

## Stories from the Front Lines: Jeff Toth, Multi-Unit Christian Brothers Automotive Franchisee

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**Name:** Jeff Toth

**Title:** Multi-unit franchisee

**Brand:** Christian Brothers Automotive

**Units:** 2

**Age:** 50

**Years in franchising:** 15

**Years in current position:** 15

### **How has Covid-19 affected your business?**

Our two locations, Christian Brothers Automotive the Woodlands and Christian Brothers Automotive Woodlands West, were affected early on during the pandemic. As the owner, it was my job to make my team members feel stable and calm – it doesn't help anyone to panic. Near the beginning of the pandemic, we were designated an essential business, which meant we had to make several changes to our operations. We got creative on how to provide for and protect our guests and team members, as well as ease any fears they had about Covid-19.

## **What are you doing to get through this?**

Before Covid-19, we provided a complimentary shuttle service for guests when their cars were being serviced. Now, we have taken that a step further and offer no contact pick-up and delivery services. Our team members will pick up the car, service the car, clean it, and return it all while using gloves and keeping keys in ziplock bags to ensure minimal contact. We also added plexiglass in our guest waiting area to aid in social distancing measures.

## **Has your franchisor offered you any kind of assistance?**

Our franchisor has been extremely helpful. Before the PPP loan was offered, our corporate team hosted several town hall meetings to discuss the next steps, and then helped walk us through the PPP application. As franchise owners, we're typically granted freedom and independence when it comes to running our business. However, in this situation, we needed the support of the corporate team, and they stepped up to assist. Our corporate team offered support through various virtual town hall meetings and Q&A sessions. Also, as a faith-based business, to keep spirits up the franchisor organized virtual bible study groups for the franchisees.

## **How are you working with your suppliers?**

We started early with ensuring that we had good cash flow. While we were still fully open, we decided to cut back on different expenses and were able to continue to use our suppliers.

## **What are you doing to help your employees through this?**

Initially, we had to cut our team members' overtime hours. Fortunately, we didn't have to furlough any employees at either of our locations. Since receiving the PPP, we've been able to keep people on and return to normal operations. Team members are now able to work their normal hours with the potential for overtime.

In fact, with the expansion of the delivery and pick-up services, we've needed to start hiring more team members.

## **What have you done for your customers during this time?**

We've been very conscientious of what our guests need and want during the pandemic. Typically, our shops are closed on the weekends. But to better support our guests, we decided to open on Saturdays through April and May. However, as Houston begins to open up, we are starting to migrate back to our original operations. Some changes – like the additional concierge service, pay-by-phone option, or the no-contact delivery and pick-up services – are here to stay.

## **What have you done about cash flow, PPP, etc.?**

Our team has done an amazing job of managing cash flow! Any nonessential expenses were cut back and removed. Our team has been extremely understanding as we navigate these difficult times. We applied for and received the PPP loan and are currently working to get the loan converted into a grant.

## **What else would you like to see from your franchisor or government?**

The Christian Brothers Automotive corporate team did a great job providing us with communications and any needed news from the government. Specifically, when it came to converting the PPP loan to a grant, they walked us through the worksheet to make the switch as seamless as possible. They've been on their game with providing marketing campaigns, creative ideas, and support. The turnaround time for marketing resources has been incredible.

The local government in Houston was extremely helpful. Even before we knew what to do, Texas Congressman Kevin Brady and Texas Governor Greg Abbott started hosting town halls on Zoom. When there wasn't any new information,

they still shared what they knew, kept local business owners updated, and spread the message that we're all in this together.

## **If you are in an area that reopened early, what was that like for you?**

We were deemed an essential business; therefore, we were not closed during the Covid-19 outbreak in Houston.

## **How are you planning to reopen and/or rebuild your business post-Covid-19?**

Covid-19 has changed the way we approach our interactions with our guests. In the past, we always had a complimentary shuttle. Now, we have taken our pick-up and delivery services to the next level. As we approach the rebuilding aspect and migrate back to our services, the steps forward we have taken will have lasting impacts.

This article can be found online, here: <https://bit.ly/3hblTbl>.