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## 'Ladies Start Your Engines' — Waukegan Tire counsels female customers

Jennifer Karpus, Tire Business staff

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(WAUKEGAN TIRE & SUPPLY CO. INC. PHOTO)

Waukegan Tire's Lori Johnson gives an underhood tour to some 'Ladies Start Your Engines' class participants.

WAUKEGAN, Ill. (Nov. 12, 2012) — **Waukegan Tire & Supply Co. Inc.** is no stranger to community initiatives, being a member or sponsor of various local and/or charitable groups. But one of its own employees has created a distinct initiative right under its roof.

Julie Scroggins, vice president and CFO of Waukegan Tire, founded **Tires & Heels** — a program that's Helping Educate and Empower Ladies on Auto Safety — to not only showcase why it is important for women to know at least the basic information about auto safety, but also serve as an outlet for them to learn.



Ms. Scroggins said she began working on Tires & Heels in 2009 and the program's website, [www.tiresandheels.com](http://www.tiresandheels.com),

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(WAUKEGAN TIRE & SUPPLY CO. INC. PHOTO)

Julie Scroggins, VP and CFO, Waukegan Tire

launched in early 2010, running as a sister site to Waukegan Tire's main page.

"It's more of an information site for our female customers," Ms. Scroggins told Tire Business.

"There is a lot of potential there to do even more. We are really just scratching at the surface."

One of the hands-on events that Tires & Heels conducts for its female clientele is Lori Johnson's "Ladies Start Your Engines" workshop. This course is offered two or three times a year at Waukegan Tire's store in Park City, Ill.

The dealership also has two locations in Waukegan and one in Grayslake, Ill. The course is not offered in those stores yet.

Ms. Scroggins said she learned about Ms. Johnson's workshops through her involvement on an automotive expert panel of Ask-Patty.com Inc.

"Waukegan Tire became (Ask Patty) accredited after enrolling in the program, agreeing to uphold the high standards expected of all 'Certified Female Friendly' locations and after successful completion of the training modules by our staff."

Ms. Scroggins said she was excited after speaking with Ms. Johnson about other events she had done around the country and thought it would be a great opportunity for Waukegan Tire — a sentiment that was shared with its management staff.

"She's really an expert at this.... She's got quite a wealth of experience," Ms. Scroggins said about Ms. Johnson. "She makes it fun."

Jody DeVere, founder of AskPatty.com — a website, blog and program that markets to women by providing automotive education to women consumers — spoke highly of Ms. Scroggins and the developments she has made with Waukegan Tire, which has been a certified client of AskPatty for nearly three years. She highlighted the various events they hold, along with the general, positive atmosphere created at the store.

"They have really taken the female-friendly activities to a high level," Ms. DeVere said.

Ms. Johnson has been an automotive technician for 24 years and said she enjoys her career since she has always liked to take things apart and see how they worked. She explained that it's possible the "auto gene" was passed down to her as both her father and grandfather worked at General Motors Corp.

On her mother's side, both her grandfather and his father were mechanics and owned a small repair shop, but both retired before she was born. However, she enjoyed hearing stories about when the shop first got a vehicle lift, though it was outside and could only be used when weather permitted.

Through her rich history, she decided to make this passion her own career. Ms. Johnson started the Ladies Start Your Engines program part-time in 2006 and expanded it as a full-time business in 2009, but said there still is room for expansion.

"It's still definitely in its growing stages," Ms. Johnson said about the business. She has traveled throughout the country to teach the course.

Various segments in the industry have shown interest in the course, which provides a general overview of the basics of auto care and maintenance, she said.

"I could teach the class in a parking lot," Ms. Johnson said, noting she uses a car rather than the equipment in shops for teaching.

"I try to touch on the main things people would see if they went in for service."

Ladies Start Your Engines is a hands-on two-hour course that, according to its website, covers the following:



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- How to check belts, fuses and how to replace wiper blades.

Ms. Scroggins said Waukegan Tire would like to expand the workshops to its other locations to make it easier for patrons to attend because of the great response it's had since starting the workshop in 2010.

"After leaving our workshops, we want women to feel empowered and confident that they know what to do in the event of an emergency situation," Ms. Scroggins said.

"When it comes to tires, they understand just how important they are, that they are the only thing between your car and the road and why it's so vital to maintain them properly."

The Tires & Heels program also has partnered with local Girl Scout troops since 2010 to educate younger generations about proper car care.

The girls complete a series of modules on various aspects of automotive awareness and safety, Ms. Scroggins said, and for older participants there are more hands-on tasks. Course work criteria are tailored for different age groups.

"One of the comments I remember was when one of the mothers called to tell me that her daughter checked tire pressure in both of their cars immediately after the workshop and that she was very disappointed that her parents weren't already doing this," Ms. Scroggins said.

Ms. Johnson noted the influx of comments from mothers about women and auto information, so she added a section to the Ladies Start Your Engines website entitled "Grease Monkeys for Moms" that has additional tips and facts for matriarchs.

"I started hearing from a lot of mothers' groups," Ms. Johnson said. "Safety is a big concern.... I decided to put something on the site that would connect to them."

With such an interest on the topic, Ms. Scroggins wants to have Waukegan Tire female customers feel like they are being heard. Ms. Scroggins stated she learned in Marketing to Women conferences in Chicago (M2W) that women have influence over 85 percent of purchasing decisions.

She stated that the auto industry is lagging behind others with the push to speaking to female consumers.

"As an industry, we need to make some progress in that area," Ms. Scroggins said. "There's a lot of opportunity out there to educate women and we are just trying to do the best we can."

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