

# Al Parsch Oil

1997



From left: Louis Parsch, Duane Wedlake & John Parsch

Louis Parsch of Imlay City is one of a handful of marketers who still operates a three-bay auto repair shop at his service station.

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2007

# A Rarity in Petroleum Marketing

## A Three-Bay Service Garage

### *Parsch's Automotive Service and Repair*

By Bernice Johnston

Even more remarkable, Parsch's Automotive Service & Repair has been in the same family for over 30 years. In the past two decades when the majority of marketers were converting their bays into convenience stores or incorporating modern store designs into their new locations, Lou Parsch stuck with what he and his brother John, both ASE certified mechanics, knew best—auto service and repair.

Lou's father, Al Parsch was a longtime oilman working with familiar marketers like Carl Schultz, John Berger and Ralph Neeb. Al eventually took over management of the Mobil service station on old M-21 in Imlay City, east of Flint. He formed Al Parsch and Sons Oil Co., and at one time all four of his sons, Lou, Alan, John and Tom, worked with him.

"In the early 1970s my Dad purchased an old truck that we fixed up. He handled the deliveries while others ran the repair shop," said Lou. In 1976 Lou began working with his father while still in school. He attended St. Clair County Community College and Mott Community College in Flint. That same year, Al Parsch took over both aspects of the business — deliveries and gasoline retail, plus the repair shop.

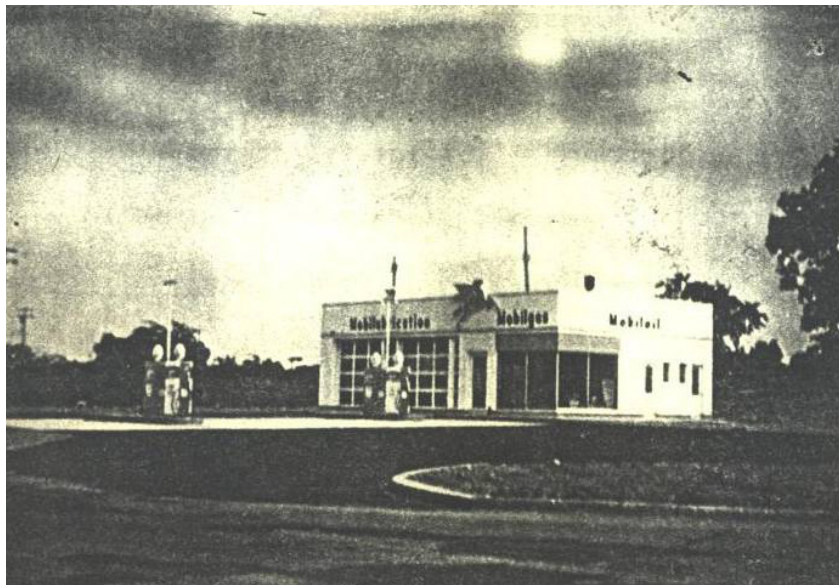
During the next nine years the company faced some major changes. Al Parsch experienced health problems and had to cut back on his work schedule. The brothers joined forces to keep the business running with Lou managing the station and Alan on the truck. John joined the company in 1981 and Tom came on board in 1983. Unfortunately, Al Parsch passed away in September 1985.

Parsch's Automotive Service & Repair encompasses several operations that meld together well to keep the business as a whole on an even keel. The company, still located at the Mobil service station in Imlay City, includes a convenience store, propane sales, repair and service garage, retail tires and U-Haul rentals.

"I've done several studies to see which operation — the gasoline station or the repair shop -- gives us the best return," said Lou. "And each time my conclusion is that neither one can stand alone, but together we've been able to survive....and survive for over 30 years"

Duane Wedlake has been with the company for 23 years. "Duane is a main fixture here and someone I really rely on," said Lou.

"He's my tire man and does light auto repair work." Lou has a total of eight employees, including some family members who work part time. Lou's wife Sandra is in the office most mornings and son Lucas comes in after school and through the summer, Lou's daughter Chelsea, who for the past three years worked part-time, now attends Northwood University. John's daughter Madalyn who is now attending St Clair Community College was a part-timer this summer.



Parsch's Automotive Site 50 Years Ago

Following their father's death, Al Parsch and Sons Oil Co. officially split. Alan purchased the gasoline route and became Al Parsch Oil Co., and Lou, as senior partner with his brother John, bought the service station equipment and repair business. Tom Parsch lives in Richmond and works as an Equipment Sales Rep.



"One of the things I feel best about," said Lou, "is the fact that we have been able to support three families, plus other employees, off a small business in a city whose population is only 3,869.

There's a down side to the business, and according to Lou, it usually comes from one of the state agencies that regulate marketers. "I always have my day planned with one or two things I want to accomplish. But if that's the day a state agency rep shows up, forget about doing anything. It could be the DEQ or Weights and Measures, or someone else, but they don't care that I'm trying to run a business. And they don't give me credit for knowing my equipment and how to operate my business. When they are on site, you do it their way."

Lou Parsch is conscientious about running his operations, has taken advanced courses in garage management and checks his pumps daily. Some days it's frustrating being a petroleum dealer. "I had my pumps cited for being out of calibration. It costs me time and money, and as it turned out only one was off....and that one was in the customers' favor."

On the up side, Lou likes the challenges of being a small family business, of being part of the community and contributing to it, and the freedom he has in being his own boss. He is the Township Treasurer for Goodland Township where he and his family live. He and his wife Sandra have five children: Chelsea, 18 is a business management student at Northwood University; Lucas, 17, plans to attend Michigan Tech next fall; Kaleb, 15; Allison, 13, and Seth, 10.

Lou is a farmer at heart. He grew up farming and continues to work 60 acres at his home, growing beans and hay. "I've always loved farming.

That's what I originally studied in school. I grew up on a farm, but Dad didn't think you could make a living as a farmer." In addition to his crops, Lou and his children are involved in 4-H, and Kaleb and Seth are raising sheep and some cattle.

For the past several years, Lou has been "in the office" taking on more administrative duties in running the company. He has always worked on cars in the repair shop but seven years ago he took business classes for automotive management. "Basically these classes showed me how to run the garage instead of the garage running me," said Lou. "I had been trying to run the business from my tool box with three phones hanging over my head." He still keeps his hand in the repair/service end doing half a dozen jobs a week.

Lou Parsch has invested 31 years in the family gasoline and auto repair business. "Over the years I've learned to put out my fires before they do damage. I catch them early, and I train our employees to put out the fires before they spread."

"For the most part I've enjoyed this business. We have good customers, and some families are now in the third generation of bringing their cars here for service."


They also have 'fun' with their customers.....

After pumping your gas you can gas guess Lou's favorite number and win a T-shirt.... or read one of the fake news stories posted on the pumps extolling the

**health and social benefits** of filling up your car at Parsch's Automotive that employee Nick enjoys creating.

As far as the future goes, Lou is at a wait and see point. "The economy is down and margins are low, but I have spent too many years here to let it go now."

Expansion may come down the road but it would have to be at a new location. "We are limited in what we can do at this site. There is no land available here." It also depends on his children and their interest in the business. "Lucas is going to study business in college after he graduates from high school, and he has expressed an interest in developing a new location. It would be great to have something near I-69 and pick up the freeway traffic."

For the time being Lou Parsch will continue putting out the fires and taking pride in being a rarity in petroleum marketing – a service station with a three-bay automotive repair and service shop. 



Alan, Lou, Al, John, and Tom Parsch, at their family business, Al Parsch and Sons Oil Company, Inlay City.

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