

# "THE BIG SWITCH"

In this small town of 8,000 people, southwest of Nashville and northwest of Huntsville, Alabama, Bill Cheatham waves at almost everyone in greeting. Because, much like Pulaski, Tennessee itself, Bill Cheatham is warm, friendly and direct. Cheatham is also something else. He's a NAPA AUTO PARTS store owner who has recently changed over to NAPA from the competition.

Bill Cheatham has owned NAPA AUTO PARTS/Pulaski Auto Parts (served by NAPA Nashville since 1956) when he and a partner purchased the store at auction from the wife of the former owner. In the early seventies, Cheatham joined a competitor's system—for the first time. He later left that competitor and then went back for a second try which lasted seven years.

In April of 1987, Cheatham made the big switch to NAPA. His reasoning? "Well, to tell you the truth, I basically realized that all of the good programs that the competition had were originated by NAPA. I figured that I wanted good ideas first-hand, so then I went with the group that comes up with them."

Cheatham was aware of what NAPA had to offer because formerly there had been a NAPA AUTO PARTS store in Pulaski and he had kept his eye on what the store's inventory was and how their sales were going. "In this business you've got to keep your eye on your competition and I did that with NAPA. I paid attention to their inventory, sales and the fact that they had those hard to find parts in addition to their regular stock. I don't think there's a better way to build loyalty among certain customers than to have them know you've got those parts they can't get anywhere else. It keeps them coming back. Plus, they (NAPA) had something no one else has—a private brand that's a good brand. I also paid attention to some of the other things NAPA had, like national advertising, customized classification, inventory control and the Pipeline."

Cheatham is quick to tell you that he didn't just decide to switch to NAPA one day and call the Distribution Center the next. "I talked with the people at the Nashville D.C. for six months before we reached an agreement. It's a big decision and not one I took lightly but all in all it has been one of the best decisions I've ever made. And I'm glad I made it.

"I have to say that the NAPA Nashville personnel have been terrific—before I changed to NAPA and after. The factory people have been terrific too. I can't say enough nice things about them. They return phone calls. They're concerned about my needs and the needs of my customers. The individuals in the system work together and there's no buck passing. The whole group of them are just good people and they really make a difference. I like that."

Cheatham doesn't believe in doing anything halfway so when he switched to NAPA he signed up for the NAPA Store Design Program. "I figure if I'm selling NAPA products then I might as well take advantage of the identity that NAPA has. And that pipeline look identifies my store as a NAPA AUTO PARTS store right away. There's no way anyone can question what I sell when they drive by. I like that too."

Cheatham's pipelined store was the recipient of the 1988 Retailer of the Year award, which is for Pulaski's merchants. "The new look of the store was a conversation piece for weeks around here. I even had the little old ladies in church telling me the store was 'absolutely beautiful.' My competitors are also noticing. They don't really say much but I've gotten some of their accounts, so I know they know that I'm here."

"I'm also very impressed with the other programs NAPA offers, especially those that work really well as door openers. The Real Deals Program works very well with traditional accounts. Now, I'm the first to

say that for my customer base some programs work and some don't. But I'm trying them all before I decide which ones are better for me than others. I believe that in order to determine if a program is right for my area, I've got to first test it out. It's like that old saying 'you never know 'til you try'."

The employees at Pulaski Auto Parts also get a share of the credit for a successful changeover from Cheatham. According to Cheatham they entered into the changeover process with a great deal of enthusiasm and that enthusiasm is apparent as customers walk in the door and phone the store. "I have to give the staff credit. They knew it was going to be a lot of work. And it was. But they knew it was a good move for us and they worked, and are still working, hard to learn about things like the computer and to continue to give our customers the absolute best in service. Between their efforts and enthusiasm and the inventory we've added, this business is going to grow. Since changing over, the business has already grown by 35%. But I've also got to give some credit to my wife, Dot. She was behind me every step of the way and that was good to have."

"But don't get the idea that changing parts suppliers is easy. Because it isn't, even though some are easier than others. Changing over is tough. As an example, let me tell you about the difficulties I had with classification. Now I'm not complaining about the Customized Classification Program. I can't complain. It's a great system. I'm just saying that systems vary and when you switch it takes some time to

