



Dennis Roberts Sr., right, once again owns Little Roberts Auto Parts. With Steve Cox's help, the company has introduced a new web site.

BUYBACK

Dennis Roberts Reacquires His Business

There's that old saying that goes, "whatever goes around, comes around." Dennis Roberts Sr. and Little Roberts Auto Parts in Kansas City, Mo., are seeing the wisdom in that adage. It took five years, almost to the day, but the business has come full circle.

In August 1999, Roberts sold his business, then known as Little Roberts Auto Salvage, to GreenLeaf Auto Recyclers, one of the nation's largest recycled-part suppliers with multiple locations across the country. Then, in August 2004, with the help of partner Don Edwards, he bought it back and changed the name to Little Roberts Auto Parts, LLC.

"I sold it because the price was right," Roberts explained. "But it's really good to be back."

The complex includes approximately 60,000 square feet of

buildings and a 1,000-vehicle inventory on 18 acres, plus a 30,000-square-foot off-site warehouse. It maintains a delivery fleet of five trucks, plus a rollback and 18 employees.

In his deal with GreenLeaf, Roberts retained ownership of the land and buildings. He remained an employee of GreenLeaf for the first year, then spent the subsequent four years building a subsidiary business, Roberts Classic Cars, which builds custom hot rods and other high-performance vehicles.

Edwards, Roberts' close friend in the reacquisition, owns C & H Auto Salvage, also in Kansas City. Both men are very enthusiastic about the "new" Little Roberts.

"We've made a lot of changes in the operation, and it's back on its feet and getting better every day,"

Roberts revealed. "But it will still take us probably another year to get to where we want to be."

He said that, as part of the transition, Little Roberts sent letters to all former and existing customers explaining the change. And with the help of Steve Cox, general manager, it launched a new web site - LittleRobertsAutoParts.com.

Another point of speculation is the Little Roberts name itself. It turns out to be a Kansas City icon.

Roberts explained, "My grandfather, Curtis Roberts, started the family in the salvage business in the 1940s. His place was called Roberts Auto, and he was a pretty big man. My dad, Bill Roberts, opened his own yard from the mid-'50s to the late-'60s, and he was a little guy - around 135 pounds. He became known as 'Little' Roberts, and that's what he named his business."

When Roberts opened his own business in 1977, his father had already closed the original Little Roberts, so he adopted the name to capitalize on its popularity.

Last year, Roberts' sons, Dennis Jr. and Kent, decided to become the fourth generation of Robertses in the industry. But to avoid confusion, they named their business County Line Auto Salvage, located in nearby Kingsville.

Although it's only been a short time since the buyback, Roberts is relying on that old saying to bring Little Roberts back to where it used to be.

"We're getting an excellent response from our old customers, and we're gaining new ones. They see the positive changes that we've made, and we're winning back their confidence and business." ❧

BY BERNIE PISCZEK

SANDERS & ROSS PHOTOGRAPHY