

Fire didn't keep them from opening doors Monday



By Russ Pankonin
The Imperial Republican

Sid Harchelroad planned for contingencies while his new shop was being built for Harchelroad Motors.

But Harchelroad said he never had any contingencies for what happened early Saturday morning.

Harchelroad was awakened early Saturday by a phone call. After learning his building was on fire, he looked out the window from his house south of Enders Lake. He could see the glow from there.

Much of Saturday and Sunday was spent trying to pick up the pieces, so to speak, after a fire destroyed not only the shop but the whole building.

Despite that, Harchelroad Motors opened for business Monday morning. It certainly wasn't business as usual but they opened nonetheless.

Lots of things remain up in the air, Harchelroad said Monday afternoon. But he did say they will rebuild the facility he owned that covered a quarter of a block on south Broadway.

New center of operations

Two years ago, Harchelroad constructed a large building as an inside showroom immediately across the street, west of their main facility.

Harchelroad had already moved the shop facility to the west building while the new shop was being built. Demolition of the old shop began Friday afternoon.

That building to the west will now also serve as the center for operations.

Harchelroad said the community has shown great support.

People brought in tables to work on. Businesses have offered office space, office equipment and office furniture. The school offered some old computers.

First thing Monday morning, Great Plains Communications installed a new phone system and Internet connectivity.

Harchelroad added they already have an offer for a building to use for their body shop during the interim.

"The community has just been awesome," he said.

Irreplaceable items

Fortunately, the business' computer system is linked in with the Wauneta store so those records are intact and accessible.

But still, the fire destroyed many paper records, business history, and such things as business contact lists, that were irreplaceable, Harchelroad said, not to mention memorabilia and keepsakes.

Especially meaningful to Harchelroad among the things lost was the plaque and picture of his late dad, Gene, and family when Gene was recognized by General Motors for 50 years as a GM dealer.

Salesman Brad Spady lost his collection of more than 60 footballs, football helmets, golf clubs and other memorabilia that was on display in his office.

Body man Doug Reinke lost hundreds of pictures and photo albums of cars that he had worked on or restored over the years.

Even many items in fireproof safes and cabinets didn't escape the fire's intense heat.

Those are the types of things that are just irreplaceable, Harchelroad said.

Even a small thing like keys to vehicles becomes a big issue. Nearly all of the keys were stored in the main showroom that burned.

Spady said they found them after the fire but they were amongst a big glob of melted plastic from the fobs attached to the them.

They were successful in melting the plastic away from the keys so they could use them to make duplicates from blanks and start gaining access to vehicles.

Despite the loss, Harchelroad put some perspective on the event, noting it could have been worse, especially if nearby homes or businesses would also have been lost or someone would have been hurt or killed.

At any rate, he admitted Monday he was still feeling a little numb after all that had gone on for the past three days.