HAMPTON Connects

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HAMPTON HILL GARAGE

"The real wealth of a family business is not its profits, but the unity, trust, and shared purpose it fosters." – Unknown



Early in John's Career, 1968



John, his grandfather, and his father



The Chronicle, 1977

John and his son, Michael

In 2027, John Rodriguez will retire from Hampton Hill Garage, leaving it in the capable hands of his son, Michael. But after 50 years of working at the garage, John isn't just leaving a job; he's retiring from a business where family has been integral to its success for four generations.

John's grandfather, Jim, started Jim's Gulf in Storrs Center in the early 1960s, selling gas and servicing cars and trucks. In 1969, the business moved to West Old Route 6 in Hampton. John's father, also named Jim, bought the business and continued to run and expand it until 1997, when John took over. Michael started working there in 2005 after graduating from UConn and will eventually become the fourth-generation owner.

After many years of working at the garage, John gained not only the automotive expertise his customers value and rely on, but also a unique blend of work and family memories. When he was just eight years old, John helped out at his grandfather's garage by stocking the oil cabinet, filling the soda machine, and taking care of the trash. His responsibilities grew as he got older and worked with his father. He remembered accompanying his father when he went out to jump-start someone's car, shadowing his father at the garage, and trying to solve mechanical problems on his own. One memory that served him well was the expectation that, no matter what he was assigned to do, he would always do his best.

When John bought the business from his father in 1997, ownership wasn't the only change. In 2000, the business moved to Hartford Turnpike (Route 6). Gas was no longer available at the new location, but the building had more space for automotive work. Another change was using technology to make billing and record keeping more accessible. John's wife, Ellen, took on the responsibility of finding and implementing the right software. Her efforts were a great success. Going digital facilitated administrative tasks, making it easier for both the garage and the customers to keep track of previous work. Technology played a role in the automotive work as well. For years, the garage has used diagnostic scanners, laser

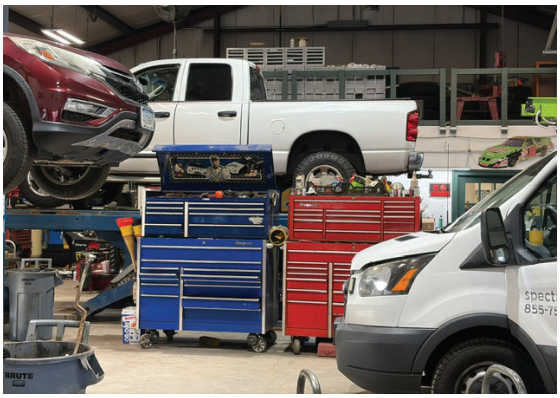
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Construction at the garage in 1999



Taking care of business



Servicing many types of vehicles

continued from front

alignment, a special lift, and other tools and equipment that are needed to keep up with automotive advancements.

Although earlier in life John considered becoming an architect, his choice to continue working at the garage with his family felt natural and right for him. There may have been disagreements in all those years, but as John said, "Family is reliable, and you can always count on them to show up." And show up they did—during gas shortages, hurricanes, blizzards, 9/11, and COVID. Customer feedback also assured John that he made the right choice. After John replaced a set of brakes for the first time by himself, the owner of the car sent his daughter to pick it up, telling John he completely trusted his work without needing to see it. Such high praise left John confident that he was doing what he was meant to do.

John's hard work and dedication to the family business not only increased his automotive knowledge and helped him gain new skills, but also gave him the opportunity to learn life lessons from his grandfather and father. He learned to "do his best, take care of people, and value a good reputation." He has done all of these things to the benefit of "the great people in Hampton and supporting towns."

John looks forward to the rewards of retirement, such as travel, more time with family, and of course, relaxation. And whenever he reflects on his life, he can do so with pride, knowing that like his grandfather and father before him, he was instrumental in building the family business with skill, hard work, and integrity.

For more information contact John at: hamptonhillgarage@gmail.com

Looking for a Good Book?



Set in the South during the 1950s, *KIN* by Tayari Jones is the story of Vernice (Niecy) and Annie, each motherless since infancy. With a friendship that begins early in their lives, these "cradle friends" navigate the circumstances of their childhoods and later the trials of being adults in a society that doesn't always accept them. Although they choose different paths to find the sense of family and kin they never had, their friendship continues to deepen.

Both girls are raised by relatives in Honeysuckle, Louisiana. After Niecy's father murders her mother, Niecy is raised by her Aunt Irene who encourages her to find a better life. When Annie's mother abandons her, she's raised by her grandmother whose strictness brings out Annie's rebellious streak. After graduating from high school, Niecy heads to Spelman College in Atlanta, while Annie travels to Memphis to find her mother.

While they are apart, Jones uses a series of letters between Niecy and Annie to show how their lives are changing through the choices they make and the people they meet. Despite the changes, their friendship remains an integral part of their lives. As Niecy writes to Annie, "You know my heart and I know yours."

When their lives connect once again, both geographically and emotionally, the girls realize that the sense of family each has been looking for is something they had already found in each other. As Niecy is told by a friend, "Blood alone can't give you kinship."

Winter: It Doesn't Like Us

By Claudette Russell

You marvel at the first snowflakes drifting by the window while you sip hot chocolate and nibble homemade cookies. But it's never long before you start hurling expletives at the deadly sheets of ice covering your yard and the record-setting snowfall that's added three more broken shovels to your collection. Because no one escapes the trials and tribulations of winter, you'll soon find yourself in some of these familiar situations.

As soon as the weatherman announces the current blizzard is fit for neither man nor beast, your dog (the beast) indicates he has to go out. He doesn't understand your reluctance to escort him in the middle of a blizzard that would render a polar bear helpless. After gathering a hat, scarf, wool vest, and boots (the dog's, not yours), you muscle through the drift blocking the front door and wonder if a 150-pound dog can be trained to use a litterbox.

Sub-zero temperatures can ruin relationships without anyone ever going outside, as you and your partner compete for control of the thermostat. Nothing says divorce lawyer faster than when in the dead of winter, one person lounges around the house in shorts and a t-shirt, and the other requires the insulation of fleece-lined sweatpants, three wool sweaters, and a puffy jacket suitable for the Arctic. Attempts to solve this problem include pleading, arguing, lying, trickery, deceit, and bribery. Don't be surprised if you're not on speaking terms with your significant other until the last icicle melts into spring.

After a day of shoveling, scraping, and chiseling, your well-deserved relaxation is foiled by a power outage. You stumble your way to the household emergency supplies, only to learn that one of your children forgot where he left the flashlight, and the other gave the last of the bottled water to the dog. While cursing your recent purchase of 50 pounds of prime beef now defrosting in the freezer, you duct-tape the refrigerator door to make sure no one can open it. When you call the power company to ask for the estimated restoration time, the only response you hear is uncontrollable laughter.

Within a month of winter's never-ending challenges, you realize the decrepit state of your former athletic body. The evidence is overwhelming: groaning when you lift your morning coffee mug, needing ibuprofen before you're able to carry the snow shovel outside without pain, ordering your third heating pad from Amazon, lamenting the state of your knees, and condemning your back for its betrayal. You would light a candle and wait for a miracle to end the nightmare, if only you weren't too exhausted to strike a match.

Winter offers no rest for the weary. Right after you leave your boots dripping onto the already saturated kitchen rug and before you can scrape the ice crystals off your gloves, you see a blast of snow fly off the plow, launching your mailbox into the neighbor's yard. And yes, the dog needs to go out. Again.

Is there any reason to hope this winter will be different? Only if you're an optimist.