

# OXFORD BANK SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

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Every local business has a story worth sharing with the community. That is the belief behind Oxford Bank’s “Business Spotlight” series – to shine spotlight on all of our favorite local businesses and connect businesses with their surrounding communities.

This month’s spotlight is the Clarkston Auto Wash Co.

Fred and Sheila Ritter opened the Clarkston Auto Wash Co. together in 1988. They knew they wanted to own their own business, and after seeing a need for a car wash in the community, they worked endlessly pursuing that goal. It took roughly three years to get the business open, enduring the struggles most small businesses have in the beginning: market research, finding land, design, planning and zoning approval, hiring a contractor, and attaining financing. Their dream was achieved after a conversation with Oxford Bank board member, Jim Sherman Sr. Jim connected Fred and Sheila with then-President and CEO, Randy Fox. Financing was secured with Oxford Bank and construction began May 12, 1988.



**AW:** What inspired you to start your business?

**FR:** I truly saw a need. I had been the Independence Township Treasurer, and was involved and active in the community. So my wife, Sheila and I, decided to take a risk and open the Clarkston Auto Wash in November of 1988.

**AW:** So you opted to open in the winter versus spring?

**SR:** Yes, winter is our busiest season!

**FR:** I also came from a family that owned a small business in the community. Ritter’s Farm Market opened in 1947. It was our family business on Dixie Highway; that’s where I worked growing up. That was my business education.

**AW:** So owning a business was in your blood?

**FR:** Yes, we were a working family that was active in our community working to make it a better place.

**AW:** What’s the one thing your business is known for, over your competitors? Why are you known for that?

**FR:** Satisfaction guaranteed. We have been voted Best of the Best for the last five years, we have a great location, our facility is clean, and we have a great staff.

**AW:** What are your hours like?

**SR:** Monday through Friday 7am to 7pm, Saturday 8am to 7pm, and Sunday 8am to 6pm.

**AW:** What has been your business’ proudest moment? Why?

**SR:** Opening the doors! It was a big deal!

a leap of faith with us. He guided us through the process and got us the loan to make our dream become a reality.

SR: We also received the Beautification Award from the Chamber of Commerce in 1989, just one year after opening our doors! It was quite an honor. Fred was Business Person of the year as well in 2007 as well and I had received Citizen of the year in 1999. These are all very proud moments for us and for our business.

AW: So you've always banked and worked with Oxford Bank?

FR: Yes, you're the bank that was able to get us started. We've always remained loyal because of the help Randy Fox and Jim Sherman Sr. gave us when we were just starting out.

AW: What has been the biggest risk you ever took for your business? What was it, what could have gone wrong, and what was the end result?

SR: I quit my job. I had a good job in sales with Bosch and Lomb and I left that position. Fred was working full time trying to get the car wash up and running, so he was essentially unemployed as well. It was scary, but also exciting.

FR: With risk comes reward. At start-up our entire lives were wrapped up in our business. Sheila and I worked together the first four years non-stop, sun-up to sun-down. Our kids worked for us as well when they were home from Michigan State. Tom Derocher of Derocher Building was our contractor and he offered us a discount if I superintended the job. The real reward of the risk when I hired my son, Matt, that summer to assist in the build. He enjoyed it so much he changed his major and earned a degree in Construction Management from State. The real bonus of the reward thought was that he met Tom's daughter. They're married now and have a beautiful family with two girls in North Carolina where he is building homes.

AW: Tell us something interesting/fun about your business.

FR: We employ a number of high school and college students. A lot of our employees are part time, but our college kids, they typically come back in the summer.

SR: We offer tuition reimbursement as well to students going to school locally. It's something we believe in. We started it as a recruiting tool and it has ended up being more of a retention tool. We have a great staff and our turnover is really low. Students that go away to school often come back for a summer job and help out during breaks. It's like a family.

### **A final note from Fred and Sheila:**

Dear Valued Customer,

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for continued patronage over the past 29 years. Your loyalty to us is our motivation to provide you with the service that thousands of our customers have said is the BEST in North Oakland County! It has truly been our pleasure to serve you. We are dedicated to providing you with the same excellent service we have provided since 1988.

As a hometown, family-owned business since 1988, we are dedicated to and proud of our community. We have established a tuition reimbursement program for our student employees and are active members of the Clarkston Area Chamber of Commerce. We also support many charitable and community events as well as local schools, churches, and service clubs.

Thank you again for your continued patronage, and remember:

**Your satisfaction is Guaranteed!**

Sincerely,

Fred and Shelia Ritter, and your Auto Wash Team.