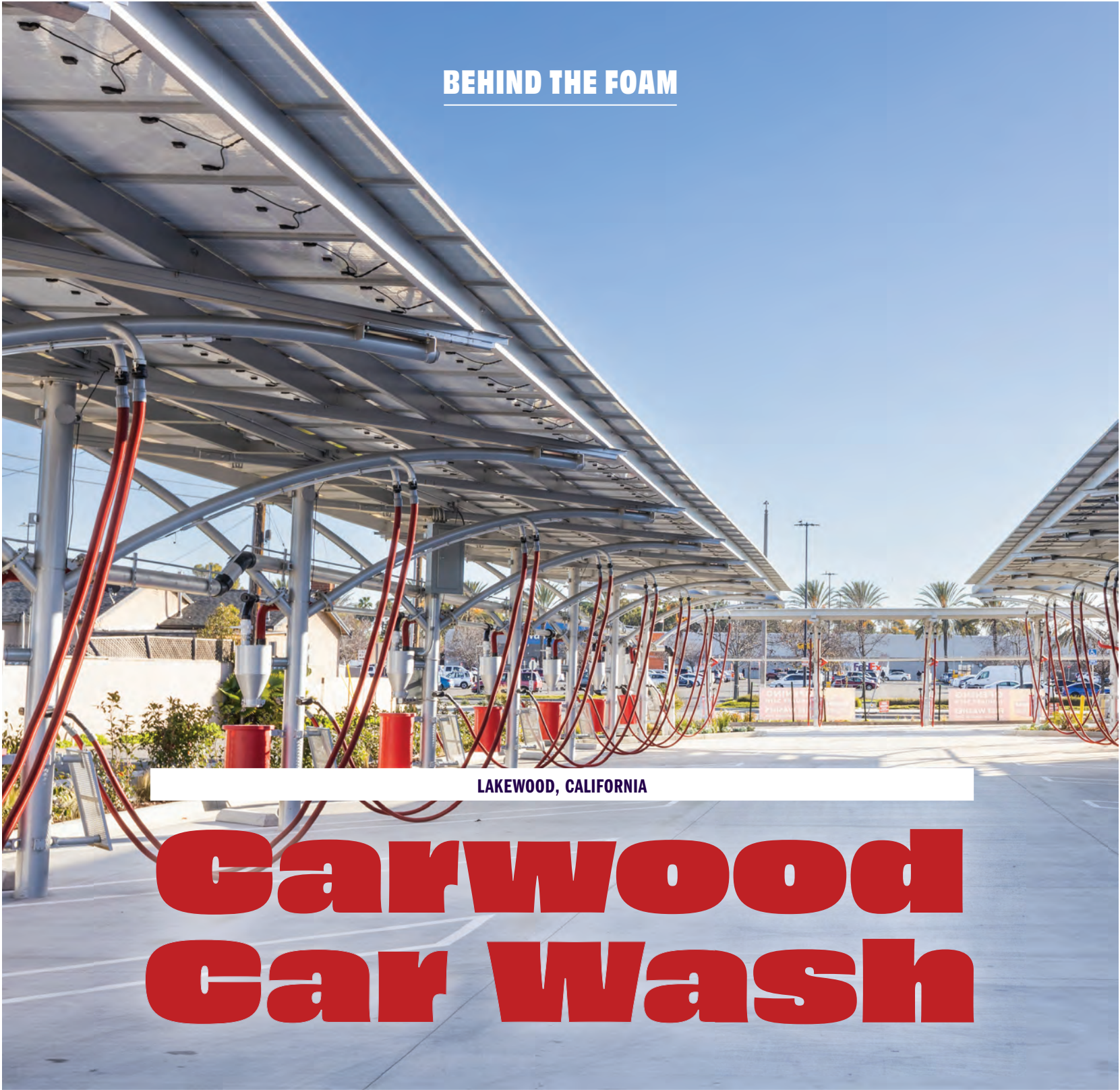




BEHIND THE FOAM

LAKEWOOD, CALIFORNIA

Carwood Car Wash

**Closing Is
Sometimes
Just the Start**

By Shaneen Calvo, Editor, CAR WASH Magazine

What do you do if your go-to car wash closes its doors? Opening your own might not be the answer most would have to that question, but it was exactly what Roland Spongberg was thinking when he heard the news.

“I learned that my favorite car wash had sadly closed its doors due to a gas station’s acquisition of their property,”



Spongberg said. Around the same time, an economic downturn had abruptly halted the office construction project he was currently working on, which meant his schedule had just opened up.

Who could have guessed that would be the start of Carwood Car Wash in Lakewood, Calif., which is still going strong and washing 600 cars a day?

“Inspired by fond memories of visiting the car wash and a genuine love for the automotive industry, I decided to

build my own,” Spongberg said, even though he didn’t have any experience running a car wash. Spongberg recruited Steve Lopez, who managed a local car wash, as the first manager at Carwood. “Twenty-eight years later, we are still in business and Steve is still our general manager,” Spongberg said.

“Steve is one of our greatest assets,” Spongberg said. “Under his leadership, we’ve fostered a warm, family-like atmosphere that resonates with our community.”



MASSIVE CHANGES

The car wash that sits at 2729 East Carson Street today looks massively different than the one Spongberg built 28 years ago, thanks to a remodel that turned the thriving hand washing and detail business — which was washing 6,000 to 8,000 cars a month— into a flex car wash.

“Like many operators, we faced labor challenges, particularly in the demanding market of California. I recognized the need for a transformative shift, and we embarked on a thorough research endeavor,” Spongberg said.

During this investigative phase, Spongberg delved into the car wash industry and discovered the resounding success of express car wash models. “It became clear that adapting to a flex car wash format was a great solution for our business,” he said.

Since he owned the property adjacent to the wash, he had

enough space to add 24 express self-service vacuum stalls while retaining the full-service and detail areas.

“My goal was to build the most beautiful and environmentally friendly car wash in the nation,” Spongberg said, and he stuck by his word. “I utilize recycled water and installed solar panels, allowing us to generate clean energy for the community in which I grew up.”

Plus, he said their utility bill was increasing 8-9% annually, and he knew that the flex model would require more power. So, that presented a compelling incentive to explore alternative energy solutions. “The solar panels have already provided savings and it will continue to be a long-term financial benefit by mitigating rising electricity expenses. The solar panel installation generates over 300,000 kWh of clean solar energy every year!” he said.

YEAR OPENED

1995

GRAND REOPENING

January 2023

OWNER

Roland Spongberg

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS

1

BUILDING SIZE

4,000 square feet

CONTRACTOR

Clockwork Construction Inc.

TUNNEL LENGTH

115 feet

NO. OF CAR WASHES DAILY

600



BUMPS IN THE ROAD

Embarking on a complete rebuild and remodel isn't easy, though, even for someone in the construction field. "To be honest, the entire journey was filled with difficulties," Spongberg said. "Obtaining the necessary conditional use permit amendment alone took us more than three years." He said they had to enlist the expertise of a land use attorney to navigate the intricacies of working with the city of Lakewood. Despite the fact that a car wash had already operated on the property for 25 years, they faced additional requirements such as traffic and noise studies.

Initially, they estimated that the remodel would be completed within four months, but it ended up taking them a challenging 14 months. They encountered obstacles with Southern California Edison and experienced supply chain issues that delayed the arrival of necessary parts. "However, with the invaluable support of Clockwork Construction Inc, we persevered and ultimately accomplished our goals," Spongberg said.

During this process, they were also fortunate to receive an outpouring of support from their loyal customers, who attended city planning commission meetings on their behalf. "Their unwavering dedication and encouragement bolstered our determination to overcome any hurdles that came our way," he said.

EQUIPMENT SUPPLIER

Detlef Stevenson of
Custom Car Wash
Concepts

VACUUMS

24 self-vacuum stalls,
each equipped with air and
vacuums supplied by Auto
Vac Industrial

CHEMICAL SUPPLIER:

National Carwash
Solutions

THE DIFFERENTIATORS

Having something to make you stand out from competitors is top-of-mind for almost everyone in the car wash industry. Spongberg said that was one of the reasons they opted for a flex wash. “You don’t come across many true flex car washes in Southern California these days, making us a standout in the industry,” he said. They offer a variety of services — including express, express memberships, full-service, detail service and hand washes — which has proven to be a major attraction for their customers. “They appreciate the convenience of getting the wash they want without having to visit multiple car washes,” Spongberg said.

They invested considerable time and effort in researching their equipment selection, as well, to ensure they had a combination that would align with their vision and exceed industry standards. Spongberg said Detlef Stevenson of Custom Carwash Concepts helped guide them through the process of curating a customized solution that included products from various manufacturers.

Also, they proactively look for ways they can support their community. “As a member of this community, giving back is important to me,” Spongberg said. They

MARKETING:

Carwood handles all its marketing initiatives, including social media, Google ads, Waze ads, print mailers, text marketing, partnerships with dealerships and rental car companies, local ads and more. “Plus, we utilize Loop TV in our waiting area, a free service that allows us to display custom marketing messages,” Spongberg said.

FUN PARTNERSHIPS:

Carwood is partnering with the original Tunnel of Terror OC this year. “We are the first car wash they are partnering with in Los Angeles County and have shows planned Oct. 6-31,” Spongberg said.

OTHER COOL INFO:

The car wash is located at 2729 East Carson Street in Lakewood, hence the name Carwood Car Wash.

Over the past 28 years, Carwood has operated as a full-service hand car wash, but is now a flex car wash. The transformation entailed an investment of several million dollars.





ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY FEATURES:

A PurClean water system is used for water recycling.

The 220 kW solar panels are capable of generating about 300,000 kWh of clean energy per year. "We have a strong commitment to environmental responsibility and sustainability.

Renewable energy from the solar panels allows us to contribute to reducing our carbon footprint and promoting a cleaner future for our community," Sponberg said. Plus, the solar panels provide excellent shade covers for the self-vacuum and full-service areas. "Given the hot climate of Southern California, this feature helps our customers and employees stay cool while getting their cars cleaned."

engage in various ways, such as sponsoring local schools, clubs, and sports leagues, and offering competitive fleet pricing options to car dealerships and rental companies.

It worked!

While it took some effort to familiarize their existing customers with the improvements made during the remodel, they've received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Prior to the remodel, they did not offer express memberships, so they started from scratch. "When we opened, we gave away free car washes for the first seven days and offered \$1 memberships for the first month. We were able to sign up over 650 members in the first 30 days of reopening," Sponberg said.

But, for Sponberg, the greatest sense of fulfillment at the end of the day comes from witnessing his son Brian stepping into the role of leading Carwood. "I'm proud to see the next generation take over a venture that holds deep sentimental value in the neighborhood where I was born and raised," Sponberg said. "Seeing clean cars and a happy community is a testament to the hard work and dedication we have poured into this project." ●

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