

# The Providence Journal

## LOCAL

# At this RI chopper shop, they take custom motorcycles seriously. One is a rolling memorial.



**Paul Edward Parker**

Providence Journal

Published 5:21 a.m. ET May 17, 2024 | Updated 5:21 a.m. ET May 17, 2024

WARWICK – When he was a kid, Shawn Dow used to like taking apart BMX bikes and putting them back together, so it should come as no surprise that he now makes custom motorcycles for a living – and has drawn national attention and awards for his work.

After high school at Davies Tech and college at New England Tech, he worked as a machinist at Guill Tool, in West Warwick.

"But I always tinkered with bikes at night and on weekends," Dow said. "I always built bikes. That was kind of a passion."

His passion spread by word of mouth, and he was quickly swamped with requests to do motorcycle work for people he knew.

"I was so busy working in my garage, I didn't have time for myself," he said. Finally, when he was so worn out by moonlighting on bikes that a friend asked him whether he had spent all night partying, Dow left Guill Tool and struck out on his own. He started a custom motorcycle business in his garage, and then moved to a shop in Conimicut, and now is on Post Road, where eight people work for his shop, Bad Mouth Bikes.

Now, Dow says he's received special recognition for a project that brought a special level of passion:

A custom bike he built to honor a fallen friend received two awards at last month's Orange County Choppers Invitational Bike Show. It was chosen by Paul Teutul Sr. as top "bagger" bike, and also chosen by the crowd for a people's choice award. Teutel is the founder of Orange County Choppers, which was featured for 12 seasons in "American Chopper" on

Discovery. A bagger is a motorcycle with two storage compartments on the back that resemble saddlebags.

"The story behind this bike is kind of a sad story," Dow told The Providence Journal. "This one means a lot."

It is a 2003 Harley-Davidson Firefighter Special Edition Road King.

"It was such a limited edition of the bike," said Dow. "You actually had to be a fireman to buy the bike when it was new."

## **A hit-and-run crash took the bike owner's life**

Dow's friend, Mike Rhoades, was not a firefighter but acquired one that was sold later. Rhoades was riding it to work in October 2018 when a hit-and-run crash took his life.

Rhoades' brother, Donnie Rhoades, inherited the bike and wanted to create a memorial to his brother, and Dow was the perfect man for the job.

"We had to take it all the way down to the frame and the motor," said Dow, adding that the frame was modified, so the motor is the only thing unaltered from the original bike.

The bike is bright orange with a flame-themed paint job, and fit out with custom accents, including directional and brake lights that are molded into the body and antique fire-hose nozzles that function as foot pegs. It has been christened "Eternal Flame."

The public can check it out on Saturday, when Bad Mouth Bikes holds an annual open-house event that includes food and beverage trucks and stunt riders, in addition to a chance to look at Dow's work. It's at the shop, 2329 Post Rd., from noon to 6, and admission is free.

And there may be other opportunities to see Dow's work:

"We're talking to somebody about doing a reality TV show here," he said, while declining to discuss details.