

Patriarch Still at Helm of Family Business

By Traci Matt
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At 91 years of age, Lou Bianchino may just be the oldest working electrical rebuilder in the country. Headquartered behind the Bianchino residence in Ocean View, N.J., Lou Bianchino and Sons has been doing business since World War II. They have seen three generations in the shop.

As a union asbestos worker in the Brooklyn ship yards in the 1940s, Lou began “tinkering” on Model As, Fords, Packards and Plymouths nights and weekends. He said he didn’t get paid, but wanted to learn how to work on his own “junk cars.”

A mentor taught him how to rewind armatures by hand, and “that’s where it all began.”

By 1950 Lou was still laboring by day as an asbestos worker in the building trade, but had his “own little shop” at home.

“I made my own test bench from scrap wood. The mold meters I bought down on Canal Street in New York, and an old lamp heating element as a resistor. Even though I have a much newer test bench I still rely on the old test bench today,” he said.

Over the years each of Lou’s four sons have worked in the shop doing repairs, ordering, inventory, bookkeeping and customer relations. His brother and grandson also worked full-time in the shop before becoming asbestos workers. His late wife Betty and three daughters were even “involved to a degree” at some point, according to youngest daughter Donna Siegel.

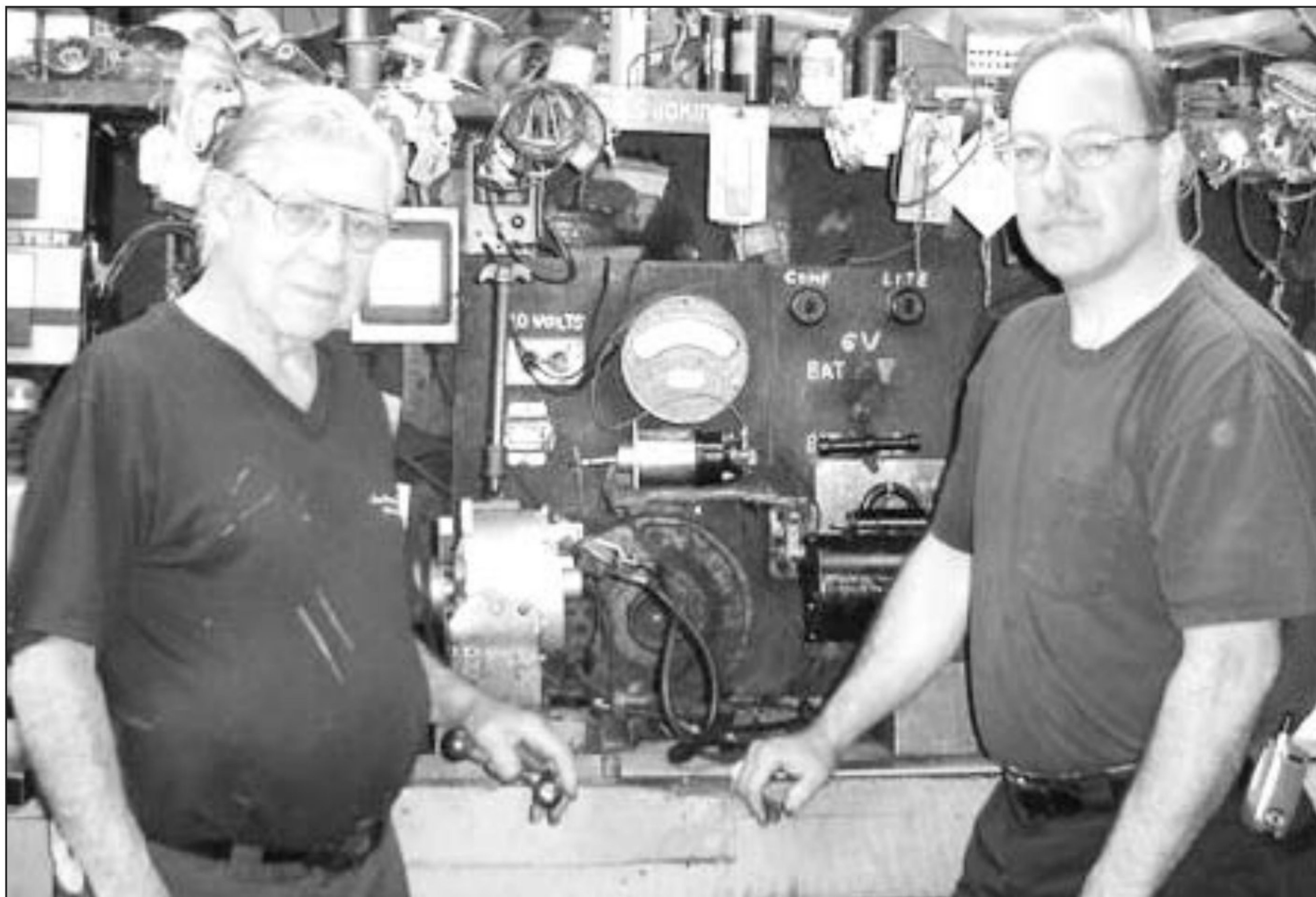
“As we were growing up it was the family business,” she said. “The driveway would be full of cars. Sometimes there wouldn’t be anywhere to park. It was crazy. Dad was up every day working full-time and them coming home and working until 9 or 10 at night. I don’t think they make them like that anymore.”

Donna said today they have third generation customers coming through their door to enjoy reminiscing and the “shop talk.”

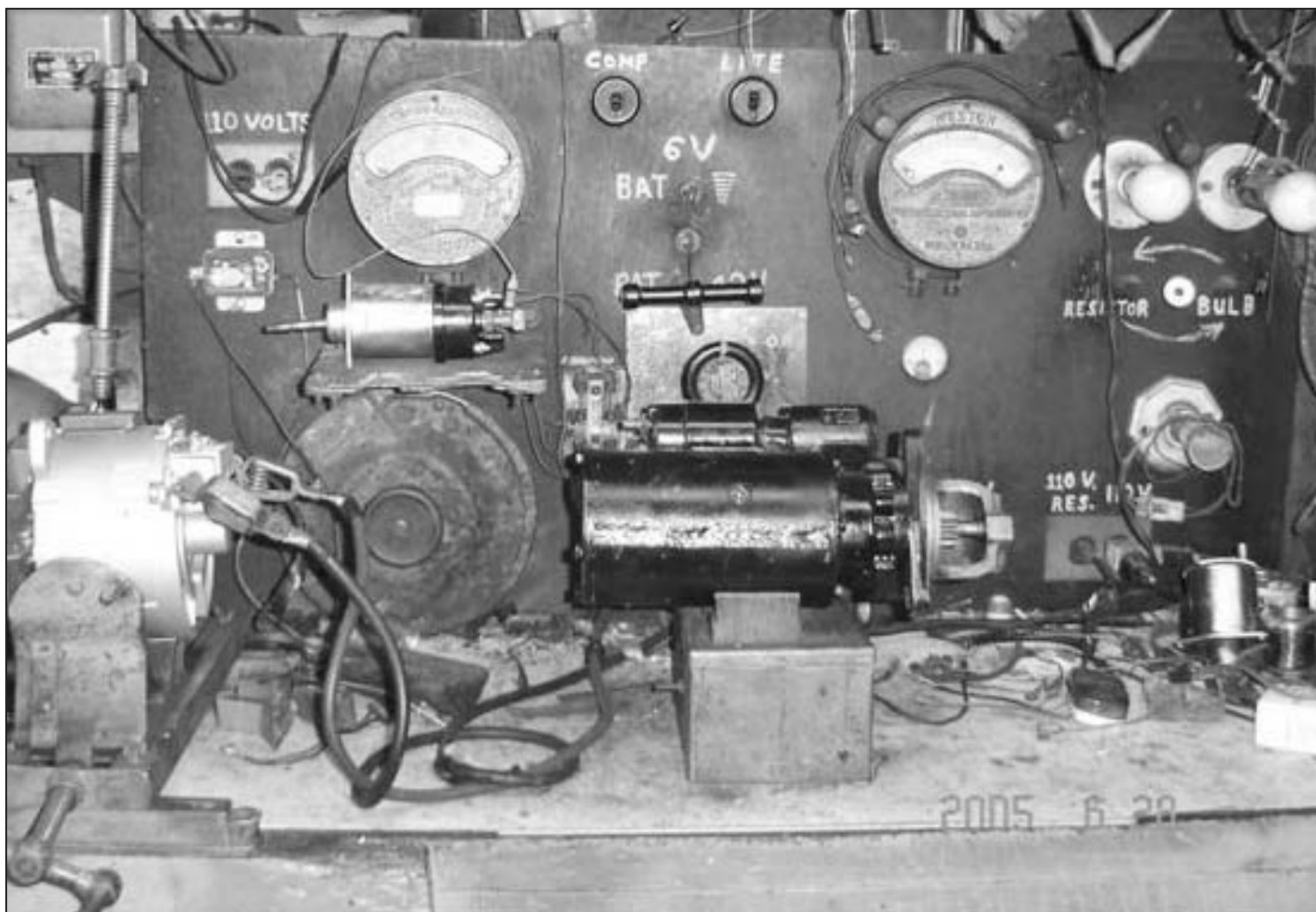
“That’s the kind of thing you don’t get if you go to a car dealership,” she said.

Lou finally retired from the union and came to work at the shop full-time with his son Lou Bianchino, Jr.

“Lou, Jr. worked for 20 years by my



Lou Bianchino and son Anthony, retired from a career in law enforcement, at their rebuilding shop in Ocean View, New Jersey.



Bianchino, Sr.'s hand-made test bench, in service since the early '50s, and still in use today.

side taking the shop from a one-man hobby to the thriving business it is today,” he said. Sadly, Lou, Jr. was killed in an accident in 2003.



Lou Jr. worked with his father for twenty years, taking the shop from hobby to thriving business.

At that point son Anthony Bianchino had recently retired from 26 years in law enforcement, and began working at the shop full-time.

“It’s been tough on all of us and my son Louis had a tremendous following,” said Lou. “But my son Anthony has done well keeping the pace and the atmosphere going. Because of him the shop’s still open.”

Anthony said that places like Advanced Auto make the business tough, but he still enjoys his new career.

“Every day it’s like putting puzzles together,” he said.

Anthony has a great respect for his dad’s experience and knowledge. “I think he’s forgotten more than I’ll ever

know. I'm constantly going to him with questions and he always seems to have an answer."

Lou Bianchino and Sons is located in an area with a high concentration of RV and marine business. Their summers used to be filled repairing cars, campers and boats. Over the years, Lou said their customer base has shifted to primarily marine and construction equipment companies.

"Today people take their cars to dealers," he said. "Although since the shop's been around for so many years we have a lot of customers who bring us older models. We have those on the shelf rebuilt already. We never turn anyone away."

Lou noted that one of the biggest challenges he experiences is the difficulty in getting to the parts on the vehicle that need to be replaced.

"Removing them from the car is almost like an engineering job," he said.

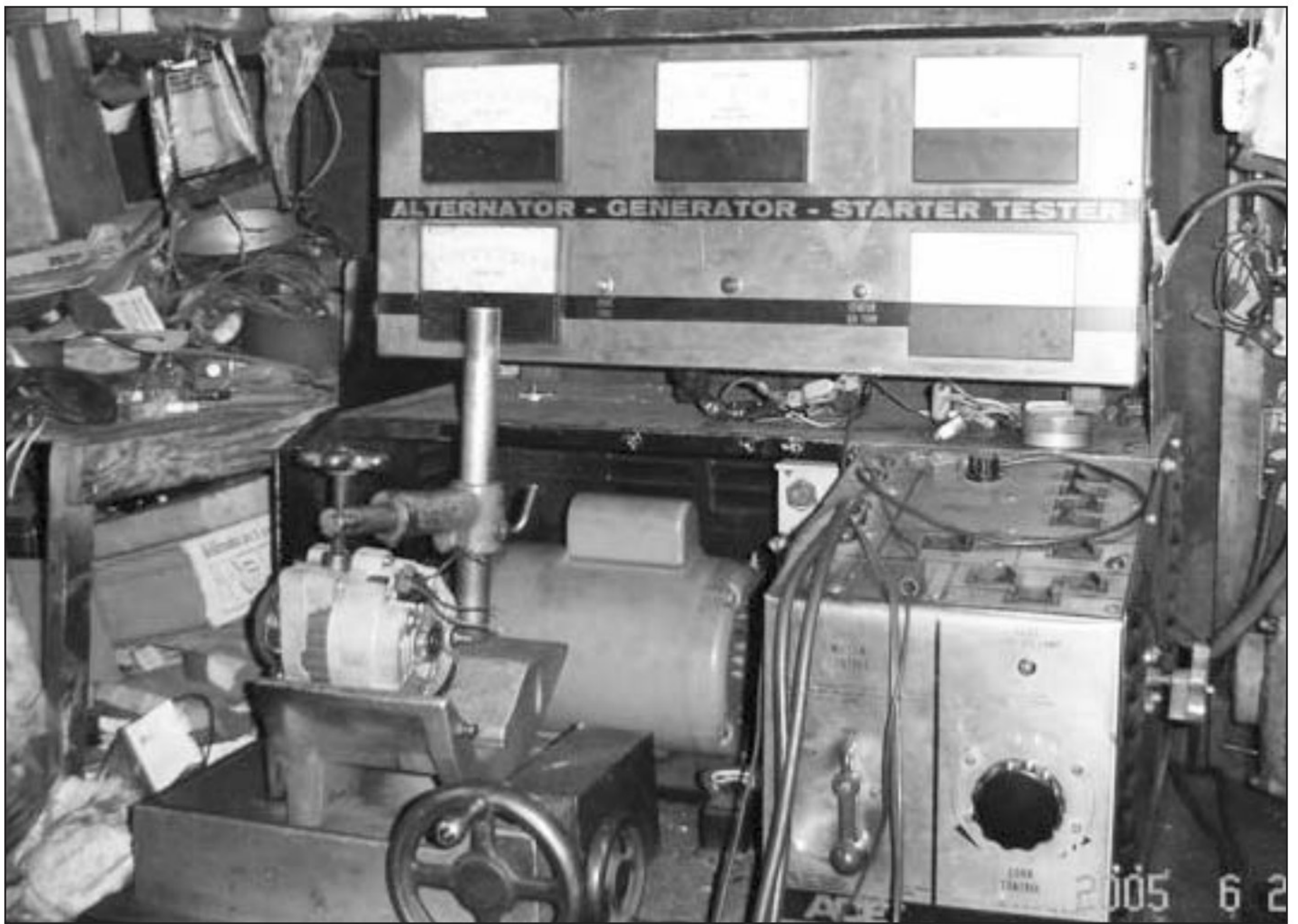
Lou has no dire predictions for the future of electrical rebuilding.

"Twenty years ago they said things were going to peter out...but I never saw anything like that. Today the automotive parts supply houses sell complete units making it harder for small rebuilding businesses to survive. The future for us small rebuilders is unpredictable but I'd like to think our size and personal service give us an edge over these large companies," he said.

Lou said he attended the ERA Show in King of Prussia in 1994 and last month's show in Atlantic City.

"I enjoy walking around meeting people in the industry and learning about all the new products and technology. I still love the challenge of the new designs," he said.

"Working is like therapy. I suppose the secret to a long life is to continue working. If you stop you just vegetate. There's nothing else to do. You can't go out dancing anymore."



The Bianchinos still prefer using the hand-made bench over more modern equipment, which they deem, "more reliable."