

MECHANIC

FROM PAGE F1

my leg," said Brad Liston, who does bodywork for the shop. "I thought, 'How could a blind man work on engines?'"

"But then he'd always out-diagnosed me on anything we looked at. He still does most times."

Bill Caldwell, who used to tow cars for Marko, marvels at his ability with cars.

"I've seen him take the bones out of them and put them back many times," the North Side resident said. "Many people don't believe me when I tell them he's blind."

The work seems more natural than remarkable to Marko, 71. Born with infantile glaucoma, the second youngest of eight children gradually developed serious problems with his vision.

He lived on the family dairy farm, north of Wooster, as a youngster, performing "just the standard maintenance stuff" on augers, tractors and combines.

"I didn't really think about it, and no one really pushed me any one way. I just followed my brothers around and did the work they did."

He attended school in Wooster until his parents — immigrants from central Europe — sent him to the state School for the Blind in Columbus.

By his first year at Bowling Green State University, he'd lost all sight.

"Until I was 17, 18, I had real good, useful vision — 20/200 vision," he said. "But glaucoma catches up with you. Some doctors said it could either way."

His experience around other blind people, he said, helped him.

"During the time I was losing my sight, I thought I was still seeing things. But really I was using my hearing and touch."

He earned a liberal-arts degree from Bowling Green in 1957, graduating on a Thursday and reporting to his new job the next Monday.

"I got this counseling job with the state Welfare Department," he said. "I had no idea what I was doing. But I ended up helping people — all handicapped people — find jobs throughout southern and southeastern Ohio."

Away from work, he built "kit cars" with Volkswagen parts. By the late '70s, suffering from "social-work burnout," he retired from the state job.

He gravitated to auto mechanics in 1979, teaming first with Mike George and Bill Chittenden at Community Volkswagen, near Neil Avenue west of the old Ohio Penitentiary.

"We called it the 'prison garage,'" Marko said.

Four years later, he joined Chittenden in opening another shop, Community Car Care, at Nelson Road and E. 5th Avenue.

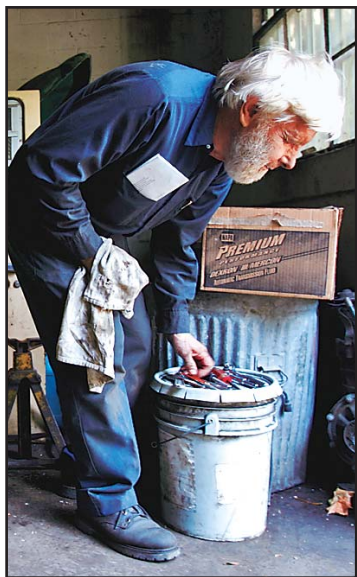
"He's one of a kind, obviously," said Chittenden, living in southwestern Missouri. "I was surprised when Ed would drop something like a nut or bolt and I couldn't find it and he always could."

"And I was totally blown away that someone who couldn't see could reach in between a running engine with confidence."

In the late '80s, when Chittenden left Columbus, Marko relocated the shop to Bryden Road and Holtzman Avenue.



Ed Marko repairs a vehicle outside Community Car Care.



Marko retrieves a tool left on top of a bucket.

Liston, who drives Marko to work from his home in Bexley, is the only employee.

Rosemary Valentine, a Nissan owner, is among the 100 or so regular customers.

"Ed is honest," said Valentine, a client for 12 years. "I live way up in north Clintonville, but I always come here."

On the front of the building, Virginia creeper overwhelms the shop's sign — white and tennis-court green.

Inside, the shop presents a study in organized chaos.

A few Beetles, a Porsche, a BMW, a Karmann Ghia and the guts of countless other machines line a path that Marko walks every day.

A rusted exhaust fan from a restaurant — 4 by 4 feet — rests in the middle of the main work space.

Though unsure why it sits there, Marko knows how to avoid it.

The tools of the mechanic's

trade are here and everywhere: in a cabinet; in — or on — 5-gallon buckets; in the trunks of Beetles; under an '80s Audi; on the minivan seat that doubles as office furniture.

"Where is that 10-millimeter wrench?" Marko asks aloud to himself. "I think it's over here in this bucket."

Sure enough, it is — along with screwdrivers, a ball-peen hammer, terry-cloth rags and nuts, bolts and hose clamps.

In his office, Marko sits at an industrial desk blanketed with fuses, envelopes, work orders, invoice slips and parts catalogs as well as cans of Liquid Wrench and a generic fiber supplement.

An inch of coffee a week old or more remains in a grease-stained coffeepot.

"We're just into fixing cars the right way," Liston says. "We're not much for the corporate biz."

Penny the cat, butterscotch with faint gray-black stripes, cleans herself atop the clutter while Marko calls friends and customers, parts stores and junkyards.

Most numbers he retrieves from the Rolodex in his brain. Others he asks someone to recite from business cards or handwritten lists haphazardly taped to the walls.

He patiently explains to a customer on the phone how to unlock a Cabriolet trunk without a key.

All the while, Penny perfects her coat. She skips her feet and the tip of her tail — both permanently stained by auto-shop grime.

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"Penny leaves paw prints on cars," Dransfield says. "Ed leaves handprints." He met Marko 11 years ago, when Dransfield, then a student at the Columbus College of Art & Design, was planning a road trip to California.

A friend had sent him to Marko for advice about his "crappy Beetle." When he returned from the West Coast in the fall of 1994, Dransfield became an apprentice — and, later, a part-time employee — to Marko.

The artist and carpenter was one of two dozen or more students who spent time turning wrenches in the shop — a number that doesn't count the stream that DeVry University used to supply.

"The main thing with Ed is he can explain things so well," Dransfield says. "I think it's because at one point he could see some."

A life without sight, Marko says, simply forced him to rely on his hands.

"Even mechanics who can see, they wouldn't really be mechanics if they couldn't feel something and know what it is. A lot of the time you're turning a bolt you can't see. Most of this is 50, 70 percent touch recognition."

He talks about how he manages without sight while trying to remove a starter from under a jacked-up Audi.

"Now there are some things I can't do, period," he continues. "I can't screw in a screw on the long end of a screwdriver."

"If there's a little, tiny hole, OK, I can't reach my hands up in it and see where I need to be."

At his age, Marko says, he stays as busy as he wants to be — working on "four or five pieces" a week.

And he can't imagine giving up the place.

"I should be retired down south there in the hills, counting the deer and loafing around," he says. "But I'm not too good at that."

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R.L. BURNSIDE | 1926-2005

Mississippi bluesman hit stage late in life

By Jake Coyle ASSOCIATED PRESS

R.L. Burnside — one of the last great Mississippi bluesmen, whose raw country blues was discovered late in his life — has died.

He was 78. Burnside died Thursday morning at St. Francis Hospital in Memphis, Tenn. His health had been declining for some time, said Matthew Johnson, owner of Burnside's record label, Fat Possum.

A sharecropper early in life, Burnside didn't record until his 40s and didn't become a professional musician until 1991, when he was signed by Fat Possum. Popular with younger acts such as the Beastie Boys and Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, Burnside remained, as Johnson once said, "incorruptible because he just doesn't care."

After the 1992 live album Bad Luck City, Fat Possum released Too Bad Jim in 1994. Burnside's raw, John Lee

Hooker-style, one-chord progression blues on songs such as Death Bell Blues and Shake 'Em on Down received critical acclaim.

He released more than a dozen albums and toured worldwide, although he performed less after heart surgery in 1999. His last record was 2004's A Bothered Mind.

Burnside was born in the Mississippi Delta town of Harmontown on Nov. 23, 1926. He spent most of his life in the north Mississippi hills working as a sharecropper and fisherman.

In the 1940s, he moved to Chicago where he was taught to play guitar by Mississippi Fred McDowell and later met Muddy Waters. But Burnside left the city after his father and two of his brothers were killed there.

When Burnside moved back to Mississippi, he shot a man who he said was trying to run him out of his home. He was convicted and served six months in jail before a plantation foreman got him out to work the cotton harvest.

Burnside is survived by his wife, Alice Mae; 12 children; and numerous grandchildren.



R.L. Burnside

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