



BRANDON DAVENPORT PHOTOS, RECORD PHOTO

Carter Grant (middle) helps his Dad, Creighton, and North West Auto Body and Paint employee CJ Anderson install number graphics on a newly painted John Deere Tractor.

Northwest Autobody thriving in Crawford

Business brought family home

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As they creep up on their one-year anniversary of business ownership, Crawford's Creighton and April Grant, owners of Northwest Auto Body and Paint in Crawford, are enjoying the ride, even though it's been as fast-paced as it's been successful.

Creighton, a 15-year automotive professional, can be found on any given day working away on any one of the many customer projects in the shop, so he's happy to have his better half, a former Chadron State College graphic design major, taking charge of things like advertising, paperwork, and handling an interview with a curious reporter.

The couple purchased the business, formerly Hourt's Auto Body, in May of last year and have been going strong as a team ever since, with Creighton, providing the dirty work, and April making sure the business and promotional side of things stay organized.

Both Creighton and April have roots in the area, but prior to moving back, Creighton had been working as a Production Manager at ABRA, a national auto body chain in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Although Creighton's position at ABRA had been going well, family ties would set his and April's future fate in motion, as Joe Hourt, the late owner of Hourt's Auto Body, not so subtly began recruiting Creighton to return to Dawes County and work with him at the shop.

"Joe was looking for someone to purchase the business," says April. "He'd been looking for a handful of years because he wanted to retire, but he wanted to gradually retire."

It wasn't an easy decision for Creighton, but after discussing the offer with April, and with some encouragement by Hourt, the two decided the offer would at least be worth a try.

With that, the couple made the short move back home to Dawes County, first moving to Chadron where Creighton had grown up, and where April had lived since graduating from CSC.

Creighton began working with Hourt, eventually moving the family, which included his new son Carter, to Crawford when it became clear that taking over the business was the right decision for his new family. But just two years after he started working with Hourt, tragedy struck.

Hourt had begun having health issues, and unfortunately the beloved Crawford businessman passed away not long after his business had celebrated its 30-year anniversary.

"Joe was a very, very good man," says April.

After his passing, the Grants worked with Hourt's family to purchase the business.

Since then, a little under a year ago, there's been no slowing down for the young couple who've worked hard to keep the business successful.

Now Northwest Auto Body



Northwest Auto Body and Paint, formerly Hourt's Auto Body, was purchased by Creighton and April Grant in May of 2017. The couple have worked hard in what has nearly been a full year of business, growing quickly while still finding time to be good community members.



Creighton and April Grant, holding sons Carter and Conrad, pose with employee CJ Anderson at the couple's shop in Crawford.



Creighton Grant and CJ Anderson apply decals to a newly painted John Deere tractor while Creighton's son, Carter, looks on.

and Paint, the shop continues to specialize in collision work and professional paint services, but also offers trailer repair, spray-in bedliners, and windshield replacement.

It hasn't been easy sailing all the way. After all, since purchasing the business the two have had another child, Conrad, but you get the sense the two embrace the challenges they face.

"We had to hit the ground running," says April of having officially purchased the business, "but I think we were prepared to do it."

"I think one of the biggest challenges we've had is just growing too fast," she adds. "It's been hard

to hold back, we kind of want to do anything and everything right now...we want to offer our customers everything."

April believes it's paramount that they try to limit how fast the business grows in order to ensure that it's growing in a healthy way.

"It's an exciting challenge to have because it feels like we definitely have opportunities and talents to know that we have the possibility to keep growing," she says.

If there's any problem for a business to have that could be labeled as a "good problem" it's probably being successful enough that you need to hold yourself back. A good portion of credit for that is likely due to the foundation built and

maintained by the late Joe Hourt. Couple that foundation with the hardworking entrepreneurial spirit of Creighton, and the business and advertising acumen of April, and it's not hard to see why they've been successful.

April's education in graphic design serves as a perfect fit with her husband's skills, and her brand-driven advertising style shows she knows her stuff. But it's not just those perfectly meshing business skills that make the two a successful team.

If her husband is the proverbial gas that drives their aspirations, April is the brake that keeps them grounded.

"He definitely has a very strong entrepreneur streak in him," says April, "...without that I don't think we'd have come nearly as far as we have."

Even though she has to tap the brakes every once in a while, she still celebrates Creighton's enthusiasm. "He's been such a driving force. Of course we made the jump, we were way past the landing."

The two haven't been alone in their endeavors, though.

If good help is hard to find, then the Grants consider themselves extremely lucky. Not long after Hourt's passing, the couple was approached by CJ Anderson, a young man currently enrolled in CSC's criminal justice program, who wanted to come work with them in the shop.

"He came in, he kinda didn't know much about autobody and Creighton took him under his wing," April says. It's just grown into a fabulous relationship between the two, they work extremely well together."

That ability to teach and lead is something April believes Creighton has always aspired to in his career, something that he's always had inside of him, and that one of the joys of him having become a business owner is that he gets that opportunity.

Even with running a busy, successful business, and managing a family that includes two young boys, the Grants still find time to be part of the community of Crawford.

The two are members of the Crawford Chamber of Commerce and in the past year have worked on projects like the restoration of a community fountain.

They also like to work closely with the Chamber when it comes to the Legends of the Butte Car Show.

"They have the car show the same weekend we have our customer appreciation barbecue, the same weekend that Joe used to have his customer appreciation," says April. "It's balled into this huge event."

This past year, the couple did something a little different with the barbecue. "This year we decided we wanted to do it more as a fundraiser...we thought it would be nice to help somebody out with what we're doing," she says.

With that in mind, they decided they'd use their event to raise money for the Honor Flight program. The Dawes County based program takes veterans on an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C., to visit the memorials.

April used her ties with the Miss Nebraska program - she's the director of the local Miss Chadron program - to bring Miss Nebraska and Miss Nebraska's Outstanding Teen out to the event.

In all, the fundraiser raised \$1,300 for the Honor Flight organization.

"We value being connected to our community," April says. "In a small, rural, community like Crawford it's important that we take care of each other and support other local community members, and other local businesses, because that's where we're going to find our strength."

April says the community of Crawford has been welcoming to their family in the relatively short time they've been residents. "It's so pleasant to see, and feel, and be part of a community that understands that if we're going to be successful we need to take care of each other," she says. "They really pride themselves on that and it's something they should be proud of because they're really good at doing it."

Creighton and April pride themselves on being members of the community and strive to offer services to other community members that mean maybe they don't have to drive somewhere else down the road to get; and they're happy to see their customers doing business locally, as they try to do as often as possible.

It's their hope that as the business continues to grow, they'll be even better at servicing their local community, and hope to offer even more services down the road.

But for now, amid the fast-paced nature of their lives, they still find time to measure their accomplishments, big and small.

"It feels like an accomplishment every time we open each Monday," April says with a laugh. "Just the act that we've made it a year now. We've had so many little things that have come together. As you tackle each and every small problem it just feels like a win."

"Just looking at what the last five years has held for us, we're hopeful that the next five are a little slower," she says with a laugh.