

ALBERT MAKES BUSINESS FUN

FROM PAGE 5

Making sure his employees smile and are friendly is very important to Albert.

He even has run challenges for employees to see if they can get grumpy customers to smile or laugh, sometimes offering free sodas or other small rewards when those smiles showed up on a usually frowning face.

"It makes it fun, too," Albert said. "Kill 'em with kindness."

Family

Albert has used the same philosophy with his family over the years. He is the father of three sons, ages 28, 23 and 12.

"I told them, 'If a teacher doesn't like you, do extra good. Then smile and move on,'" he recalled.

Albert has been married to his wife, Mindy, for 29 years.

"I went to school with her," he recalled. "She's a couple years younger than me. We got together in 1988."

When Steve was ready to propose, he had a solid plan in place.

"I fixed her favorite dinner – spaghetti and meatballs," he



Hometown Auto & Hardware owner Steve Albert talks on the phone with a customer.

JENNI GRUBBS/BRUSH BEET EXPRESS

recalled. "When I got down on one knee... I'd die to see that face again."

Mindy said yes, and they were married in 1989.

"It's been good ever since," Steve said. "Nothing out of the normal flows of marriage."

Their marriage was marked by having a child with each move they made.

That included not long after they were married and had moved in together.

"We had a kid right away, we moved and had a kid, moved and had a kid," Steve recalled. "She said, 'We're never moving again. We're stuck now.'"

As a result, the home they have south of Brush may just be their forever home.

Working life

Today, Mindy works at the hardware and auto store in the mornings and takes care of the home and their still-school-age son, Steve said.

Meanwhile, he is putting in 85- to 90-hour work weeks at the business.

"So it's nice to know things at home are taken care of," he said.

But the long hours Steve puts in at Hometown Auto & Hardware are worth it to him.

"It's what you got to do," he said. "I feel I have to do it. I still enjoy it."

Steve acknowledged that it does get a bit more difficult as time passes to keep up that pace.

"As I get older, it's getting harder," he said.

One of his issues is being as patient with people as he knows he probably should be.

"My tolerance is sliding as I age," he said. "You know that crabby, old woman across the street..."

Steve joked that he thinks he is gaining a better understanding of where that woman was coming from.

Still, he would not trade his business and the life he has had because of it.

As a boy, he thought he would have a "more hands-on job" as an adult, but "things change and you learn to go with it," he said. "I love selling stuff."

Steve also enjoys the special events held at his store.

"It's about the customers," he said. "We do little events, and seeing them taking part and smiling is the best."

Those special events in-

SEE ALBERT PAGE 7

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