



Nathan Finholdt owner of Finholdt Repair located at 435 26th Street NE, Owatonna.

Finholdt Repair

Nathan Finholdt has been repairing cars and trucks since 1996, and he's been the proud owner of Finholdt Repair since 2004. In 2017, he made the jump from operating out of his garage to purchasing a vacant convenience store on 26th Street in Owatonna. Since then, he's been steadily working on improving the building and its surrounding lot, but his ongoing work was delayed this year as COVID-19 spread through the state.

While Finholdt was able to continue offering his services through no-contact options, such as customers dropping their cars off at night and leaving a set of spare keys, he said business still slowed down greatly because people weren't driving as much and didn't feel comfortable spending as much money. He said it was also challenging to stay safe while he worked, since he came into so much contact with surfaces that other people had touched.

"You think about jumping into somebody else's vehicle, and I don't want to bring anything home to my family that somebody's vehicle had," he said. "You're cleaning steering wheels, wiping down door handles... It's getting easier to deal with, because it's now the new normal. It is what it is. It's [still] kind of a scary deal, but the cars still need to be fixed."

According to Finholdt, the Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce

and Tourism was "greatly appreciated" during the past several months. He said the Chamber gave him cleaning supplies, answered his questions and was available any time he needed advice.

"They've been more than willing to help anybody out," he said. "They've gone above and beyond what they needed to do. If you ever had a question, you could call them for an answer. I think it's a good group of people there, and they follow up what they're supposed to do."

Finholdt also received one of the Chamber's JumpStart Owatonna grants, which he used to help fix his parking lot—a project that had been in the works before COVID-19 upended his plans. "It's not cheap to re-asphalt a parking lot, and then all of a sudden, you don't have any work to do," he said. "I did set aside some money, but then there was a lot of cleaning supplies [to buy]—the sneeze guards, the masks that you provide to customers, gloves..."

Looking forward, Finholdt said the situation is still "definitely scary," but there's nothing to do but continue working.

"You don't know what tomorrow's going to bring," he said. "It's definitely uncertain times. You've got to take the good with the bad and see what tomorrow brings."

by Grace Brandt, special project for the People's Press

jump start!

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