

## Ackerman's Goes into Overdrive Extends Repair and Maintenance Services To Various Car Brands including Hybrids



Excellent Volvo maintenance and sterling customer service have been at the hub of Ackerman's business for twenty-seven years. So last year when a few customers inquired about the possibility of having ASE-certified, master

technicians Eric Bjorklund and Adam Anderson repair their second, non-Volvo cars, Bruce gave the requests serious thought.

His first instinct was to offer these valued clients the convenience of bringing multiple cars to one place for repair, but at the same time he hesitated to relinquish his standing as the owner of Berkeley's last repair shop concentrating solely on Volvos.

Adding emotional texture to the issue was the reality that his affection for the Swedish-made vehicle was the substance that built his successful business. "A certain sense of pride surfaced and I wanted to stand firm with the status quo because of my deep respect for the Volvo brand, the Swedish culture, and simply because I could," explained Bruce.

Then came the nationwide, economic slump where Bruce felt obligated to ensure extra work for his technicians who had begun to hear stories of a general drop off in business from peers at other Bay Area shops.

This prompted Bruce to consider not only his staff's Sherlockian flair for solving mechanical mysteries, but their combined eighty years of car-repair skills. In the end he knew that releasing the master technicians' broad-based training on a wider range of car brands made sense for the

times, the business, and his clients' requirements.

Soon afterwards, Bruce's mailed postcards informing customers of the added service option. Since then more than a dozen customers have brought in a mix of vehicles to be worked on, others plan on bringing a family member's car in, and even more have enquired about hybrid repair.

In anticipation of further requests for the latter type of service, Bruce and the technicians will get intensive training in hybrid-car diagnostics and repair in April. "This is the direction I want to take the business because the environmentally-friendly technology matches our green-business practices," said Bruce who is in the homeward stretch towards all-out adjustment to seeing his lot chockablock with an assortment of car makes.

After all, as a business man with obligations to clients and employees, and a commitment to donating a portion of his earnings to local schools and nonprofits, Bruce is happy with the increased business. Yet when a customer recently asked him if he ever thought he'd see the day when Wrangler jeeps, Siennas and Chrysler Sebrings would be crossing Ackerman's threshold rather than whizzing past, Bruce paused and said "No way, but times do change and I like to go with the flow and have a good time doing it!"

A flow of upbeat customer feedback has helped smooth the transition. "No one has cried heresy and I've received nothing but support from my clientele," said Bruce. The master technicians are satisfied too. Just recently Eric Bjorklund enjoyed working on his first 1986 Monte Carlo. "All cars tick the same. They operate under the same principles but every car has its own design and that piques my interest" he said.

His co-worker Adam Anderson is also chuffed. "Variety is the spice of life and that applies to cars too," said Anderson as he grabbed a wrench and disappeared under the hood of a German-made Porsche.

# A Productive Life Bears Fruit in the Bay Area

Farmers and amateur gardeners both know that bumper crops come from a happy convergence of good soil, favorable climate, and hard work. So by applying these principals to his own life, avid gardener and retired probation officer Clark Cassidy thoughtfully created conditions where he knew he would thrive.

Growing up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, he worked a few years in a steel mill before attending college. After earning a degree in general psychology he parleyed that into a career as a probation officer working with juveniles in the criminal justice system in Pennsylvania.

Although that work was hard and sometimes frustrating, it was also satisfying when kids in his caseload succeeded in turning their lives around. The money was good too and his salary enabled him to travel. Two tourist trips to San Francisco sparked his interest in the Bay Area.

So when he found out a friend of his was moving her mother to California in the summer of 1970 he gave notice at work, packed his belongings into a Studebaker, and drove west too.

Three thousand miles from Pittsburgh Cassidy finally felt “at home,” and the memory of the June day he arrived in Berkeley, where he first rented a place, is as crisp as the apples he now harvests in his Richmond garden shaded with pine and cedar trees. “I remember it being love at first sight, because it was the antithesis of where I had come from. And with the uproar about the Vietnam War still ongoing at U.C. Berkeley’s campus, it was the most intellectually, politically and socially turbulent time I’d ever know,” recalled Cassidy.

A few months after arriving in Berkeley he obtained a probation-officer position with Contra Costa County. In his free time he rediscovered the passion for gardening that ironically took root in the large, old cemetery near his boyhood home where he observed maintenance workers uproot summer plants from clay urns at the end of a growing season, toss them in the cemetery’s dump.

Knowing he could revitalize the rejects, the then teenage Cassidy, who is now a member of the California Rare Fruit Growers Association, took action. “My friends and I would raid the cemetery dump, replant the flowers and nurse them through the winter,” he explained.

These days his focus is on fruit rather than flowers. This shift from decorative plants to edible produce manifests itself in the 50ft x 50ft garden behind the Richmond home he

bought in 1989. According to season, the fertile area is lush with gooseberries, strawberries, boysenberries, blueberries and red and black currants that keep his freezer stocked, and friends and garden critters well fed.

There are also semi-dwarf stock fruit trees that yield Black Jack and flavorful, green Adriatic figs, orange Hachiya Persimmon, Comice, Bartlett, and Seckel pear, six types of plum, and eight choices of apple including American Heirloom varieties like Northern Spy and Golden Russet, and the English Cox Orange Pippin which dates back to 1830.

“The Bay Area is heaven on earth for fruit growers,” said Cassidy who explained that pockets of tropical micro climates allow gardeners grow everything from the hardier pomes fruits to macadamia nuts, to bananas, to the most tender sapote fruit native to Mexico and Central America.

Naturally a gardener needs to transport tools and supplies, and this requirement prompted Cassidy to buy a forest-green, Volvo, station wagon in the early seventies after his Studebaker died. Intent on getting the most out of his new vehicle, Cassidy had the car’s engine replaced twice over time; and by lavishing it with the same kind of nurturing he gave to the discarded plants in the



*Clark Cassidy has a penchant for Volvos and a knack for fruit growing.*

Pittsburgh cemetery, coaxed twenty-seven more years out of that Volvo before selling it in 1998 for \$1,700 and upgrading to the roomier, more comfortable basic black, 240 Volvo wagon he drives today.

It was in the course of maintaining the forest green Volvo he first met Bruce Ackerman who happened to be working as a substitute mechanic at Volvo Don’s the car repair shop Cassidy was patronizing at the time. “Don usually worked on the car but that time it was Bruce. He was about twenty-one-years-old at the time and he stood out because he looked so young yet seemed to know what he was doing,” recalled Cassidy.

The second time he encountered Bruce was after Volvo Don’s had closed. On a friend’s recommendation, Cassidy took the car to Rusty Cohen’s shop at Ackerman’s current location and again found Bruce working as a mechanic.

That was 1979, before Cohen bowed out and Bruce took over as sole owner, and Cassidy has brought his car there ever since for service by technicians he describes as “thorough, knowledgeable, and accommodating.”

But, thinking back, the incident that galvanized Cassidy’s loyalty was the time he was returning from a trip to Oregon

## Bruce Recommends Quince Café & Grill A Culinary Gem Next to Ackerman's

"It's all good, homemade, fresh and delicious," says Bruce who's tried everything on the menu and declares the albacore tuna and Havarti melt his favorite sandwich. Bruce likes the place so much that whenever his sister Maile Ackerman comes by to offer her organizational expertise he returns the favor by inviting her to lunch at the eatery because she loves the food too.

"The menu's overarching theme is Mediterranean," explains Shiryn Shalileh who opened her restaurant the day after Labor Day in September 2009. At the beginning of the day the "hot breakfast special" features 2 eggs with spiced Near East crispy potatoes and Acme toast and bacon. Two other early-morning choices include the house-made yogurt with fruit and granola and the steel-cut oatmeal with brown sugar syrup and Medjool dates and butter. After breakfast Shalileh offers lunch choices like the 1/3 pound-hamburger on a bun with spicy ketchup, roasted garlic aioli and balsamic onions, a Greek salad plate, an arugula, orange, feta and candied walnut plate, and the knockout Mediterranean salad with quinoa tabbouleh, grilled pita bread, cilantro hummus, and hand-rolled dolmas (grape leaves stuffed with seasoned rice, raisins and walnuts,) served over a bed of mixed greens drizzled with pomegranate vinaigrette.

"For me, my business is a labor of love," says managing owner Shalileh, who earned her master's in Hotel and Restaurant Management from Cornell University, and uses her grandmother's recipes for the quince jam and the dolmas.

The café's decor with its caramel-colored teak floor, lemon-meringue-hued walls with sage-green wooden trim, low-hanging, coffee-tinted glass light fixtures and art from a local painter and a metal sculpture show Shalileh's flair for interior design and make this establishment the perfect place for a rendezvous.

- Open: 7a.m.-2:30p.m. (Tuesday-Friday)
- 8a.m.-2:30p.m. (Saturday-Sunday.) • Wheelchair Accessible
- Location: 2228 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley
- (510) 666-0094 • [www.QuinceCafe.com](http://www.QuinceCafe.com).

*Clark Cassady continued from page 2*

and the Volvo broke down on Highway 5 near Orland in the Sacramento Valley. He pulled into a gas station where a mechanic willingly tackled the job, isolated the problem, and determined the need for a replacement part.

A phone call placed to Bruce established he had the part on hand in Berkeley; he immediately drove it to the Greyhound bus station where it was transported to Orland and successfully installed. "This is just one example of Bruce's willingness to go the extra mile," said Cassady.

There have been some funny moments involving the Volvo too. One incident that elicited a chuckle from Ackerman's mechanics when they lifted the hood to inspect his car was when the Volvo's heavy air conditioning unit snapped off its cast metal base and came into contact with the rotating engine fan. So that he could drive the car to Ackerman's for repairs Cassady temporarily resolved the problem in a creative manner.

## The "Woof" Report



*Fialka wears a sweater made by shop helper Ingrid Lobas.*

The Obama White House may have Bo the Portuguese water dog, but they don't have Fialka, Ackerman's mini-snauzer who sits, lies down, and does a downward-dog stretch on command. She also heels at street corners before crossing with her owner, shop-helper Ingrid Lobas, who describes her dog as "spectacular." At the shop Fialka continues to thrive under Ingrid's love and fastidious care-taking and celebrates her first birthday in March. She welcomes visitors, so next time you are at the shop stop back to Ingrid's work shed and you'll catch a glimpse of Fialka relaxing on her patch of grass or playing with her squeaky toys. If there's a nip in the air, don't be surprised to see the dog dressed in a cashmere sweater, because so far Ingrid has made her three woolen garments from the sleeves of thrift-shop sweaters. These pullovers keep her warm on outings to Strawberry Creek where she enjoys the company of "Rogue" a one-year-old mini pinscher.

"Using a gardening trowel and a piece of string I was able to tie the unit away from the blade. It was a real Rube Goldberg arrangement," said Cassady referring to the American cartoonist whose signature sketch is an elaborate collection of objects arranged to accomplish one small task.

Now enjoying retirement, Cassady spends his time biking, working in the garden, and enjoying San Francisco's cultural offerings. It's fair to say that when it comes to making a good cup of tea, handling backyard maintenance, or sleuthing how to get a particular fruit to thrive, he's your man, but when it comes to continuing to keep his Volvo wagon running as smoothly as the day he first got it 11-years ago, he's the first to draw the line. "That's Bruce realm because he keeps my Volvo running like a top!" says Cassady without hesitation.



*A Certified Green Business*

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**Ackerman Donations to Schools and Non-profits Topped \$14,000 in 2009**

Next time you are settling your invoice, ask Bruce to donate 5% to your preferred school or non-profit. Many customers avail of this offer and Bruce has already written \$1,216.00 worth of checks in January and February of 2010.

**Bruce Ackerman, owner**

Liz O'Connell-Gates, writing and photography • Email: [lizoeg@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lizoeg@sbcglobal.net) • Special thanks to Pat Russell.

**BERKELEY**

**Dial 510-549-9330 Monthly  
To enter our \$150-Chez-Panisse-Dinner-Raffle.  
Add Ackerman's license plates to your car and your name's in the hat:**

**2009 winners:** Lucie Smith (January), Bob Schneider (February), Christie Fanton (March), Rhondi Saslow (April), Matt Townsend (May), Lauren Kerr (June), Jeff Synder (July), Aaron Wells (August), Anonymous (September), Cherry Law (October), Chet Patterson (November), Deborah Hoffman (December).

**2010 winners:** Ann Wilford (January).

**Drawing held on 1<sup>st</sup> of each month.**

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