

Best local companies to work for: Lake Arbor Automotive & Truck



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By Kathryn Marion
Denver Job Search Examiner

In this 'best companies to work for' series, I'm uncovering unique small businesses in the Denver/Boulder area. Today's profile is [Lake Arbor Automotive & Truck](#) of Westminster, a company that goes the extra mile, and then some, for its customers and employees:

When was the company founded?

Dana TePoel believed that he could overcome the common perception about [auto repair](#) shops—the perception that put the industry at the bottom of trusted professions. When he purchased the Emissions Clinic in Westminster in 1992, he saw more than a slab of concrete with a ceiling high enough to hoist cars. Dana foresaw a repair shop where people would immediately recognize his emphasis on customer advocacy. The combination of ethics and skilled auto mechanics would give customers all the motivation they needed to return regularly to the shop—and encourage their friends to do likewise.



Lake Arbor Automotive Owner, Dana TePoel, celebrated one of the shop's many awards with a cake and a party.

What is the company's mission statement and what is the business about?

The company's mission is, "*We do the right thing for you, every time*" and that mission applies to everyone who has any kind of dealings with Lake Arbor Auto, including employees, even if it erodes resources such as cash and employee time. Our target market is every motorist needing oil changes and repairs who appreciates and values ethical maintenance standards in a mechanic.

What sets Lake Arbor Auto apart from the competition?

Lake Arbor Auto's policy of "always doing the right thing" creates an environment in which employees feel empowered to treat the customer well, without worrying about the impact on the company's bottom line. At Lake Arbor Auto, Do-The-Right-Thing is more than just a slogan, even more than a business model. It is a way of life, woven into the fabric of the company's culture as surely as the quilt in the waiting room contains the love of family in every stitch.

What kinds of employees does Lake Arbor Auto look for?

Dana has owned the Lake Arbor [Automotive](#) and Truck repair shop in [Westminster](#) since 1992. Under Dana's leadership, the former one-man shop has grown to a business of 11 employees with annual gross revenues of over \$1.5 million (up from \$180,000 the first year). To help employees understand the "Ethics-R-Us" philosophy, he created an ethics manifesto—a statement defining where the company stood on issues of trust, responsibility, attitude, personal and company growth, commitment, integrity, respect, and their quest. He adopted the eight-point code of ethics and conduct of the [National Institute of Automotive Service Excellence](#). Every employee signs and agrees to adhere to both documents as a condition of [employment](#). Adherence to these documents is summed up with the simple statement: '*We do the right thing for you...every time!*' "When you always do the right thing, the best employees want to work for you," TePoel points out.

What makes this company a 'best place to work'?

Owner Dana TePoel's concern for the welfare of his employees has been reflected in his policies from his company's beginning, when he provided a full healthcare benefits package for his lone employee. In 1996 Lake Arbor Auto heeded its employees' wishes to spend more quality time with their families and closed the shop on weekends. Despite the reduction in shop hours, gross revenues increased by 12.5 percent that year, indicating that healthy employee morale is healthy for business, too.

Says employee Gary Kingsbury, "My grandma passed away, and Dana said, 'Take whatever time you need. Do what you have to do.' When I had a foreign exchange student come in, I needed a little flex time with my schedule, and I knew it wouldn't be

a problem. Dana has an open-door policy, and you never feel like you're interrupting him. He'll always take time to figure out solutions to whatever issues you might have."

Is Lake Arbor Automotive a 'best place to work' for women?

Ever since TePoel purchased the Emissions Clinic and changed the name to Lake Arbor Automotive & Truck, he has regularly added benefits and policies designed to empower employees. Employees receive Saturdays off, which allows mothers returning to the workforce an opportunity to enjoy an ethical working environment that also supports healthy family dynamics. He makes sure the employees have all the tools they need and all the latest equipment needed for the complexities of the modern car. He also provides continuous training for the technicians, in a classroom that is on the premises of the new Lake Arbor Auto shop. Women receive equal compensation for equal work, and as soon as TePoel can find a qualified female technician who embraces the company's emphasis on ethics, he plans to hire her.

What else should people know about Lake Arbor Automotive & Truck?

Adding to the customers' experience at [Lake Arbor Auto](#) is the availability of loaner cars for extended repairs. Lake Arbor Auto offers a shuttle service to drop customers at work or home while their vehicles are in the shop; and in 2009, Lake Arbor Auto implemented its unique Wherever Warranty, in which Lake Arbor Auto will, at no cost to the customer, transport to the nearest car dealership any car that is still under dealer's warranty, for repairs covered by that warranty—all just part of doing the right thing.