Focused on Fundamentals: How Charlie Trujillo became one of the industry's most sought-after vehicle wrapping talents



After all, he might tell you about how he spent some of his formative years living the life of a free-spirited snowboarder in Colorado. Or he might tell you about how he started a job at the business he'd eventually lead and met the woman he'd eventually marry all in a single morning.



"I do think the biggest thing I enjoy is seeing that light bulb go off in the student's face."

Charlie Trujillo, Lettering Express

But probe a bit deeper, and you realize that there's much more going on here. In fact, Charlie's one of the most sought-after vehicle wrappers in the country. He's part of the Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions training team and is a highly valued partner to the company. And he champions fundamentals while doing highly visible work in a media environment that often celebrates flashiness.

A foundation in a family business

Charlie's start in the industry was a bit roundabout. His parents, Rich and Toyah Braun, founded Lettering Express in 1988. Operating before the era of digital printing, the Oklahoma City-based business produced die-cut vinyl lettering for local clientele. As a teen, Charlie helped out in the shop on weekends and afternoons. It gave him his first taste of the business.

His parents sold Lettering Express in 2006, when Charlie was a high school senior. So, after graduating, Charlie made his way to Breckenridge to shred the slopes, work in a sandwich shop and just have a lot of fun. But when he finally had enough of the snowboard lifestyle, Charlie decided to return to Oklahoma. His mom suggested asking the company's new owner, Michael Lombardi, for a job.

It turned out to be a fateful suggestion. Charlie was hired. Then, during his first-day-on-the-job orientation, he met Jill — Michael's daughter — working on the shop floor. They married three years later. (According to Charlie, several Lettering Express employees over the years have made a love connection at work. Maybe something's in the air.) Fast forward to 2015, Charlie and Jill have been running the business since Michael retired.

Things seemed to have come full circle. But it turns out that Charlie was just getting started.





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Charlie Trujillo, Lettering Express

Taking Oklahoma City to the world

Around the time Charlie and Jill moved into leadership positions at Lettering Express, Facebook had surpassed one billion daily active users, Instagram had launched, and the rapid adoption of high-speed Internet access meant people could easily watch video content on YouTube and other sites. A popular content niche was (and still is) short videos showcasing creative manual work. This includes vinyl wrapping.

It all may have been just a fortunate coincidence. But to Charlie, it was a sign that the fledgling field of vinyl wrapping was about to explode. He saw a potential opportunity for his career and business. So he decided to act.

"Around 2014 or 15, social media really started changing things," Charlie says. "The global connection really started. The world suddenly felt a lot smaller. It also felt more attainable for a small shop in Oklahoma to be recognized on a global level."

He continues: "And we also saw the way that the algorithms were pushing color change and restyling wraps, and really glamorizing that stuff. I wanted to be part of what was happening, part of that trend. So I started getting certifications with Avery Dennison."

A growing reputation for technical expertise and consistency

Charlie became an Avery Dennison Certified Wrap Installer (CWI) in 2015. His manufacturer training taught him from the get-go that executing a quality vehicle wrap meant focusing on fundamentals that don't typically get boosted by the algorithms: preparation, surface management, material control, sequencing and patience with the complex geometries of many modern vehicles. These fundamentals became the foundation of Charlie's approach to the craft.

The approach paid off in the years that followed. With an Avery Dennison CWI and other manufacturer certifications under his belt, Charlie was invited to show off his talents in live demos at SEMA and other major industry gatherings. He also took part in timed wrap-off competitions and collaborated with material distributors to test wrap films.

Building a relationship with Avery Dennison

The high-profile appearances confirmed Charlie's growing reputation, as installers are typically invited to participate based on their technical credibility, consistency and peer recognition. They also highlighted Charlie's ability to pass on his knowledge.

Manufacturers noticed. Avery Dennison jumped at the opportunity.

"Around 2021, Avery Denison brought me on to be a trainer for North America," says Charlie. "At the time, they had three trainers. So I ended up being the fourth. I already had a great relationship with Avery Dennison. But it just really blossomed and developed from there."

Since then, Charlie's led approximately 20 Avery Dennison classes per year. A class holds up to 14 students, so he's trained thousands of installers. His most gratifying moments are when students who had been making subtle technical mistakes discover the value in focusing on the fundamentals.

"I do think the biggest thing I enjoy is seeing that light bulb go off in the student's face," Charlie says. "It's that moment when they realize, 'Oh my goodness, I've been doing this wrong for so long. This class was really worth it.'"

Doubling down on what you do exceptionally well

As Charlie's wrapping career has evolved, so has Lettering Express. Charlie and Jill have grown the company by discovering and doubling down on what their team does exceptionally well: branded fleet wraps, vehicle color change and restyling, signage, merch and apparel.

"Over the years, I've always asked the question, 'If we have 20 things on the menu, how many of those things are we really good at and are really valued by the customer?'" says Charlie. "So we realized that we maybe could do all of those 20 things at a great level, but were only exceptional at maybe six or seven of them."

He continues, "So basically, we leaned into those six or seven services and, over time, got rid of the rest. We became hyper-focused on what we like to do and do exceptionally well, what makes us money, and what the customer really enjoys and wants."

This specialization has involved reducing staff by more than half since 2019. Charlie stresses that the reduction has happened through natural attrition, as team members moved on to other opportunities. He also notes that today's team — focused on fewer, higher-impact services — is driving the same revenue as the larger team of the past.

Charlie's advice for those starting out: Real education is crucial

When asked what advice he'd give those starting out in the industry, Charlie falls back on the traits that have made him successful: Get trained, focus on the fundamentals and be patient. And while social media can be a source of inspiration, don't rely on it for learning.

"A lot of what's on social media is just smoke and mirrors," says Charlie. "They (wrapping influencers) move too fast. It's like if they were going up flights of stairs, they'd be going from floor one to floor four without stopping at two and three. It's just not possible."

"Real education is crucial," he continues. "Get yourself into a class by Avery Dennison or any other major manufacturer. Then put your head down and don't try to conquer the world overnight. Maybe you can conquer your neighborhood, but let's do it in small bites!"

Visit **Lettering Express** to meet Charlie, Jill and the rest of the team, and see some of the outstanding work they do with vinyl wraps.

Get trained on the fundamentals and beyond at an **Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions training class**. They're led by our **team of expert trainers**, including Charlie Trujillo.



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