

Spitfire Automotive.

"At that time, you repaired or rebuilt everything," Richard Malinowski says. "There was no replacement of components. From the beginning, we also did tires, though it was limited."

Malinowski became involved in the industry early on, working in the product packaging and shipping departments for his father's business. During high school, he worked at an auto parts store, putting away stock, delivering parts and working in the machine shop – a job that lasted him most of the way through college.

When he was a senior at Northern Illinois University, studying business and taking automotive management training courses, his father gave him the opportunity to take the reins of the family business.

"At that time, my dad was heavily involved with rebuilding starters, regulators and generators – and one day in my fourth year of college, he handed me the keys to Spitfire and said, 'Here, take care of it,'" Malinowski recalls. "So, I was given the opportunity, whether I liked it or not."

SUCCESSFUL TURNAROUND

That was in 1967, when Malinowski then entered the most hard-working years of his life; when he took over, Spitfire Automotive's sales had become stagnant and profits were marginal.

"When I started out with the business, I had a pledge: Do whatever it takes to get the job done," Malinowski says. It took him eight years of 12-hour days, seven days a week, to bring the business back to being profitable.

"We changed everything around and rethought the whole process of repairing cars and selling automotive parts," Malinowski recalls. "We changed procedures in the way we did things and we became more of a specialized repair facility."

Since that time, Spitfire Automotive has employed technicians who are dedicated to a certain area of repairs – undercar, underhood, driveability, etc.

"We don't have techs who do everything," Malinowski notes.

Under his leadership, Spitfire Automotive's business grew from annual sales of \$150,000 to more than \$800,000 by 1974. That same year, the family moved the company to Oak Lawn, Ill., where it still stands today.

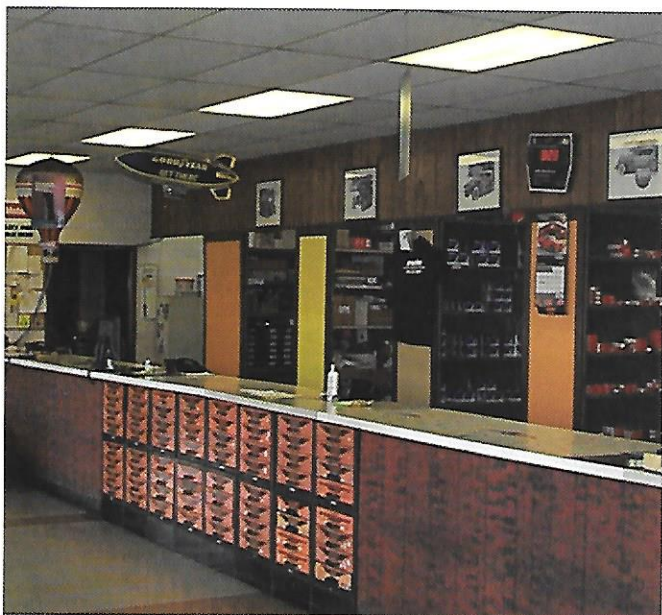
Though the new purpose-built facility offered resources Spitfire Automotive hadn't had before, including the best in testing and service equipment available, the 20-mile move into the suburbs essentially meant the dealership was starting from scratch.

"This time, it only took seven years of 12-hour days, seven days a week, to be profitable," Malinowski jokes.

CONTINUED EXPERTISE

Within Oak Lawn and surrounding communities – as well as within the tire and auto repair industry – Spitfire Automotive made a name for itself.

In 1987, ACDelco selected the shop as the first service center to test and administer its new independent automotive service program, the Delco Tech Program. According to Malinowski, the program provided factory



Building up Spitfire Automotive's business took hundreds of 12-hour days, and the effort and promotion hasn't stopped, whether its out-door signage or at-the-counter merchandising.

support in training, technical information, advertising and marketing support, and parts availability.

"It was a lot of hard work to get the program where it is today, the ACDelco Professional Service Center," he says. "I was a part of the advisory council for eight years and Spitfire is still a member of the program 28 years later."

Spitfire Automotive also is a member of several other organizations, including the AAA Approved Auto Repair program, National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence, Automotive Service Association of Illinois, International Automotive Technicians Network, RepairPal Certified shop program, and the Automotive Management Institute's management training program. The dealership also serves on Moraine Valley Community College's automotive advisory council.