

# Auto & HOME IMPROVEMENT



March 23, 2024

A supplement of

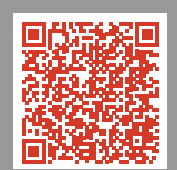
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# Local body shop combines experience with care

BY ROBBY TUCKER  
rtucker@prairiepress.net

After forcing an old push mower over acres of a sun-baked incline in the dead of summer, few things are more deflating than a mechanical failure. As a young man, however, Eric Strandberg looked forward to breakdowns and busts.

Once the engine on his old 19-inch mower sputtered and died, Strandberg would haul it to the base of a shade tree behind his childhood home in Charleston, Ill. He and his father, Clifford Eugene Strandberg, would disassemble the engine, find the faulty part and stroll down the street to the Western Auto store to find a replacement. After fixing the issue, Strandberg would promptly return to his work – a disciple of his father's strong work ethic and prudence.

"Dad knew the difference between needs and wants," said Strandberg. "Although they could afford it, a rider mower was out of the question."

It was under that shade tree Strandberg's love for machinery was born.

Before long, dragsters became the subject of Strandberg's curiosity. At 10 years old, a family friend offered Strandberg a job at the Coles County Dragway.

"I've been a lifelong drag race fan and worked at the local drag strip," Strandberg explained, smiling. "I was a bonafide car nut at an early

age."

Trips to the concession stand, the excitement on the track and the smell of rubber made the experience "heaven" for the young motorhead, who eventually started sweeping floors at the T.A. Bacon Auto Body Shop in Charleston. Before long, he worked at several body shops whenever they needed help.

Strandberg did anything he could to find work and, after briefly considering medical school and a career as a surgeon, he decided to follow his heart.

"I made the choice to stick with cars because it's what I knew and what I loved," he explained.

Strandberg continued to work in several shops in Charleston before making his way to the Shanks Motor Company in Terre Haute, Ind., where Strandberg spent 22 years painting vehicles. After picking up evening hours and weekend shifts at several other shops to support his young family, Strandberg received some of the best advice he ever heard from a friend and customer.

"As much as you work and as hard as you work, you should work for yourself," Strandberg recalled. "It was very good advice from a very successful businessman who saw something in me."

He took the advice and never looked back,

opening up shop in Paris in 2006 after declining an offer to have his own shop funded in Terre Haute. Strandberg Auto Rebuilding Inc., his current operation, is the culmination of years of hard work.

"I did what it took, and it took a lot," he said, later adding, "If you work at something hard enough, you can make anything work."

Since that time, Strandberg has brought on Bill Douglas and Andy Patrick to help in the shop. The duo have worked with Strandberg for 10 and six years, respectively.

Strandberg and his associates pride themselves on their commitment to excellence and their willingness to see each job through to completion – a trait he inherited from his parents.

Strandberg's father worked nights as a pressman with a family of four before earning his doctorate from Texas A&M University. He went on to accept a position as a professor of Industrial Arts and Technology at Eastern Illinois University, where he taught for 37 years. Strandberg's late mother, Twila Strandberg, went to medical school at the University of Illinois, balancing her household duties with college courses on her way to becoming a doctor.

Strandberg's father hailed from a lineage of tough, blue-collar farmers in the state of Kansas. In addition to the occasional tornado, his family endured the turbulent agricultural climate resulting from the Dust Bowl and had to give up some of their land to the government during World War II as part of the war effort.



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

Bill Douglas, left, has worked with Eric Strandberg for 10 years and Andy Patrick, right, has been helping at auto shop for six years. The three mechanics pride themselves on their commitment to excellence and their willingness to see each job through to completion.



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

Car enthusiast Eric Strandberg got his first job at the Coles County Dragway when he was only 10 years old. Since then he has built a career restoring and repairing vehicles, opening his own shop in 2006.



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

Preserving the tradition of locally owned body shops, Eric Strandberg places emphasis on getting the job done right, the first time, while caring for his clients and their cars.

“That’s hard when you’re trying to make a living off the land,” Strandberg explained, adding, “That’s how I became self-reliant... I have great respect for my parents... I give him (dad) all the credit for how this came to be for me.”

Today, the example of hard work and dedication set by his family shines through every hood, door and frame Strandberg works on. The lifelong car enthusiast specializes in collision repair and will do whatever he can to get the job done.

“It (the work) better be right when they come, because I have to stand eye-to-eye with them,” said Strandberg of his motivation at work. “Everyone who comes here, that’s what they like.”

After decades in the industry, Strandberg’s commitment to offering honest labor at a reasonable cost, his love for anything with an engine and his desire to preserve the tradition of locally owned body shops like the ones he grew up in keep him energized.

“I’ll work as long as somebody wants me to work on their car. Every morning I am still excited to come to work,” said Strandberg, who later added, “I’m the last generation of body shop owners to operate in this manner.”

Because of his extensive experience, Strandberg has plenty of tips on how to keep vehicles running smoothly and looking sharp for as long as possible, as well as tips on what to do when you do have to call a shop.

#### STRANDBERG’S CAR TIPS:

- Change oil regularly. Ensuring your vehi-

cle’s oil supply is refreshed regularly can add thousands of miles to its life span.

- Keep an eye on your tires. Ensuring tires are inflated to the proper pressure ensures a safe, smooth experience on the road.

- Repair parts as needed. Waiting to repair a faulty or malfunctioning car part can result in further failure and potentially compromise other interconnected parts of your vehicle.

- Wait to repair bumpers. Often, bumper covers are an exception to the rule. Aesthetic damage can wait to be repaired if the vehicle is going to be an everyday driver.

- Hand wash and dry your vehicle. Delicately hand washing and drying your car or truck with a towel or shammy cloth ensures harmful minerals and residue are less likely to remain on your vehicle. Road salt, a common sight on winter roads, can cause car exteriors to rust if not properly washed away.

- Set a low deductible on your comprehensive coverage. Comprehensive insurance coverage protects vehicle owners from random, spontaneous events that can damage your car, such as falling limbs or rock damage. Paying a small amount extra on your monthly rate can save a lot of headaches down the road if it means damage to your vehicle is mostly or fully covered.

- Use a local insurance agent. Strandberg recommends shopping for insurance locally, so drivers can get answers to their questions reliably and quickly, without having to wait on the line for an answer from a call center.

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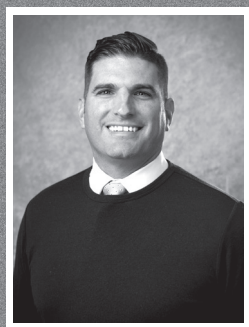
Eric Strandberg credits his strong work ethic and sense of determination to his father, who taught him to become self-reliant and work hard. After decades in the industry, Strandberg’s commitment to offering honest labor at a reasonable cost continues to energize his shop.

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# Use flowers and landscaping to elevate your home

BY BETHANY WAGONER  
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As the air grows warmer and the dangers of frost pass, the grass in Edgar County is slowly returning to green and new life is sprouting outside of every door. With crisp breezes and ultraviolet rays of sunshine becoming more frequent, it is no surprise so

many residents are eager to get outdoors and embrace mother nature while taking on a project.

The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) claims professional landscaping can increase a home's price tag 15 percent to 20 percent more at the time of resale. However, pruning one's land does

not only add to the amount on a price tag, it also offers an abundance of benefits for homeowners and renters who are eager to escape the ever-present chaos of Midwestern winters and embrace a handful of glorious spring days.

A boost in curb appeal can quickly transform the general attractiveness of a house from the sidewalk to a prospective buyer, neighbor and the family returning to a dwelling every day after work and school.

In many ways, landscaping a yard is a home improvement project that can improve morale before anyone steps foot inside of a dwelling. Simple tasks like mowing a lawn, sweeping steps, trimming weeds and planting a flower bed are tasks all members of a family can gain satisfaction and pleasure from.

Two local sisters have made a business out of planting and pruning a stunning variety of flowers. Grace Joseph and Molly Joseph are the brains and brawn behind Ginger Blossoms, an Edgar County flower farm of-

fering monthly flower subscriptions and a host of flower garden instruction.

Molly, the self-titled flower farmer of Ginger Blossoms, spends her garden-free time as the department chair and assistant professor at Ivy Tech Community College in Terre Haute for Advanced Automation and Robotics, Industrial Technology and Smart Manufacturing and Digital Integration.

Grace helps in the garden when she can, but says her main duty is Ginger Blossom's social media management. She spends the majority of her time in St. Louis as a grad student working at an accounting firm, assisting with taxes.

The sisters are assisted by several family members, including pups Ruby and Lucy, for planting and harvesting.

The florists kicked off the year planting a variety of ranunculus, anemone, poppies, eucalyptus, tulips and lisianthus in their garden. Lisianthus, endearingly called lissies by the sisters, are a favorite of floral designers and flower admirers alike.



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Grace Joseph is one of two sisters behind the scenes of Ginger Blossoms, a flower farm in Paris. Grace spends the majority of her time in St. Louis as a grad student working at an accounting firm, assisting with taxes.

The ruffled petals and elegant buds come in many colors and their delicate-looking blooms are known not only for their beauty, but also for their ability to hold up as a cut flower in the bouquets the twosome craft.

Newer varieties of lisianthus are bred to be dwarf, making them ideal for a home garden setting.

Last fall, the duo planted tulip and daffodil bulbs. The perennial plants needed around 14 weeks of cool temperatures before they could flower.

Planted around five inches below soil level to promote long roots, the sisters say the bulbs needed extra time to grow roots before entering dormancy.

The secret to the beautiful fields of flowers the florists prune is in the soil beneath them.

"The soil's composition is absolutely crucial for healthy plants," Molly Joseph said. "When we first started our flower farm, we sent our soil off to Waypoint Analytical (WA) for soil testing."

She explains that the report sent back to them by WA showed a major deficiency in nitrogen and potassium, but had a great amount of phosphorus.

"Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium are the dynamic trio of soil nutrients," Molly said. "(The trio) of plant nutrition is working behind the scenes to make sure flowers bloom with vibrant colors and beautiful blossoms."

Nitrogen is the main ingredient in chlorophyll, the substance that helps plants turn sunlight into energy through photosynthesis. Plants lacking nitrogen will show yellowing on their leaves and on the fruits or flowers they produce.

"Nitrogen is like the superhero of plant growth, making leaves lush and green," the flower farmer said. "When you see those vibrant leaves soaking up the sun, you can thank nitrogen for its role in their green glory."

Molly also says that Phosphorus is the unsung hero of the trio.

"This nutrient (Phosphorus) might not get as much attention, but it's just as important," she said. "Think of it as the secret sauce that makes flowers bloom with confidence."

Phosphorus helps plants store and use energy by giving them the oomph they need to grow strong and produce vegetables, fruits or flowers.

The final ingredient in the magic mud trio is potassium. Molly says that in addition to keeping a plant's roots healthy, it aids in the production of vibrant flowers and fruits.

"Potassium lends plants resilience in the face of adversity, enabling them to endure stressors such as drought," she said.

"Next time you're admiring a field of wildflowers or a bouquet of roses, remember to give a nod to the soil and its amazing nutrients," Grace said. "After all, they're the real MVPs of the floral world."

Before planting anything in the soil, the twosome collected seeds from their plant's blossoms. Seeds, according to the sister, can be easily harvested by simply shaking them loose from the plant and into a hand.

"Be sure to properly store them - most seeds like a dark, cool, dry place," Grace warned.



Special to The Prairie Press

Working as the Department chair and assistant professor at Ivy Tech Community College in Terre Haute for Advanced Automation and Robotics, Industrial Technology and Smart Manufacturing and Digital Integration, Molly Joseph is also an expert gardener crafting beautiful blooms at Ginger Blossoms, a flower farm in Paris.



Special to The Prairie Press

Dynamic duo, Grace Joseph and Molly Joseph, are the brains and brawn behind Edgar County flower farm Ginger Blossoms. The sisters often get the assistance of their family members to plant and prune the large variety of flowers they grow and deliver.



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A floral subscription service offers floral enthusiasts the opportunity to receive a bouquet of locally grown blooms bi-weekly or monthly throughout the late spring and summer months directly from Edgar County's floral farm, Ginger Blossoms.

The gardeners says seeds collected from a plant will likely offer a different color of flower due to the pollination process.

"Each type of flower will go to seed at different times," Grace explained. "If you want to collect seeds from your flowers it is important to check on them often. The Old Farmer's Almanac has some great guidance on collecting seeds for various different types of flowers."

The sisters are gearing up to join the Downtown Paris Farmer's Market this summer, a perfect location for them to share their beautiful blooms and their wealth of garden knowledge. This year kicks off the flower farm's first full season with more than 250 snapdragons, among dozens of other vibrant blooms in the soil and beginning to sprout.

Flower enthusiasts can discover the delight of the budding beauties with hassle-free floral rotations directly from the sister's farm by way of a floral subscription. Ginger blossoms' floral subscription service offers a variety of options and price points tailored to suit any preferences with options for delivery or pick up directly at the farm.

More information is available online at <https://gingerblossomsflorist.square.site>.



Special to The Prairie Press

Molly Joseph, left, and her sister Grace Joseph, right, are the gingers behind Ginger Blossoms, a flower farm located in Paris. The sisters grow a variety of stunning blooms and share their garden knowledge in monthly newsletters.

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# PHS teacher shares upcycling skills with students

BY AUBREY WILSON  
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Carriann Pounds has been a teacher at Paris High School for many years – in this time she has undertaken many art projects with her students.

Varying from graphite, charcoal, paints and ceramics, her lessons take many different forms. A different project is repurposing furniture pieces by upcycling.

Upcycling, or the process of taking something old and repurposing it, has been around forever. With prices rising, it is becoming utilized more frequently.

Not only does upcycling reduce waste, it also saves money. Being able to repurpose and reupholster old furniture and decorations can easily save hundreds of dollars. It is an improvement project that anyone and everyone can do. The word upcycling first came from a German engineer, Reiner Pliz, who believed the sister term recycling diminished the value of perfectly usable products. The word did

not become mainstream until 2002.

Upcycling furniture creates an activity for families of all shapes and sizes. Aside from personal benefits, repurposing old goods is more sustainable than purchasing new ones.

In years past, Pounds has utilized upcycling in her projects with the students. This coming April, Pounds plans on attempting an old project with her students.

The project has not been attempted in quite some time, but she hopes to help her students find old pieces of furniture, such as stools or nightstands, and upcycle them into something new and original.

In the past, students have gone to second hand or thrift stores to find their items. According to Pounds, upcycling is not only about repurposing, but redesigning as well.

Many fashion brands and designers themselves have taken a more sustainable approach to modern clothing. Opting to use biodegradable, or reused fabrics and hardware.

This year, once students have picked their objects, they will redesign and repur-

pose them, and display the pieces in the school for an art show.



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# Thrift shop finds make for budget-friendly decorating

BY GRETCHEN STONE  
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For new homeowners and decorators working on a budget, a big find at a local thrift store can make a project a happy experience, not a financial headache. Inflation has made new furniture sets and everyday goods twice as expensive, compared with five years ago, putting them out of range for some shoppers.

In their place, a used item that is carefully cleaned or restored can meet a household's needs. Thrift store finds can hide among the menagerie at garage or estate sales, traditional thrift stores and consignment or pawn stores, and online.

Local options in Paris and nearby include:  
■ The Paris Resale Shop on 150, open since September 1998, it is a small shop filled with appliances, especially washers and dryers, refrigerators and freezers.

Other finds include a small section of tools, video games and DVDs and a few pieces of furniture. It is not a pawn shop, like the other stores on this list, but the shop buys and sells merchandise from individual customers.

Owner Scott Creech says they buy, sell and trade. The store is open five days a week, at 10 a.m.

A smaller-sized store, the shop is a nice, quick place to pop in to check for anything new.

For those who have a big project that could go in many different directions, starting to collect big furniture pieces first offers a variety of changes to add bargain pieces in along the way.

■ In Clinton, Barnums Emporium is a 7,000-square-foot store with a wide selection of furniture, lamps, tools and more. Its hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays.

Barnums opened in 2000, and owner David Wright also owns the building across the street for merchandise storage, though it's not open to the public.

Wright said he buys entire households, and once in a while goes to an auction.

"My eyesight isn't good anymore, I've been on Main Street 53 years," he said.

His first store, across the street, was a Goodwill before he bought it. He bought his current storefront in 2012, from a former Woolworth manager who owned two locations of Horney's, one in Clinton and one on the west side of the square in Paris.

When shopping, he advises customers to remember that an odd find you do not need today might be of great use tomorrow.

"I think utilitarian things are the smartest," Wright said. "Going to a big box store and spending \$15 to \$20 for a garden rake can be replaced by a thrift store find for \$4.97, a lamp with shade can be purchased for half the price of the shade alone."

Wright regularly buys from individuals,

when people bring things in.

"Too much month left and not enough money, and they need diapers or cigarettes," he said, describing his opportunities to make purchases. "Or a customer buys a new washer and dryer, and brings in a good, but used set that has nothing wrong with it."

■ The Etc. Shoppe, at 141 E. Court St., in Paris, is open from 9 a.m. through 5

p.m., Wednesday through Saturday, and by appointment. Owner Mary Ann Creech bought it in September 2020 but has been in the thrifting business for 25 years, much of it with former husband Scott Creech.

The store is 5,085 square feet, with new mattresses and new and used furniture in the back. They sell in the store, on Facebook, Facebook Marketplace and on eBay.



Mary Ann Creech became the owner of E. Court Street's The Ect. Shop in September of 2020. The 5,085 square feet store sells new mattresses and new and used furniture, as well as a variety of odds and ends.

Jacob Scott/ The Prairie Press

Mary Ann Creech sells new and used merchandise she buys from auctions and storage units.

"Storage units are the most fun," Creech said.

Since COVID, all storage unit auctions are online, with bids based on a few pictures. The buyer has to clean out everything, and cannot use the storage facility's trash bins.

"You get the good, the bad and the ugly," she said.

Her most wild find? A grandfather's ashes, in a labeled urn. After finding the obituary online and tracing the grandson, she stopped in from Terre Haute to get his grandpa's ashes.

■ ReStores and Goodwills are other great

places to find great items for a home.

Every Goodwill store is its own unique universe. It might be stuffed to the brim with clothes and books, DVDs and unique collectibles, or it might be the one with the big furniture section in the back.

Terre Haute is home to both a Habitat for Humanity ReStore and more than one Goodwill, while Clinton also has a ReStore and several small home goods stores. ReStores are many times great places to find home renovation items, especially doors and windows.

During the summer, multiple family yard sales and garage sales, as well as estate sales, are fantastic ways to find big bargains too.



Special to The Prairie Press

A selection of used furniture and home decor items are available for bargain hunters inside The Etc. Shop located at 141 E. Court Street in Paris.

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