

# SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY

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by [Steve LaFerre](#)

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## Politeness, Planning and Service Make Charleston Dealer Unbeatable

Bright, polite and responsible describe David Hay to a "T." He's the owner of Hay Tire Co. in Charleston, S.C., a position he doesn't take lightly. He also is the president elect of the College of Charleston Alumni Association, which he takes just as seriously. Additionally, both he and his father, Henry, are elders in their church and stand among the pillars of society in a city that has often been rated the most polite in the nation.

In fact, he gets involved in just about everything that affects his city. But how do so many responsibilities connect? In a word: Community. Charleston is both historic and modern, a community of new families, old families and still-growing opportunity.

Hay enjoys his city, his business and the many groups to which he belongs. He has earned a reputation among his fellow citizens for being a doer, among his employees for being fair and just, and among customers for being someone they can always trust.

"To me familiarity breeds loyalty, that's why we take our activity in the community to heart," he says. "We work hard at visibility and we earn respect from our employees and customers every day."

An American Car Care Center dealer, Hay has just opened his second tire outlet. "As Charleston grows, so do we," he says.

You shouldn't be surprised that Hay has thought carefully about the success of his business. "I think a great deal about what we are doing today and what we need to do tomorrow," he said. "I've been thinking about a second store for some time, but didn't make a move until everything was in place.

"We purposely overstaffed our single dealership with good people and trained them carefully. Many of them will be reassigned to our second outlet to continue the tradition of Hay Tire."

Hay has discovered some real treasures along the way. Neil Thomas, his sales manager of 16 years, is one example. "Neil is one of those people who is always happy and positive," says Hay. "He's consistent and treats customers like family. I like it that way, so does Neil and so do our customers.

"Although I've singled out Neil, we have at least a half dozen more front line people who have worked by his side, learned by example and are true professionals just like him. We are truly blessed to have so many good people and I reward that kind of dedication."

The good people come from a good community, Hay says, and that sense of community means everything to Hay Tire and its staff.

"Down here, home ownership is a matter of great pride along with being a committed Charleston citizen," says Hay. "My employees own their own homes, even most of our tire techs, because we pay them enough to raise their families in the tradition of our city and our business." Does that cut down on turnover? You already know the answer.

## Unbelievable Customer Trust

So confident are Hay's customers that many give him their credit card number so he can keep them on file. This is old-fashioned receivables at its very best.

"When a vehicle is dropped off in the morning, we take the owner back home, to work or wherever they're going," said Hay. "Then we pick them up and bring them back to our dealership. We tell them what we did to their vehicle, hand them a receipt and they are on their way. We do everything in our power to minimize inconvenience to our customers."

Some of the shop's newer customers come from the College of Charleston, the Citadel and the Medical University of South Carolina, all roughly within two miles of Hay's outlets. "We are beginning to file the credit card numbers of

parents from all over the country whose children are enrolled in one of our colleges.”

The result is a consistent increase in new customers for today, and potential customers for the future.

“We have been experiencing growth for years and we are projecting that it will continue,” he says. To meet those growth challenges, Hay has a well-established mentoring program between his senior workers and newer employees. Each newcomer works under a seasoned veteran for 90 days before he or she is permitted to work entirely on their own.

“This means there is no break in the quality of the work we perform,” says Hay. “We have built a continuum for outstanding service, which builds confidence among both our employees and our customers. For us it’s a source of pride to know that a puzzled big box tire buyer comes to us for a solution.”

How exactly does such a tradition exist at Hay Tire? “For one thing we know that we spend more time with our fellow employees than we do our families,” he says. “So we stress that this will be a pleasant and cordial place in which to work. Customers don’t miss that point, which makes it even more fun for us.”

One of the most interesting things a visitor to a Hay Tire outlet will observe is the lack of people in the waiting room. “Although we’ve gone to great lengths to make this area state-of-the-art, we really don’t want people waiting on their cars,” Hay says. “We see it as our job to keep the waiting room empty and happy customers on their way home or to work.

“We approach every customer with the same courtesy and respect, fully expecting to create a customer for life,” Hay says. “In many cases we are now serving three generations from the same family, so we must always be on top of our game in order to serve their respective needs.”

### **Constantly Learning**

A book reader, Hay tries to learn more about his business daily.

“Jack Phillips, who works with ACCC, is one of my favorites,” says Hay. “He has taught me and hundreds of others to learn more business analysis and benchmarking, both of which have been huge for me professionally. Jack encourages me to work on my tire business instead of simply being in the tire business.

“With the role playing and hypotheticals, two-thirds of a day with Jack is invaluable. His lessons are brought back to our business and retaught to our employees. Long story short, doing business the same way everyday isn’t good enough anymore.”

In the past year, the staff has completed several certified training programs: TIA-certified automotive tire and TPMS service, various automaker programs, and tire company programs.

Hay Tire also supports many community causes through cash donations and gift certificates. Annually, the shop donates to schools, churches and charitable organizations, like Goodwill Industries, Hay said. “These donations range from free oil changes to full sets of tires.”

Taking a look back to Hay Tire’s roots through a story about Henry Hay, the founder of the family business, helps to explain just what kind of values have molded the shop to what it is today. Thomas Leland, a college friend of one of the Hay family members, ran into a problem and recalled the honor with which the Hay family conducted business.

Leland was readying his family for a move to North Carolina when a battery blew up in his overloaded truck. The truck was far back into Leland’s driveway, making it impossible for a tow truck or AAA to be of any assistance. “We were desperate to find a battery service open at that hour of the day on a Saturday afternoon. I tracked Henry down at his personal residence to inquire if he knew of a company I could call,” said Leland.

“Without hesitation Henry took over. First, he remembered my vehicle then said he thought he had the correct battery at the store. Henry and his wife came to my home, removed the old battery and replaced it, under extremely difficult circumstances, and left us a note saying, ‘Have a wonderful trip tomorrow.’ That’s what I call service above self.”

It’s still that way at Hay Tire. Hard work, dedication and service automatically lead to the kind of image that builds a business, allows it to grow, to expand and to prosper. Just ask David Hay.

**Top Shop Specs:**

**Hay Tire Co.**

**Brands:** Michelin, BFGoodrich, Uniroyal, Bridgestone, Firestone, Dayton, Fuzion, Goodyear.

**Tire Changers:** Coats

**Tire/Wheel Balancer:** Coats, Hunter

**Lifts:** Bend Pak, Rotary

**Alignment Racks:** Hunter

**Brake Lathes:** Ammco

**Compressors:** Ingersoll-Rand

**Marketing/Buying Groups:** ACCC

**POS Software:** Rowriter