

Big Sky Collision Center Does Magic with their Matrix Wand



by Autobody News Staff

With two locations in Montana, *Big Sky Collision Center* is a second-generation business run by **Matthew McDonnell**, 39. McDonnell is a passionate, extremely hands-on and highly innovative owner, but for many years, it did not look as though he would be even working in the collision industry at all.

"My father started the shop back in 1978, so I was born into this industry," McDonnell said. "I guess you might say that I am the prodigal son that kind of went away. I went to school and travelled and worked in the bar business in Montana and Alaska and sowed my wild oats in my twenties. My two older brothers **Bryan** and **John** worked in the family business pretty much their whole lives. So, when I hit my thirties, I came back. It was time."

Eventually, McDonnell decided to take on the reins at *Big Sky Collision Center*. "My vision for this business differed from what my brothers wanted it to be," he explained. "I don't believe it's a body shop, because in the end, we're really in the business of people. We just happen to fix cars. So, I negotiated a deal with **Bryan** and **John** and they stepped away, so I could change the culture at these shops. We still have a great relationship and we talk on a regular basis, but it was a necessary move for a lot of reasons."

As of January of last year, Matthew owned 96 percent of the company and was ready to instill his vision in both shops. "Yes, we work on cars here, but we really work on building leaders—that's our main focus," McDonnell explained. "Our vision is to change an industry. We've stepped up the customer service, the repair process, our equipment and our entire attitude, and getting the Matrix Wand was a big part of that."

The award-winning Matrix Wand is a hand-held 3D electronic blue-printing and repair measuring device for structural collision damage. It uses a 3D camera to capture images of damaged vehicles. These images are analyzed using Matrix computer software. Estimators and repair technicians can use the images to measure and correct sway, sag and mash



At *Big Sky Collision Center*, Body Technician **Danny Hawkins** uses the Matrix Wand on 75 percent of the cars coming through the shop and the results are outstanding.

using infinite data points.

By using the Matrix Wand, the estimators at *Big Sky Collision Center* can measure undamaged vehicles to create their own bank of repair data and specifications. McDonnell covets this information because it is based on actual vehicle measurements and is 100 percent accurate each and every time.

"I am probably a little more technical than most body shop owners," he said. "I'm in the back with the guys a lot and I understand how to use all the data. The information we get from the Matrix Wand is invaluable for us as we pursue the ultimate repair on every car. It has allowed us to be a better shop, and that's something we're always pursuing."

The Matrix Wand is already an integral part of everyday production at *Big Sky Collision*. "Now we have two units in both of our locations," he said. "They were easy to learn quickly, are kept in our estimating bays and all of our estimators know how to use them. With today's vehicles, you just can't see everything, and with this measuring system, we're able to know if we are structurally out of alignment very quickly. We can find out early in the process whether or not we need to order parts or to do panel adjustments. It's really the only way to find the damage—I mean, this tool is phenomenal!"

By using the Matrix Wand, Mc-

Donnell is strengthening his position with a lot of his insurance partners, he added. "One of our goals with this measuring system was to be more effective in working with our DRPs, because obviously they make up the lion's share of our business. We're writing an accurate estimate more than 95 percent of the time now with the Matrix Wand and loving it. As a result, our supplements with one of our largest DRPs went from 18 percent down to 1.6 percent in just about three months. The Matrix Wand is helping us to be a better partner with our insurance companies and that was one of our goals."

Big Sky Collision Center is on a two-way street with Matrix. Matthew has been asked to help test the new Matrix Active Map 3D software. This new application allows technicians to fully integrate The Matrix Wand into the repair process. A structural repair technician can now repair or replace a structural component with confidence.

Big Sky Collision Center is using the Matrix Wand on 75 percent of all the cars that come into their two locations for repairs and McDonnell couldn't be more pleased by the results. "Anything that looks like it may have any movement, we will use the Wand. Front end collisions, side impacts and anything that might have structural damage such as rails is going under the Matrix Wand every time."

Big Sky Collision Center

Location: Billings, MT
(406) 671-9652
www.bigskycol.com

Company At A Glance...

Type: Collision Repair
Facility Employees: 58
In Business Since: 1978
DRP Programs: 12
Number of Locations: Two
Combined Production Space: 75,000 square feet (combined)



Shop COO **Nick Rodgers** (left) and Body Technician **Bryan Clark** use the Matrix Wand as they pursue the ultimate repair on every car.



Owner **Matthew McDonnell** said his estimators are writing an accurate estimate more than 95 percent of the time now by using the Matrix Wand.

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