

## Lakewood

## SENTINEL



Photo by CHARLOTTE COWIE-BOZNER

Sean Snelling has been working at Auto-Tech in Lakewood since it opened on Sept. 1. The shop plans to offer free services to widows and single mothers.

## Auto shop with a mission

Hands Automotive offers services to widows, single mothers

BY LAURA HATHAWAY  
laurah@milehighnews.com

Where Dan Georgopulos is today started by accident.

In 2002, Georgopulos was laid off from his job because the travel industry declined after 9/11. About the same time, Lookout Mountain Community Church asked him to lead a group for single mothers and widows. He agreed and quickly realized the two biggest needs that came up constantly were home and car repair.

"They didn't have any resources and if they did, they would get taken advantage of," Georgopulos said.

Soon enough he was volunteering three days a week, and in 2004 he started a nonprofit called Hands of the Carpenter. The organization provides car repair services to single women and widows who cannot afford repairs.

Georgopulos said sometimes when some women's cars need repair, and they can't fix them, and it can lead losing a job or eventually homelessness.

"Many of the women we've served are living in their car, sometimes with kids," he said. "We want

to be the people that lift them up to self-sufficiency."

The nonprofit recently raised \$100,000 to buy Colorado Auto Tech, an auto shop on Colfax Avenue and Kendall Street. Colorado Auto Tech has been operating for 26 years and Hands of the Carpenter plans to use revenue from the shop to fund repairs for single mothers and widows. The shop will eventually take the name Hands Automotive, but wants to maintain the current name to keep attracting business.

The former owner has been helpful in making sure the shop

See AUTO SHOP, Page 2

### AUTO SHOP FROM PAGE 1

doesn't need to spend two years building a new business and instead can generate enough money to begin doing nonprofit repairs. The shop expects to be able to start repairing single mother and widow's cars in three to four months.

"Anyone can support the work the nonprofit does simply by going to the shop," he said. "Their same dollar does twice as much work now."

For the past six years, Hands of the Carpenter used discounted services at other auto shops to repair the cars, but it became too expensive and buying a shop was the solution. In past years, the nonprofit has served 175 women, doing around 250 repairs a year. Georgopulos expects this number to triple in the next two years.

Even though he thinks the new shop will support the need in Jefferson County, he plans to open another shop some day.

Volunteer for the shop's board of directors Rob Liley has worked in the auto business for many years and often sees people who can't afford repairs. "It breaks my heart they can't get that stuff done, so I'm really excited we're going to be able to grow that support for people that need those repairs," he said.

Each repair is done for whatever amount a mother or widow can pay at the time. Georgopulos said sometimes the shop receives pay-

ments six months later, as well as a lot of hugs, cards and gifts.

"A fair number of them are astonished we followed through and helped them," he said. "Knowing you just helped someone who's been taken advantage of or might have lost their job is pretty significant. You can see that on their faces and reactions."

The nonprofit meets with each client before doing the repairs. Julie Hobin, who is a single mother of three daughters, began small groups for the women to interact and support each other.

"Because I'm a single parent I've learned some of the struggles, and it's a huge responsibility. When we care for women without husbands and children without fathers, it helps our communities become stronger and more stable," she said.

Hobin said that for many women it's the first time someone has taken the time to care for them, since they are usually the ones taking care of everything else.

"I think as a society we're called to care for them. When we do care for them, it strengthens the whole society," she said.

The shop also has several car clinics for oil changes, safety inspections and car maintenance. The next one will be Saturday, Oct. 9, and people can call 303-526-4488 to sign up. The shop is open 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., located at 1510 Kendall St.