

# Female service station owners: 'we love to go to work'

By Lynn Mongar

"Here are your tools. You can work over there. And, if you need any help, just ask," says a petite blonde woman named Terry.

This "service station"—Amazon Amoco—at 1235 South 11th St., is operated by Kathy Allen and Deborah Stephen, and their "driveway monitor," Lucky, a golden retriever. Lucky is also the station's guard dog.

The station rents its hydraulic lift to customers for \$3.75 an hour and a \$10 deposit. Other tools rent for \$2 an hour plus the deposit. In addition to tool rentals the station attendants sell batteries, tires and oil.

Stephen, 24, and Allen, 26, said they were tired of working for other people and dissatisfied with their work in local social programs.

"We get up now and we love to go to work," Allen said.

**BEFORE BUYING** the business, neither of the women had any formal training in car repairs. A keen interest in business and cars, and the financial backing of a friend, Dick Salem, owner of Salem Oil Company, has enabled them to stay in business for two-and-a-half years.

"I'd been working on my car a lot. And, I thought we could show other people how to do it," Allen said.

Stephen said both women took a night class in foreign car tune-up when the business first opened.

"Most of it we already knew, but the course familiarized us with terms," Allen said.

The idea of women running a gas station appeals to Allen and Stephen as something creative and different. "I love to amaze people," Stephen said. "It's great to be a tiny woman (5' 3") and work around powerful tools and huge tires," she said.

Stephen said the duo learned to handle the equipment easily, because it's "just leverage."

Allen said the women have also learned how to change oil and tires without getting dirty, thus enabling them to wear white sun dresses during summer months.

"IT'S A BLOW OUT," she said, no pun intended. "People come in and see women attendants in white dresses and have their gas figured in liters," she said.

Allen said constant exposure to the elements has made them "heartier."

"We're really strong and healthy," they said.

Stephen said the women wear layers of clothes during cold winter days. Typical winter attire includes long underwear, two pairs of jeans, flannel shirts, sweaters and a coat.

"The layers are versatile. You can shed them when you need to," Allen said.

"I wore a load of laundry every day," Stephen added.

Unfortunately, the station and the women have been exposed to harsh conditions unrelated to weather.

Last week the station was robbed and vandalized. No one was in the station at the time. Allen and Stephen recently moved into an apartment next door to the station to avert robberies and vandalism.

**THE WOMEN SAID** they used to be frightened and would schedule two people to work night shifts.

"I used to think I'd be either robbed or raped," Allen said.

She said she had to "reverse" the situation, so that she was in control and confident of herself when she questioned a male customer's intentions.

The women enjoy the rapport that has developed between the students and themselves. And, Stephen said students provide about \$100 a day in concession business.

"I think we're still in social work with the kids being around," she added.

The women said they plan to expand their talents and business interests to operating restaurant.

"It wouldn't be an ordinary restaurant," Allen said.

"We're intelligent, creative women," she said. "We know we can do anything."



Photo by Jerry McBride

Deborah Stephen shows her skills at fixing a tire without getting dirty.

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