and suspension repair; cooling system and transmission flushes and fills; replaces batteries and alternators; works on rack and pinion units; does alignment work; and much more. The mechanics are ASE-certified and work on cars, trucks, SUVs, and vans. "We have a lot of fleet accounts, and we do a lot of work for contractors such as for plumbers, construction, and lawn guys," Cliff points out.

While Cliff is very hands-on in the business, he doesn't spend much of his time changing tires anymore. "I'm pretty much in the

office. I do all the ordering, and Mary and I do the pricing for the tires as well as other automotive services. And I help out in sales too." Cliff's brother, Bernie, in addition to being partner in the business, works full-time as office administrator and in sales, in addition to three other full-time sales staff members.

Even though Midwest Tire offers longevity in business, full-service car repair, and practically any tire you could possibly imagine at your disposal, both Mary and Cliff know that these are not the reasons why customers have continued to come back for nearly 70 years. "All I can say is that we treat customers the way we like to be treated—plain and simple," says Cliff. "And we've got a good crew that tries to make it right the first time." "They're hard workers," Mary adds.

Cliff says that customers respect the employees' honesty. "We've been here so long that we're busy all the time. We don't need to up-sell," Cliff shares. In fact, their dedication to customer service and honesty is their best form of advertisement. "We're not a lot of bells and whistles. We just price everything out fairly, and word-of-mouth is huge for us."

Cliff estimates that 80 to 85% of the people who come in are known on a first-name basis because they have been coming in for so long. "They know us and they trust us. They've been buying here for a long time."

Even people from out of town have experienced the Ehlers' down-to-earth business style and seem to appreciate what they do for their customers. With Creighton and UNO being in the area, many college students from out of town bring their cars into Midwest Tire for repairs. More often than not, Cliff will be on the phone with a worried parent who doesn't know where to turn or how bad the situation with the car is.

"They don't know us and they don't know Midwest tire," says Mary.

But soon after talking to Cliff, the parents know that their child and his or her car are in good and trusted hands, she comments. "Cliff just looks at it from their point of view. There have been several times when he's said, 'If this was my child I would do this...,'" she says.

Cliff comes from a family of 12 children, and he and Mary have three children of their own. They say that they know exactly what it's like to care for a family, and their customers have become an extension of that family. "We build relationships with our customers," says Mary. She points out that in the nearly 70 years that the business has been open, they have served three generations of clientele. The couple says that they enjoy hearing about their customers' children and grandchildren. "What colleges they're going to, or if they're getting married...I think it's a neat part of what we do," Mary adds.

Midwest Tire Company is located at 1102 S. 13th Street. The hours are Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Saturday from 7:30 a.m. to noon. It is closed on Sunday. For more information, visit the Web site at [www.midwesttireomaha.com](http://www.midwesttireomaha.com), or call 402-342-2248 to make an appointment. **WE**

## MIDWEST TIRE

By Traci Osuna



Owners Cliff, Mary, and Bernie Ehlers