

ROUTE 422 Business Advisor

OCTOBER 2023

Serving the Route 422, 100, 202, and Route 30 Corridors in Montgomery, Chester and Berks Counties.

CJ's TIRE & AUTOMOTIVE



Paul "Skip" Levengood, Sr.,
Paul Levengood, Jr. and
Haley Levengood (Paul's son).

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CJ's Tire & Automotive



By Kathy Hunt

Companies and consumers often cite the term “good customer service” as something that they seek to achieve. With articles, books, podcasts, and classes devoted to this topic, it has become a universally desired experience. So, what exactly is customer service and what makes for a good or bad customer service experience? In a July 2023 article, *Forbes* magazine defined it as “the support and assistance given before, during and after customers purchase a product or service.” The article broke down the essentials of customer service, including interacting with customers, answering questions, and resolving issues and complaints. As obvious and straightforward as those tasks may sound, some businesses struggle to carry them out. Failure to do so can have dire results. In 2020, *Forbes* carried out a study indicating that 96 percent of customers would stop shopping at or using a business if they found better customer service elsewhere.



PHOTOS BY STYLISH IMAGES



One company that doesn't fumble with customer interactions is the independently owned and operated CJ's Tire & Automotive. Headquartered in Birdsboro, Berks County, this family-run business has made exemplary customer service a top priority since 1971. Paul "Skip" Levengood Sr. started CJ's with the belief that people should receive better customer service than what he had experienced at local tire shops. Today, Levengood Sr. serves as the chair of CJ's, while his son Paul and grandson Haley focus on day-to-day operations.

MISSION TO TREAT CUSTOMERS RIGHT

Customer service was so important to Levengood Sr. that he included it as part of CJ's mission statement.

"We break the mission statement down into three parts," explains Leanne Bolger, CJ's Sr. Director of Marketing. "The first is to provide excellent customer service. We are dedicated to doing this." Bolger replaced Bill Bainbridge, vice president of marketing and business development, who recently retired.

Bolger noted that CJ's has several staff members who devote their time to responding to online reviews on Google, Yelp, and other sites, answering customer questions and addressing issues. "We have an internal process we use to investigate reviews that are under five stars or indicate customers are unhappy," she said. "We will reach out to these customers directly and try to rectify the situation. We train our employees to see an issue as an opportunity to be better."

To further enhance customer experience, CJ's features a "customer touch point" at each of its 17 retail locations in Berks, Chester, Montgomery, and Lancaster Counties. It has tried to eliminate desks, replacing them with pods that are more approachable and visitor friendly, and it requires staff to greet every person who enters one of its locations. Before interacting with consumers, sales staff are trained on the latest tire and automotive technology so that they can pass this education and advice along to customers. The staff works to ensure that anyone visiting CJ's feels not only welcomed but also valued.

BOOSTING CUSTOMER SERVICE THROUGH REWARDS PROGRAMS

CJ's further emphasizes customer service through its rewards programs. With Loyalty Rewards, individual consumers earn points back as a percentage of every dollar that they spend. Accrued points can be applied to anything sold at CJ's, including tires and service. The Loyalty Rewards program includes monthly promotional deals, such as \$10 off a car inspection or special tire financing, and free enrollment bonuses.

Customers should remember that Loyalty Rewards points must be used on future purchases and are not redeemable

for cash. Also, commercial, fleet, and government vehicles are excluded from the loyalty program.

Commercial vehicle owners reap rewards in CJ's Commercial Advantage Program. Aimed at helping fleet owners know and control their costs, Commercial Advantage includes discount pricing on tires and vehicle repair and maintenance, such as parts and labor. These discounts apply not only to a company's commercial vehicles but also to its employees' personal automobiles, enabling both a business and its employees to save money.

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COVER STORY

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The program gives customized pricing on automotive maintenance and keeps maintenance records so that service reminders can be emailed in a timely fashion.

This commitment to positive customer experience has paid off. In 2023, CJ's Tire & Automotive won the *Berks County People's Choice Award* for the ninth consecutive year.

Although it began as a tire shop, CJ's Tire & Automotive has evolved into a much larger enterprise. As its name indicates, the business has expanded into automotive service and repair to its offerings and developed a strong business-to-business (B2B) and consumer client base. Today, small to mid-sized businesses take their fleets to CJ's not only for tires but also scheduled maintenance. In 2022, roughly 15 percent of CJ's customers were B2B and included such professionals as electricians and building contractors.



A PLEDGE FOR EMPLOYEE EXCELLENCE

The second part of CJ's mission statement focuses on bettering its employees, helping them to grow and achieve their full potential. "We are dedicated to our employees and want to develop career opportunities for them,"

Bolger said. "We bring in employees not on a skill set but on a positive attitude and good smile. We feel that we can teach them what they need to know in the business and continually build on that so that they don't just get a job, they get a career."

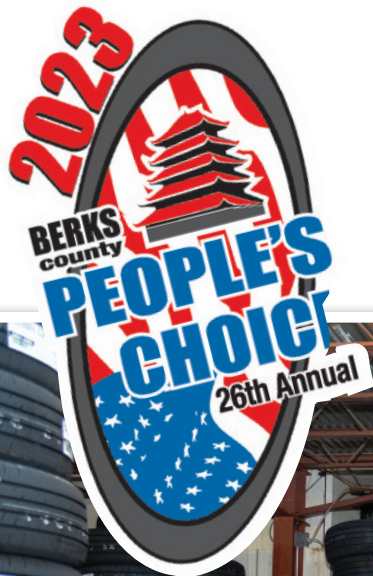
CJ's employs more than 200 individuals at its 17 locations, working in such

departments as retail sales and service, supply chain, accounting, and administration. To keep its large staff up to date on the latest automotive and tire trends and technologies, the company provides in-house training through "CJ's University." In existence for approximately eight years, CJ's University classes are led by senior technicians as well as outside instructors.

CJ's adheres to the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certification and pays for outside training and certification for its employees. Technicians also take self-study courses to advance and become ASE-certified and pass state emissions qualifications.

Along with educational opportunities, CJ's presents helpful tips, free Reading Phillies tickets, and employee recognition in its quarterly company newsletter. "We have an employee spotlight where we recognize one person who may have gotten a promotion, is new to the company, or had a milestone or major life event," Bolger said. "It gives the rest of the company a chance to get to know who they are personally."

The company also uses Nectar employee recognition software to recognize and reward hardworking employees with online shout-outs and points. Accrued points can be cashed in for gift cards to an assortment of national retailers and restaurants. Yet another compensation comes from CJ's employee apparel shop. During the first month of each quarter, it offers a 20 percent discount.



COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY THROUGH CJ'S CARES

CJ's commitment to the surrounding communities is so entrenched that the company made community service the third and final part of its mission statement. "We believe in giving back to the local community and do this through our CJ's Cares initiative," Bolger said. "Every year, we choose four to five local charities and collect money in our stores for them. We also match one dollar for every tire sold."

In 2022, the company raised over \$30,000 for such organizations as the Pennsylvania Breast Cancer Coalition and Animal Rescue League of Berks County, both of which are frequent beneficiaries of CJ's Cares. It also supports the pediatric cancer charity Alex's Lemonade Stand, Special Olympics Pennsylvania, Ronald McDonald House Charities, Helping Harvest Fresh Food Bank, and Noah's Ark Rescue Project and Sanctuary, among other nonprofits.

"Each November, we do food bank collections and let each county where we have stores choose where we donate in that county," Bolger said.

SEASONAL SAVINGS AND OTHER GOOD THINGS

Another gift that CJ's gives to the region is its annual super sale. Held in November, this is the company's largest tire sale of the year and offers deep discounts on tires in stores and online. The event runs from November 15 to November 30, 2023, and is promoted on the radio, through direct mail and email, and on the company's website, cjtire.com. Think of it as an early holiday present and treat yourself, your business, or your loved ones to new tires before winter.

Along with the yearly sale and ongoing tire rebates, CJ's features VIP discounts for active or retired members of the military, police, firefighters and other first responders and senior citizens aged 65 years or



older. In the fall and spring, CJ's has several preventive maintenance packages to prepare drivers and their vehicles for the upcoming season. Information on these discounts and special offers can be found online and in print.

To make purchasing tires and service as seamless as possible, CJ's has set up several payment options for its customers. Those who have the electronic money transfer service PayPal can pay online with it. Customers who prefer a buy now/pay later plan can sign up for Affirm and pay for their purchases over time without late fees. They can likewise apply for and use a Goodyear, Bridgestone, or Continental/General Tire/Synchrony credit card. Traditional financing and lease- to-own plans are available through Koalafi, which was formerly known as West Creek Financial. Information about these payment options can also be found on the company's website.

GETTING READY FOR WINTER AND BEYOND

If you're purchasing tires at the end of fall or start of winter, you may wonder what type of tire to buy. Should you invest two sets of tires — winter tires for the snowy months and all-season for the rest of year? Do you need to switch from all-season to winter tires or can you get away with one type year-round?

CJ's carries and endorses a newer cold-weather product, the all-weather tire. Containing a different rubber compound than all-season tires, the all-weather tire pairs the firm grip of a traditional winter tire with the durability of an all-season tire. It performs well year-round in all types of weather. Unless you drive in extreme winter conditions that call for snow chains, all-weather tires afford you both safety and convenience.

Generally, winter tires last for up to 20,000 miles. All-season and all-weather tires can last for up to 70,000 miles before needing to be replaced. Premium all-weather tires and premium all-season tires are priced similarly. Manufacturers of all-season tires, such as Bridgestone, Firestone, Continental, and General, produce all-weather tires as well.

Beyond tires, CJ's addresses a multitude of automotive needs, including oil changes; brake or cooling system repairs; vehicle alignment; belt, hose, air filter, or battery replacement; tune-ups; scheduled maintenance; steering and suspension system service; and state emissions and inspection.

Whether you're in need of automotive service, new tires, or guidance on how to keep your vehicle roadworthy, you'll receive sound advice and top-notch customer service at CJ's Tire & Automotive. Consult CJ's website, cjtire.com, or the sidebar for a location near you.

CJ'S TIRE AND AUTOMOTIVE, PROVIDING 17 LOCATIONS IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Birdsboro: 91 Ben Franklin Highway West, (Route 422 West) Birdsboro, Pennsylvania 19508 **(610) 582-4266**

Fairless Hills: 127 Lincoln Highway, Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania 19030 **(267) 580-5660**

Kimberton: 305 Coldstream Road, Kimberton, Pennsylvania 19442 **(610) 933-5984**

King of Prussia: 180 W. Church Road, King of Prussia, Pennsylvania 19406 **(484) 864-5005**

Lansdale: 735 E. Main St., Lansdale, Pennsylvania 19446 **(267) 641-9010**

Leesport: 343 Hafer Drive, Leesport, Pennsylvania 19533 **(610) 926-0400**

Limerick: 1405 S. Township Line Road, Limerick, Pennsylvania 19468 **(610) 409-0400**

Lionville: 210 Eagleview Boulevard, Exton, Pennsylvania 19341 **(610) 524-1002**

Lititz: 4 Copperfield Circle, Lititz, Pennsylvania 17543 **(717) 625-3700**

Mechanicsburg: 5306 Baron Court, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania 17050 **(717) 620-2360**

New Holland: 728 East Main Street, New Holland, Pennsylvania 17557 **(717) 354-3193**

Orwigsburg: 641 South Route 61, Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania 17972 **(570) 366-8567**

Pottstown/North Coventry: 18 Glocker Way, Pottstown, Pennsylvania 19465 **(610) 705-5501**

West Chester: 1309 Wilmington Pike, West Chester, Pennsylvania 19382 **(610) 455-0400**

West Lawn: 30 South Dwight Street, West Lawn, Pennsylvania 19609 **(610) 670-5922**

Whitehall: 3699 Eberhart Road, Whitehall, Pennsylvania 18052 **(610) 433-9696**

York: 2814 E. Market Street, York, Pennsylvania 17402 **(717) 747-1709**