

Two high school seniors build car detailing business

BY MARILYN THOMAS

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In 2020, 15-year-olds Aaron Latman and Donovan Brennan started Attention 2 Detail, a vehicle detailing business. Ferrari North America was a customer 18 months later.

In the past year, the business has grown 500%; they've expanded to include paint protection and window tinting; and they expect to relocate their business into a specially-built, 6,000-square-foot space in Highland, Indiana, by the end of the year.

"We're still hands-on, very involved in the day-to-day operations, but we do plan to expand quite a bit over the next few years. Being in that space will help us a lot," Donovan said.

The pair became fast friends in second grade at Willow School in Homewood and went through District 153 schools. Aaron now is a senior at Homewood-Flossmoor High School. Donovan's family moved to Indiana, and he is a senior at Lake Central High School. Despite the distance, their friendship remained strong.

Donovan was the first to work on cars. His dad, Jason Brennan, owns Fine Tune Automotive in Lansing, Illinois, and seventh grader Donovan would make sure the business's loaner cars were clean. He suggested to Aaron that they start a business cleaning and detailing cars, but nothing came of it.

In 2019, Aaron decided to detail his mom's van as a birthday gift. He bought about \$350 worth of supplies and was proud of the job he did. He suggested to Donovan they go into car detailing, since he already had the supplies.

"It was right before COVID," Donovan recalls. "We started out as mobile detailers. We went to customers' houses and detailed in their driveways. It was a really nice service, especially during COVID."

Customers were happy with the results. "We really took pride in our work," he said. Neither of them could drive yet,



Provided photo

Donovan Brennan, left, and Aaron Latman, founders of Attention 2 Detail, stand with a row of Ferraris they detailed for a Ferrari North America-sponsored show.

so Aaron's dad, Brian Latman, drove them around.

The pair designed a logo, opened a Google business page and got enough business to keep working. Attention 2 Detail was officially incorporated in December 2020. In April 2021, a representative for Ferrari asked if they could prepare cars for a show in Lake Forest, Illinois.

Aaron jumped at the chance to get that kind of business. He remembers canceling every customer he'd booked, and he and Donovan went to Lake Forest. After that event "they invited us back and back and back," Aaron said. They've been to Ferrari events in Indianapolis, Lake Tahoe and Pebble Beach, and helped set up shows in Michigan and Wisconsin. They'd work 12-hour days detailing the Italian sports cars, some worth \$1.8 million.

The Ferrari specialty jobs helped supplement their local detailing business. For

a time, they worked evenings and weekends in Donovan's dad's shop when they grew from a couple of cars a month to a couple of cars a day. In spring 2021, they realized they needed their own space. Today they have four full-time employees who work out of a garage in Griffith, Indiana.

"We always take pride in our work, and it's helped to have people here who do the same thing as well; finding people who care about what they do," Donovan said.

At first their friends were part of the team, but they learned to keep friends as friends and not as employees.

And they don't let their ages be a factor in the operation. It does surprise some customers when Donovan, who runs the shop, tells them he's not available until after school hours.

"It's a little bit shocking to a lot of peo-

ple that I am running this kind of thing and that we're doing this regardless of our age," Donovan said. "Honestly, most people don't have a problem with it. Our employees still respect us, even though they're older than us, and as long as you conduct yourself in a professional and responsible way every day, there's really no problem with being so young."

How do two teenagers get to a point where they're responsible for expanding a business, servicing customers, working with employees and meeting a payroll?

Donovan and Aaron say their ambition and drive has been nurtured by their parents, Brian and Robin Latman of Homewood and Jason and Tracy Brennan of Dyer, Indiana, who gave them support and encouragement. Because of their ages, Brian Latman is the "official" owner of the business on paper, but Aaron notes that his dad doesn't "know more than four makes and models of cars."

They started out learning from YouTube videos, but over time they used Facebook to connect with people in the business who gave them tips -- detailer Facebook groups, people who have experience in the industry. Aaron recently spoke to someone in Australia.

And they're expanding their services from detailing to paint protection and coatings. Aaron said they recently went to Florida to learn the process. They are doing between 30 and 40 coatings a month.

Maybe it's their age, but Aaron, the marketing manager, said they didn't have a fear of trying. "We just started the planning process. I didn't know much about business at the time, but one thing I did know that a lot of people just don't start. It's a very treacherous task."

Donovan said: "The biggest thing we're learning in working for ourselves and having each other and people working for us is that communication is key. Kind of just a life lesson, not just in business."

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