

A car for \$1 and a good deed

Paul Barr knows what it's like to be without a set of wheels when you could really use one.

Growing up, he watched his father, a cabinetmaker, trudge to the bus stop every day to get to work.

"And it was back and forth to the bus stop, about a mile each way, and it was all kinds of weather," Barr recalls.

But, if his dad couldn't afford a car, he could afford to lend a hand to others who needed it — some handyman work around the house, for instance, or a roof over their heads for a while.



Tamara Dietrich
Opinion

The lesson that Barr, now 54, learned is that you don't have to be rich to be rich in spirit.

So, now, as his successful Guaranteed Auto Service business in Newport News enters its 30th year, Barr is launching what he calls the "Wheels of Change" contest.

Are you in need of a vehicle? And, just as importantly, do you deserve one?

If so, Wheels of Change is the chance for you to earn — not to win, but to *earn* — the chance to purchase a completely refurbished 2002 Dodge Intrepid for the sum of exactly one dollar.

That's right: \$1.

What makes a winner?

"My dad would've been the perfect example," Barr says, adding that his father passed away in 1994. "He didn't have much, but he reached out to other family members and people in need, and was always helping them."

It could be an individual or an organi-



Tamara online

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zation. It could be you.

The only catch is, you can't sing your own praises: Someone has to sing them for you.

Someone has to nominate you, with a page or so of text describing who you are and why you deserve a (nearly) free car.

Writing skill doesn't matter; nor does presentation.

"It could be chicken-scratched or typed, cursive — it doesn't make any difference," Barr says. "As long as it goes to a deserving person."

If presentation doesn't matter, credibility does. Barr says he has lots of experience at his business and his church background in people applying for financial assistance. Con men need not apply.

As for the car, his shop towed it as part of its service contract for the Newport News police department. As sometimes happens in such cases, the owner never came to claim it.

So Barr attached a storage lien on the vehicle, and won legal title. The shop now owns it outright.

His shop did the mechanical work, and One Stop Auto Body on Warwick Boulevard cleaned up the exterior. It runs great and looks like new, Barr says. And it's sitting on his lot, if anyone wants to take a look.

"This is just a way we can give back to the community that's helping us be so successful," Barr says. "And it's not a major contribution, but it's kind of one

step at a time. And I think each of us can reach out to help others. It doesn't have to be monumental — just one person reaching out, and it can make (the world) a much better place to be."

Along with the written nomination, include your name, address and phone number, and the same for the person you're nominating.

And send it to:

"Wheels of Change"
c/o Guaranteed Auto Service
5800 Warwick Blvd.
Newport News, VA 23607

Nominations should be postmarked by Oct. 31. Barr and others will read through the nominations as they arrive, and announce a winner on Nov. 5.

Then, says Barr, "They pay one dollar, and we hand them the title."

Why a buck, and not for free?

"I feel like anybody that gets something, they feel a little bit better if they give something in exchange for it," Barr says. "A dollar might mean as much to them as \$5,000 to another person."

With the rotten economy and rocketing joblessness, he's not wrong.

For the second year in a row, residents have voted to give Guaranteed Auto Service a Daily Press Choice Award for best auto service/repair. Local businesses sign up to be considered for these awards, and their customers decide whether to vote for them. Friday marks the shop's 30th anniversary.

"This is something I'd like to start doing annually," Barr says of Wheels of Change, adding that other businesses like his could start similar projects. "It's a small thing, but I believe that's how big things are started."

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