

## **A Less Tiring Tire Shop - Sandone's Changing Focus of Customer Service**

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Pat Sandone III knows buying tires is a necessary but not always exciting purchase for most people.

Even if the tires are high-quality and the right price, the experience can be downright unpleasant.

"You watch an 18-inch television, read old magazines, sit in an uncomfortable chair, and drink terrible coffee," Mr. Sandone said. "Customers have to be there, we may as well make it pleasant."

Sandone Tire and Battery's new shop in Taylor will try to do that by offering customers perks such as gourmet coffee, Wi-Fi Internet access, comfy chairs, and lots of natural light. The shop is scheduled to open in January.

When Mr. Sandone was working as a corporate consultant in Europe, he took an interest in his family's industry--tire stores--and found they did things differently there.

The waiting rooms were spotless. Customers enjoyed Internet access and gourmet coffee. Employees carefully consulted with customers to find out what characteristics they wanted in a tire.

"I saw that our industry is behind the times in the way they think about customers and how we administer our services," he said.

Since returning to Scranton and the family business three years ago as Sandone Tire's director of retail sales and special projects, the 33-year-old has been working to change things.

Mostly, Sandone is a tire distributor, supplying rubber to retailers in four states from warehouses at Wyoming Avenue and Larch Street. Although the company has a retail shop on Wyoming Avenue, it is an adjunct to the wholesale business, which makes up the vast majority of company revenue.

Mr. Sandone wants to refocus on the retail business with the Taylor store, which will feature a plasma television.

Instead of a counter that makes buying tires seem like buying fast-food, the new store will have consultation stations.

"Tires really are a significant purchase that impacts safety and a vehicle's performance," he said. "We have to treat it as more than a commodity."

In addition to making the shop "a cool place to hang out" as Mr. Sandone put it, pains were taken to make the building energy efficient and less costly to operate. Designed by local architect Joseph G. Rominski, the mostly glass-and-steel building has enough natural light that the bulbs can be switched off during the day. The building will have special equipment that can heat it using waste oil from oil changes.

The Sandones worked with Michael Detter of Hinerfeld Commercial Real Estate to find the location at 531 N. Main St. Looking for a high-traffic road in an area underserved by other under-car specialists, Taylor seemed like the place to be, Mr. Detter said.