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Tri-City Keeps Hopping During Shutdown

By Mark Sherry

Like many small businesses throughout the world, the doors to Tri-City Small Engine in New Holstein have been locked for the last several months because of the virus pandemic. That does not mean, however, that nothing has been happening behind those doors.

As a matter of fact, Tri-City Small Engine has been a beehive of activity. That is usually the case at this time of the year as people pull out their yard equipment and decide to get it tuned up or fixed for the season ahead, or they decide it is time for a new piece of equipment – perhaps something their stimulus check can help fund.



Josh, Scott, and Matt Buechel (l-r) - along with Rudy, of course - have made improvements to their Tri-City Small Engine showroom and shop and remained very busy during the pandemic shutdown.

But for Scott and Lori Buechel and sons Josh and Matt, the pandemic shutdown has only made one of their usual busy seasons even busier. With many people finding they have more free time at home, they have stepped up their lawn and garden efforts – and Tri-City Small Engine is a popular destination when equipment breaks down or does not work. In addition, Scott said a number of other repair shops in the region shuttered their businesses during the pandemic, bringing even more business to the New Holstein shop.

Broad service area

It was true long before the pandemic that Tri-City Small Engine – located at 2204 Calumet Dr. (STH 32/57) – serves an area greater than New Holstein, Kiel, and Chilton as its name implies. People have long been coming from Appleton, Manitowoc, Sheboygan, and beyond to have their equipment serviced by Tri-City Small Engine. Scott said, “We’re seeing people we’ve never seen before. I know a lot of shops in Fond du Lac and Sheboygan were closed completely. We’re seeing a lot more parts going out to people, too.” On that last note, some people do try to do their own repairs – those who are unsuccessful often bring their equipment and those parts in to Tri-City Small Engine.

The pandemic has impacted the business in some ways, Scott said, although he indicated the price of parts had started increasing even before the virus hit. The pandemic has caused the shipping of parts to be delayed – what used to arrive in a day now might take a week. We try to get it out as quick as we can,” Scott said.

There are multiple reasons why Tri-City Small Engine continues to be the destination for so many people in need of equipment service, not the least of which is their many years of experience in getting the job done right. Having both formal and on-the-job training in small engine repair, Scott and Josh have just about seen and done it all in their field.

Services all makes, models

Tri-City Small Engine also services all makes and models of equipment whether or not it was purchased originally from them. Many sellers of new lawn and garden equipment do not do that. Scott said they are seeing a lot of Sheboygan and Manitowoc customers who purchased their equipment at “big box stores” but then cannot find anyone to service it when something goes wrong. He added that they are especially seeing a lot of John Deere equipment coming in these days.

Tri-City Small Engine also provides pickup and delivery of equipment it services if the customer is unable to do so themselves.

One silver lining from the pandemic shutdown is that son Matt has been home more to help at the business. With one semester remaining in college before he earns his Bachelor's Degree, Matt has been helping to make improvements to the shop and showroom. In the past month or so, he has gutted the showroom, taking out the old carpeting on the floor and painting the interior.

An attractive new Mikita chainsaw display now fills the better part of one wall. Mikita also sells thousands of tools and accessories which customers can order at the store or online and have shipped to Tri-City Small Engine if they wish. An advantage of that is that the staff there sets up every piece of equipment they sell before giving it to the customer, showing them how it works and sending them home with something they can use immediately.

The showroom will be displaying Tri-City's remaining stock of riding and push mowers before making way later this year for the next batch of snowblowers. Scott said they had a good year of snowblower sales with only a few left as of a couple weeks ago. He said they had just sold another one as people look for off-season deals.

Tri-City Small Engine also continues to sell EGO battery-powered equipment, including trimmers, blowers, push mowers, and more. Josh said the trend toward battery-powered equipment continues to rise as battery and performance standards continue to improve. He said manufacturers are coming out with a zero-turn electric riding mower. EGO also has battery-powered snowblowers. Scott said he was wary of blowing snow with a battery blower – until he took one out on his front walk and was impressed with its power and performance.

Matt also is working to move Tri-City's parts room and move the office into the former parts room for Lori and others. It is all part of the busyness at Tri-City Small Engine – which is never lacking, even during a pandemic.