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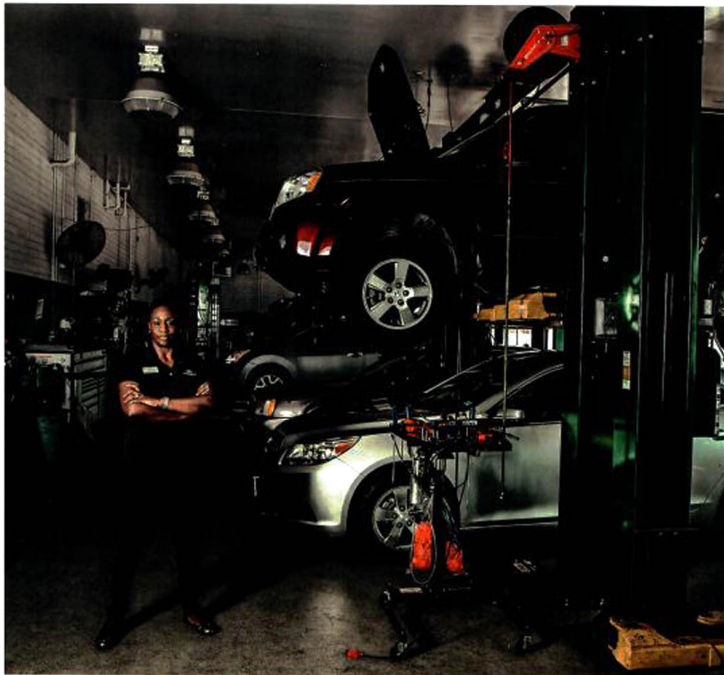
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Jonita White of Christian Brothers Automotive. P.63

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The Expertise That Matters

Jonita White didn't know much about cars, but she did know about people. That's how she became a successful Christian Brothers Automotive owner. by NINA ZIPKIN

F / Franchisee

In 2006, Jonita White quit her job in San Diego and moved to Texas. She did it to be closer to family, but she also saw it as a chance to pursue her dream of becoming a real estate agent. Then the housing market crashed in 2007, just as she'd earned her license, and White needed a backup plan—fast. She still wanted to work for herself, but launching a business in a troubled market wasn't an option. That's how she came to franchising; it was a way to be entrepreneurial, but with a proven playbook. She started researching opportunities. Since arriving in Texas, White had become a loyal customer at Christian Brothers Automotive. She had no experience with cars but was attracted to the company's customer service, long history, and values—it's been around since 1982, has more than 170 locations, and operates under the motto "Love your neighbor as yourself." She signed on as a franchisee and opened her first location in Frisco in 2011. This year, she'll open her second, in Little Elm. That backup plan seems to be working out.

Before you signed on with Christian Brothers Automotive, did you explore other franchises?
We looked at Pizza Hut, Subway, Primrose Schools. But the values of Christian Brothers matched those of my family. When they worked on my car, they were always honest. The price was fair. They loved on us when we went into the shop.

And the fact that they've been around since 1982 sat really well with us. It's a successful model.

Was it tough transitioning to life as a business owner?
My husband was like, "You can do this, honey. You don't know cars, but you know business." This industry is not about cars. It's about relationships. If a customer is frustrated because



of a situation with their car, it's because of everything else they're dealing with in life. I've got to get my daughter to dance lessons. I've got to get my son to football. What does it take to get my car fixed and back on the road? It's wonderful to be able to help them, give them a ride, and say, "Don't worry; we will get your kids to football practice, to dance practice."

You drive them around if their car isn't ready?
Part of the hassle of taking your car in for work is then not having a car. We have a shuttle to make sure customers can get where they need to be—on time. I'll drop you off at the grocery store, and when you're done, if your car isn't ready, I'll pick you up.

Before moving to Texas, you worked for Kaiser Permanente. What was the biggest challenge in moving from health-care to auto care?

The biggest challenge in any industry is finding the right people to work with, who share your values and believe in providing the same level of service. If I am not in the building, I need to feel comfortable leaving my team in the shop. And I am.

Community is a big part of Christian Brothers' mission, as well as your own. How is that reflected in your business?
With our new location, I'm excited to be part of the Little Elm Chamber of Commerce and volunteer with the Women's League. I'm finding more and more women are getting into the auto repair industry, and I want to tell them to never give up on their dream. When women come into the shop and see me, their faces just automatically relax, and they feel comfortable. Women, don't be afraid of a male-dominated industry. Cross that line. I'm living proof it can be done.