

## New Look, Classic Model: Fair Lawn Meineke Owner Has Fresh Perspective

Cecilia Levine | March 6, 2018



*Sam Sa, 31, is the new owner of Meineke shops in Fair Lawn, Passaic and Butler. Photo Credit: Cecilia Levine*

Samuel Sa believes that each Meineke Car Care center is like the vehicles on its lifts.

They are smooth and sleek at first glance, aesthetically pleasing and inviting.

Lifting the hood on both the cars and the business reveals a complicated system with many working parts. The failure of just one part, on either the car or the business, can cause deterioration -- which over time will lead to a break down.

When Sa first lifted the hood on his recently acquired shops in Fair Lawn, Passaic and Butler, he saw what amounted to a late-model car -- one that works but needs some attention.

He wants to ensure that each part of his business, like that car, work perfectly.

"It's an old-school industry that could use new ideas," said Sa, 31.

"There could be more of a focus on technology and service more catered to a tech savvy customer base."

Sa was working as an investor mostly in restaurants when he ran into corporate Meineke employees last year.

They felt that Sa could bring a fresh perspective to a business that had been conducted the same way for such a long time.

"Cars have changed," said Sa, "so certain things need to be tweaked to make sure customers are satisfied and are getting the service they expect."

Sa says he's going to start by pushing pre-existing programs that might be underutilized.

Take the rewards program, for example.

"It's not as prevalent as it should be," Sa said. "Every customer is going to have a rewards card which offer significant benefits."

Think free oil changes.

Then, there's the mobile app, which Sa also says has not been utilized enough.

"You can log in to view your car service history, get maintenance reminders or make appointments," he explained. "That will help smooth out the overall appointment process."

Most importantly, Sa wants Meineke to feel like a dealership rather than a garage.

He wants customers standing on shiny floors, even in the back near the bays. He wants each one to be remembered and greeted warmly by staff.

He likened it to visiting an Apple store.

"It's about the experience more than anything," Sa explained.

"Someone greets you at the door and all of your information is already in a system. You feel welcome."

Sa says the Meineke experience should be simple and easy.

Enjoyable -- no matter the customer's understanding of cars.

"When I first started at Meineke, I didn't know first thing about cars or repairs. I rely on the team for that," Sa said.

"I bring business experience to the table with a focus on retail, specifically what makes a retail business successful versus not."

Sa has the perspective of a customer and the understanding of a businessman.

He sees the workings on the front and back ends.

He wants to bridge the gap.

"There is a level of distrust in this industry in general," the East Brunswick native said.

"There needs to be transparency so we can improve communication and customer education."

Sa hopes to soon provide technicians with iPads or tablets to snap photographs of problem areas they might encounter on their cars.

Mechanics can then either send the photograph as a text message or email to the customer, or wait to show them in-person after the appointment.

Sa says visual explanations will help improve a client's understanding of their vehicle and build a trusting relationship with their technician.

"Education and communication should be top priorities," he said.

"We want people to leave happier than they came in."

What Sa first saw months ago when he examined the systems that keep Meineke moving was a team of honest, hard-working guys who want to see the company succeed.

More than anything, Sa wants to make that happen for them.

It won't take much, he said. Just maintenance.

"We want to continue to operate as a local business, even though it's part of a national chain of thousands," he said.

"We want to be part of the community."