

## **Economy driving growth in Triad auto repair**

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As cash-strapped consumers repair their current cars instead of buying new, three national auto care franchise companies are targeting the Triad for growth in the coming year.

Though the trend is partly to blame for a statewide slump in car sales in recent years, it has meant growing demand for the likes of Cottman Transmission, AAMCO and Express Oil Change and Service Center, which provide everything from engine tune-ups to tire rotations.

[Randy Wright](#), president of Cottman Transmission of Horsham, Pa., can attest to that.

Business has grown so much locally that the company's Greensboro service center has expanded from a 2,600-square-foot location on Landover Road to a new 12-bay, 8,000-square-foot facility on Spring Garden Street.

Wright attributes the growth to "people keeping their cars longer."

"That's sort of an economic issue that's been going on the last few years," Wright said. "The average age of a car is growing. More repair is required than normally would have been the case."

Meanwhile, Express Oil Change and Service Center, a national automotive service company with more than 170 locations including Winston-Salem and Kernersville, is planning two more Triad locations.

Gary and [Rebecca Howorka](#), who opened an Express Oil Change and Service Center in December 2008 at 125 W. Hanes Mill Road in Winston-Salem, plan to open another center on Lewisville-Clemmons Road in Clemmons by January 2012 thanks to a growing demand for service.

"We grew 65 percent last year," he said.

[Philip J. Stewart Jr.](#), owner of Stewart Realty in Winston-Salem, sold the land that the Clemmons service center will be built on for \$550,000.

Howorka said he also is planning a third location on Hanes Mall Boulevard to open in about two years.

And AAMCO, a car care franchise with several Triad locations including two in Winston-Salem, is seeking entrepreneurs to operate three new sites in eastern Greensboro, Asheboro and Lexington.

[Robert Glaser](#), president of the N.C. Automobile Dealers Association, said he's noticed the trend of consumers fixing what they have instead of buying new.

“Obviously, the economic issue is delaying some purchases as well,” Glaser said. “The last three years have been a very turbulent time for our industry.”

Consumers also are holding onto their cars longer because the vehicles are some of the safest — and cleanest — on the highway today, Glaser said.

“The technology is so far superior to our parents' cars that it's amazing,” he said.

But judging by recent car sales, the holding-onto-cars trend might not last long. Glaser said new car sales in North Carolina are up 17 percent ahead of last year.

“We are very optimistic,” he said.