

By MARK FINSTON

The three students have driven all the way to North Arlington from Auburn, N.Y., which is above Syracuse. And they are determined to earn their diplomas, as they join the dean of the school for Lesson No. 1.

Dean Ira Feinberg, also the chancellor, president and a full professor, appears with a bunch of towels. Each towel is 16-by-27 inches. Years of academic search have revealed that this is the optimum size.

Feinberg leads the three students to a large window. He hands the first a towel, tells him exactly which way to point each finger.

"One, two, three, four down; one, two, three, four, up; switch hands; straight lines, straight; go around and make a frame..."

Extensive academic research has shown that these are the motions that guarantee efficiency and equality of pressure.

About 250 people from all over the world have graduated from Feinberg's university, which is located at 485 Ridge Rd., not so coincidentally the site of the Tip-Top Car Wash, which Feinberg owns. The vast majority have completed their lessons and earned a diploma that reads:

"University for a Totally Clean Car.

"School of Perfect Windows.

"This diploma signifies that—of—has completed a special program of training in the achievement of perfectly clean windows..."

"People write me from all over asking for a souvenir diploma," says the 43-year-old Feinberg, who lives in Fort Lee. "But I don't do that. Anybody who gets one of these diplomas has to earn it."

Feinberg, who charges no fee for those attending his School of Perfect Windows, has varied academic credentials. In 1948, he fought, as an American volunteer, in the Israeli army. He speaks fluent Spanish, French, Italian, Hebrew and Arabic, and can make himself understood in German, Russian and Japanese.

After his foreign military period, he studied jazz ballet, and earned a living for a while as a dancer and actor on the Straw Hat Circuit. At the same time, he earned a master's degree in business administration from NYU.

He worked as a stockbroker for a Wall Street firm, and in 1971, the market took a tumble. Feinberg decided he wanted to tumble into his own business, one where he could be creative, use his talents and where he wouldn't have to ante up huge gobs of money.

A car wash was put up for sale for \$9,000. Feinberg bought it.

"I knew nothing about car washes," he recalls. "But I felt if I worked hard and was creative, I'd be successful. My friends couldn't believe it. They thought I wasn't exactly moving into high society. I didn't see it that way."

Early on, Feinberg, who once owned three car washes, realized that customers judged their wash primarily on how the windows looked. If the windows were streaky, it didn't matter that the bumper was spotless, that the hitewalls outshined the sun.

And windows were tough.

"The techniques for cleaning them were never efficient," Feinberg found.



Ira Feinberg, owner of the Tip-Top Car Wash in North Arlington, demonstrates his 'Hot Glass' cleaning process.

The dean of clean

On the outside, the wax and soap frequently left streaks. The towels used by the outside car wash men to buff the windows were often not clean. In their rush, the workers would miss corners. And even if the men and machines did their job, the window still contained a thin layer of slime, invisible until a window got wet. Then streaks and smears would be accentuated.

On the inside of the glass, Feinberg discovered enough spray from the bottle was never squirted. So the fellow with the towel was simply moving all that gunk around on the glass. Moreover, procedures were inefficient; Feinberg, for example, monitors even the posture of his students: "When you're doing the back window, you should be on your knees, like going to church."

Feinberg applied his considerable energy to the problem. He started to work with a chemist to find a mixture that would do the job, but not burn like ammonia (which isn't so good on tinted glass anyway) nor sink like vinegar.

The fifth mixture proved to be the elixir. The only problem was that it didn't work properly unless it was warmed to 130 degrees. So Feinberg installed a warmer to heat the pink fluid and the towels. And he named his invention Hot Glass.

But Feinberg didn't stop there. Like an efficiency engineer, he started to experiment with the perfect technique. Ultimately, he published his results in a 12-page booklet he titled "How to Get Perfect Windows." It was a best-seller in the industry, bought by thousands of car washes, he says, and translated into five languages.

Feinberg started to go to car wash conventions to hawk his Hot Glass. (It is now sold retail in 500 car washes and retail shops throughout the country.) And his emphasis on technique caused him to set up his university. Most of the alumni support Window U. by buying Hot Glass for their own operations, but there's no compulsion to do so.

There are scoffers. Why pay such attention to the windows when they'll just get dirty again near the first puddle you—or the car in front of you—encounter? Feinberg points out that you shouldn't stop brushing your teeth in the morning just because in several hours you'll eat lunch.

And some rivals assert that although Hot Wax doesn't cost much more than solvents now in use, there is extra labor—and more towels—connected with the Feinberg Technique. This adds to costs. Feinberg agrees, but states that he has found the extra expense is worthwhile. Cleaner windows increase business more than any other single factor, and ensure repeats. He says lots of people drive to North Arlington for their auto cleaning, although there are car washes much closer to their homes.

The university has proved so successful that Feinberg has trained a crew to open a Canadian branch in Calgary. Half-facetiously, he notes he may expand the curriculum: The School for Perfect Vacuuming, or Tires 106.

The three men from Auburn, N.Y., are working hard.

"No, no, no, start at the TOP in the center," Feinberg commands. He peers at his watch, times something: "That's fast, but I want it done faster on the insider. Watch where those fingers are pointing."

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