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Old Reliables

IT TAKES HARD WORK AND SAVVY TO STAY IN BUSINESS FOR DECADES. ON ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY, *WASHINGTON CONSUMERS' CHECKBOOK* LOOKED IN ITS ARCHIVES AND FOUND OLD-TIME BUSINESSES THAT ARE AS GOOD AS EVER.

[*By Sherri Dalphonse*]

I've got a simple formula of trying to get work right the first time at a reasonable price," says Carlos Zamora, owner of Carlos Auto Service. "That's my way of doing things."

Zamora's way has consistently earned his Kensington auto-repair shop top ratings in *Washington Consumers' Checkbook*, which this year celebrates 30 years of steering its readers to good service companies—and away from bad ones.

After the shop earned high marks in *Checkbook's* first-ever rating of auto repair, in 1976, Zamora learned the power of print. "I had to go 2½ years before I could take new customers," he says.

Checkbook has evaluated thousands of service firms in three decades, from plumbers to veterinarians to cell-phone providers. Some poor performers got better—perhaps because of *Checkbook's* role as a

consumer watchdog. Zamora says he has used the ratings as a gauge of what to improve. Other businesses like the recognition but view it as just that.

"We don't pay much attention. That would be like a baseball player following his records instead of concentrating on the ball," says John Weintraub, co-owner of Frager's Hardware on Capitol Hill, another consistent winner in *Checkbook's* ratings. "We just go about our business."

Over the years, good firms that once were top-rated have disappeared or lost their way as staff and ownership changed. But some things have remained the same.

Checkbook has gone back through 30 years of ratings and identified for *The Washingtonian* the firms that have consistently rated high for quality. Some ratings date back 30 years; in a few cases, *Check-*

book and *Checkbook.org* began rating a type of service more recently, and the firm has gotten top ratings since then.

"These companies prove the point that with the right values and a lot of day-in and day-out hard work, it is possible to deliver good service year after year," says *Checkbook* president Robert Krughoff.

We could say the same about *Washington Consumers' Checkbook*.

Here are other long-term winners in 30 categories.

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