



# RBGA's May Small Business Award Honors Family's Service Legacy

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**GODFREY** – The RiverBend Growth Association has chosen its May 2023 Small Business of the Month award honoree to be Freer Auto Body & Accessories, Inc. of Godfrey.

Located at 4512 N. Alby Road, Freer Auto Body has been a business mainstay now for 31 years with 16 employees who all have a part in supporting “the dream.” This dream had been launched into reality by a young 19-year-old entrepreneur back in 1991, with help from his grandfather, his brother, and his whole family. David Freer was that young man with a vision. His grandfather was Arnold Freer, an auto body man with a genuine talent.

Freer Auto Body remains a true family-owned business today. “We lost David in 2008,” noted Margaret Freer, David’s mother, who helps in keeping his vision going as a part of the family business. “But we have continued his legacy of quality repairs and excellent customer service. We have never forgotten our meager beginnings, and we truly feel the community has made us what we are today.”

Tim Freer, David’s brother and founding co-owner, now leads the business and its team forward.

Freer Auto Body is rated in the top one percent of auto repair facilities throughout the United States for quality and service. It is an I-CAR Gold Class facility and continues to keep on top of the constant changes in the industry. Today, its facility occupies three buildings, roughly 13,000 square feet of space.

“We are constantly investing in our business and upgrading facilities and equipment,” said Margaret further. “We have the most modern equipment and products in the industry. Not only do we invest in our business, but also our surroundings. We have purchased eight homes on Alby and renovated them, improving our immediate area and the community.”

Further investments in the community from Freer Auto Body can be witnessed through their ongoing community service. The Salvation Army, Crisis Food Center, and the North Alton Godfrey Business Council are just a few of the local nonprofits supported by the Freer family business.

“We founded Christmas in July and Cookies and Cocoa for Community Christmas, which raise thousands of dollars each year for our area needy. Without these events, many in our area would not experience the magic of Christmas,” Margaret said.

“We have painted golf cars, rescue boats, ambulances, fire trucks and watering buggies free of charge for local charities and organizations,” she added. “We sponsor soccer, basketball, baseball, and just about every nonprofit in our area with a mission to help our area and its people. We genuinely believe we have made a difference in our community, helping to make it a better place to live, work and play.”

Freer also noted that they would like to hire more technicians for their shop but said that they are hard to find these days. The shop has instituted a four-day work week for the techs they do have, working four 10-hour days to help with a lesser commute and reduced fuel consumption for the employees.

“We spend between \$20 and \$25,000 on certifications and training for our staff a year,” Freer further shared. “I-CAR Gold Class is the highest level of training you can accomplish in our industry, and we have had those credentials since 2004. We pay all fees for training and certifications; employees are required to complete so many classes in their areas of expertise.”

“Any time you own a business you face challenges. Our worst was probably the loss of David and how we had to pick up the pieces and carry on, all while grieving his loss,” Margaret said.

She also shared some other challenges met with opportunity for the company.

“We survived Covid and all the challenges it brought. Our employees are like family, and many have been with us for a very long time, but just managing people and their different personalities can be challenging. Our newest challenge is inflation and trying to pay the \$6,300 a month electric bill, increasing health insurance fees and skyrocketing material costs, all while being regulated by insurance companies that are facing some of their own challenges.”

Margaret continued: “Mechanical repair rates are \$130 an hour, and insurance companies do not have a problem paying this, but auto body facilities have the same expenses for training, etcetera, and our rate is only \$70. All big challenges, and unfortunately some small businesses will not survive.”

“I was always told your name means everything, and in business this is very true,” she added. “If you have a bad reputation, people will not want to use your business. I am proud of the reputation we have achieved. We have been voted the best in auto body repair every year. We always go the extra mile for our customers and operate our business on the Golden Rule.

“We have worked long and hard to get where we are today. Nothing was given. We opened with faith and grown with support. We are proud of our success and our accomplishments, which our customers and the community have made possible. We truly give back daily, and we are grateful for our ability to give and to help make our community shine,” Margaret noted.

She also recognizes the role small businesses have as the backbone of America. “This has always been my favorite saying: ‘When you own your own business, you just work half days; 6 in the morning until 6 at night.’ But we consider our greatest opportunity to be the pleasure of meeting our customers and making their experiences less stressful. We have met and befriended many fellow business owners and customers over the past 31 years, and we would not trade this experience for anything.”

To learn more about Freer Auto Body & Accessories, Inc., visit online at [freerautobody.com](http://freerautobody.com) or call (618) 466-6151.

The RiverBend Growth Association is the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development organization for the 11 communities known as the Riverbend. For more information about the Growth Association, visit [www.growthassociation.com](http://www.growthassociation.com) or call (618) 467-2280.

RBGA’s Small Business of the Month Committee recognizes a different member business each month for its outstanding efforts and leadership in the community. Committee members include Brenda Eardley, Adrianna Lock, Sam Quigley, Amy Roady, Kristen Ryrie, Martha Schultz, and Amy Smith.

To learn more about membership in the RiverBend Growth Association and the Small Business of the Month recognition, visit the RBGA website or call their Godfrey office.