

# DESTINATION Dealership



STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARILYN STEMP

## DENNEY'S HARLEY-DAVIDSON

Superior Service In The Heartland

If you deal with the public in a retail situation, you know that you're much more likely to hear complaints than compliments. This isn't necessarily indicative of the kind of service you're providing either, it's simply human nature to whine instead of praise. So when unsolicited news arrived of sterling service provided by Denney's Harley-Davidson in Springfield, Missouri, I had to investigate.

I was barely five feet over Denney's threshold when the first evidence was presented. A smiling young woman stopped what she was doing to walk my direction, say hello, welcome me, and tell me to make myself at home. And before I go further, let me say that Denney's is not one of those blinged out mega stores. It's now more than twice its original size, thanks to an addition in 2002, but overall it's quite modest in scale, though the space is well used. Someone with retail savvy laid out the store's floor plan, with display racks and cases positioned at angles that lead the browser seamlessly from

one area to the next. However, should you visit Denney's with a determined goal in mind, neon signs vividly point out the separate departments such as parts, accessories and service. Considering what I'd heard about Denney's stand-out service, that's the sign I headed for.

I was led that direction by another greeter, this one four-legged and furry, the proverbial shop dog, Zeus, who escorted me from the parts counter to the service department — where we encountered his cohort, Emily. I later learned that both dogs were taken in by Denney's after being abandoned, and their presence is further evidence of the attitude here: kindness prevails.

So does professionalism. Service is housed in an add-on section of the building that's restricted to the techs and their superiors. Customers are met at the door, where a service writer takes their info, begins the paperwork and takes possession of the motorcycle. This process reminded me of leaving a treasured pet at the vet's office,

probably in part because the Zeus and Emily effect, but mainly because of the concern and care exhibited by the service writer.

General manager Amanda Stehle says it's no accident. "We're passionate about animal rights, and our biggest annual fund-raiser is Hogs For Dogs, now in its fifth year. We have over \$14,000 in corporate sponsorships for this year's event and hope to raise a total of over \$25,000," she said. A recent recipient of a local business award entitled "20 under 30" Amanda is a hands-on manager. In fact, when we talked, she was helping her staff tend to 20-some visitors from Norway making a route 66 trek [the original highway runs just to the north]. She also wisely credits her staff for the dealership's success. "Your staff is paramount, and good morale is vital. If you trust your people, they'll do the right

thing." And that's not all. "It's all in how you treat people. We're fair and honest with our staff and with our customers. Your customers can tell if the staff is cohesive, and they respect it," she said. A 2007 Bronze Bar & Shield Award, the dealership's first, is emblematic of this strategy's success.

Owned by Mark Denney, the dealership started in Ft. Smith, Ark., in 1976, and they opened the Springfield, Missouri store in 1989, eventually selling the Ft. Smith store. Denney's is located on the outskirts of Springfield, allowing riders to escape to the backroads almost immediately upon leaving the parking lot. And there are impressive riding roads to be found in almost every direction. This is Ozark Mountain country, where lakes, river valleys and national forests abound.

The staff is especially proud of a recently completed custom bike built for local hero, University of Nebraska grad, and former NFL player Grant Wistrom. Using only the frame, trans and wiring harness of the donor Fat Boy that Wistrom bought in his college





days, they created a one-off, full-blown custom that reflects Wistrom's career.

"It's the most extreme custom we've built," said Amanda. And though the staff is proud of the custom work, they were guided, even in this, by the goal to keep every bike they work on functional and reliable. "Riding is about having fun. That's what our customers are coming to Denney's for, and that's what we strive to provide."

"It comes down to good business practices and good people," said Amanda. Sounds simple, right? The best — and toughest — things usually do. ↵

