

FINISHED PRODUCT—Richard Nerber, in charge of retreading operations at Zimmie's Tire Service Inc. in Lockport, removes rebuilt tire from mold press machine. Frederick Zimmerman, president of the firm, at left, observes the final operation. Prior to placing in the press, another

workman has applied a layer of tread rubber for further molding by a separate machine. In the press, steam at about 300 degrees inside the tire presses the outside portion against tread design in mold.—Gazette Photo.

New Methods Speed Growth Of Lockport Recap Business

By S. J. LaSPADA

Gazette Lockport Bureau
LOCKPORT — More and more persons are using recapped tires every day, according to Fred Zimmerman, a partner of Zimmies Tire Service Inc. here.

Located at Church and Niagara streets here, the business operated by Fred and his brother, Ronald, is the only place in the city where tires are "recapped," or rebuilt to be used again.

Mountains of used tires often pile up in front of the building while on the inside, the Zimmermans and their employes use new equipment which enables them to recap tires faster and better than ever before.

The firm, another of Lockport's many smaller businesses, turns out about 12,000 tires each and every year.

The business was started in 1946 by the Zimmermans' father, Clarence, who set up shop in a small building at the back of his home at 249 North Transit St.

In 1954, Mr. Zimmerman bought the building at the present location and was joined in the shop by his older son, Fred.

Ronald joined the firm when he completed high school in 1959.

THE TWO SONS took over the business from their father when he retired in 1961. Mr. Zimmerman died in 1964.

Business prospered from the very beginning.

The brothers had entered negotiations to purchase buildings near the present site in order to expand facilities, but have postponed plans because their property will probably be acquired by the state for the construction of Route 78.

They said they plan to relocate as soon as the state moves in.

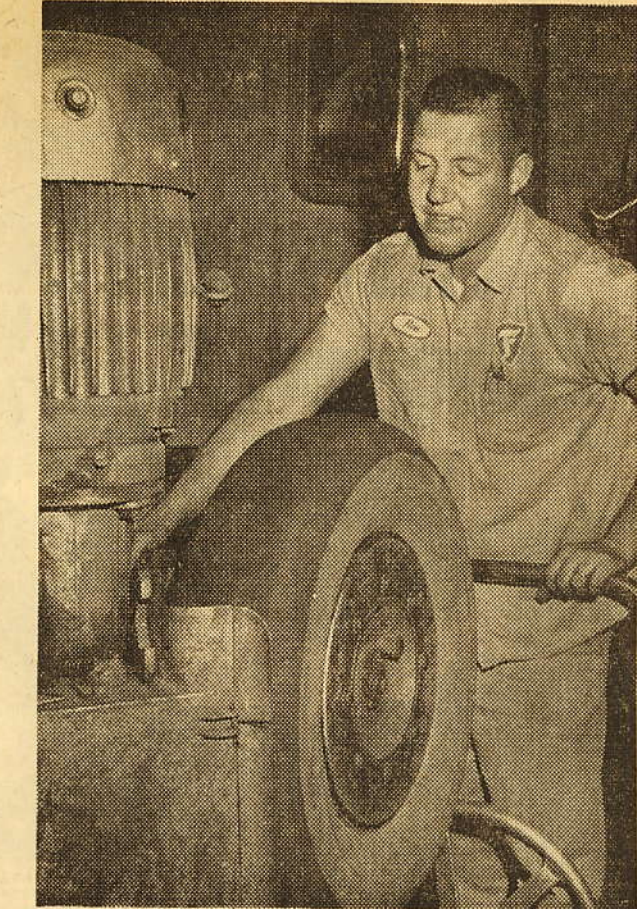
Improved methods leading to improved quality in recapped tires over the years has led to the growth of the business.

"It's sure a lot different now than it was when dad first started the business," Fred noted.

"Take the application of rubber cement on the buffed tires," he continued.

"When dad first started, the cement was applied right from the bucket in a heavy layer with a big brush."

"That was the last thing they did every night," added Ronald, "because the tires needed to stand overnight



OPERATION BEGINS—Ronald P. Zimmerman, vice president of firm headed by his brother, places "bald" tire on buffer. Whirling action of the machine removes all that remains of original tread and prepares for further steps leading to final retreading.—Gazette Photo.

before the cement was ready for the application of a new layer of tread rubber."

Now the cement is sprayed on. Besides producing a more even layer of cement, it leaves the tire ready for the new tread rubber in about five minutes.

OLD TIRES come in from a multitude of sources.

Used car dealers, local service stations, scrap dealers, and individual scrap collectors bring in tires almost daily.

"We can never get too many," said Fred, who noted that about 40 per cent of all the tires they receive are unsuitable for recapping purposes.

Many of these unsuitable tires are sold to area farmers who use them for smudge fires in their fields and orchards, the rest of the tires are hauled away to the city dump.

Once in the shop, the reuseable tires are given a closer inspection by an employe who places them on a "spreader," a device which

spreads the rim of the tire wide allowing a closer inspection of the inside of a tire.

Any tires with breaks, cuts or holes in the inside are rejected.

Another employe, meanwhile, works on the piles of tires that are left.

Placing them on a collapsible rim with a self inflatable tube, which is part of the "buffing" machine, the employe then works the tire around the whirling base of the machine which grinds or "buffs" the outer surface of the tire, removing all of what remains of the original tread design.

Once again, tires which show weak spots during this process are rejected.

THE MACHINE operator follows a guide track during the process which not only buffs the tires, but contours them to their regular dimensions once again.

The layer of liquid rubber cement is then sprayed on the rough outer surface.

After the cement is allowed

to dry for about five minutes, an employe molds a layer of regular tread rubber, which is purchased from tire companies, around the tire.

A machine helps mold the tread rubber to the tire and ensures a stronger uniform grip. However, the machine operator must trim and butt the two ends together.

The thickness of the layer of tread rubber depends, of course, on the type of tire to be produced. Snow tires, for instance, because of their deeper tread design for stronger surer grips require a heavier layer of tread rubber than a regular car tire.

Once the tread rubber is in place, the tire is ready to "run."

One of the employes then takes the tire and places a "bag" (curing tube) inside along with a curing rim.

It is then put on a large press type machine where it is placed in a mold.

As the mold closes over the tire, the curing tube is automatically inflated and hot steam (about 300 degrees) is placed on the outside.

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THE MOLD, with the enclosed tire, is then rolled to another section of the building where it is hooked up to steam and air lines to continue the process.

The air pressure from the inside of the tire pushes the tire against the tread design in the mold.

The constant steam heat, meanwhile, keeps the outside of the tire soft and pliable and the tire works its way slowly into the crevices of the tread design in the mold.

After about 45 minutes, the tire is removed from the mold and placed aside to cool.

A short time later employes trim off any excess rubber and the tire is ready to be sold.

Scores of individual customers come to the firm daily to purchase recapped tires, but local service stations and used car dealers are other major customers.

The firm also does a heavy truck tire recapping business.

Winter, of course, with its snow and ice, is the busiest time of the year for the brothers.

"We're swamped on the day of the first snowfall," said Fred who jokingly added, "we almost hate to see that day come."

They very seldom run out, however, because, as Fred noted, "whenever we have free time we build up on our snow tire supply."