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in the [Chamber View and posted on the website for a month, then moved into a prominently-placed online archive for the remainder of the year. To win this free publicity, just drop your business card into the Featured Member Fishbowl at each monthly Networking Mixer and be present for the drawing. For more information, call the Chamber, 410-719-9609.](#)

February Featured Member

Building a Persona Larger Than Life

After a bone-chilling tour of his backyard locksmithing workshop, Bill Lorenz stands on his back porch in trademark shorts, punching in the combination to the back door of his home office. "I hate keys," he says with a grin. "They're a pain in the butt."

For a second-generation locksmith who trained in the business from his teen years, it's not surprising. Keys are the focus of the untold number of calls that he fields at all hours: lost keys, broken keys, keys locked in homes or cars or vaults, high-security keys that only he has the license to duplicate. Keys and locks of all descriptions that he sells to businesses across Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Howard County.

So many calls come, in fact, that he's needed to narrow the types of cases he handles. "I work with residences and businesses, I work with bank vaults and jewelry store vaults, I open cars," he says. "I don't make keys for cars. Either I freeze or I cook my tail off out there, and I just don't have the time." So he's referring car calls to a colleague while he looks for an honest junior locksmith to handle that side of his business.

"Honest" is the operative word here: honesty and fairness are the keys (so to speak) to his business. "There is no law requiring locksmiths to be licensed in Maryland, and I've met some unscrupulous ones," he says. "One even told me, 'I'll charge whatever I can get away with.' I couldn't believe what I was hearing."

By contrast, Mr. Lorenz is committed to saving his customers money. "I don't want to take them for a ride," he says. "If I'm called out to open a lock, I'll use whatever means I can to open it without destroying it. I'll pick it, bump it, try to salvage it in any way I can. I'm not out to screw the customer. Then again, if I have no other option but to destroy the lock, I'll tell them that it can't be replaced free of charge."

"If a customer calls and asks how much it will cost to open a lock, I'll tell them," he adds. "I always tell my customers to ask first before they call anybody out. If a locksmith won't tell you what the job will cost, I say, call somebody else."

Bill Lorenz Locksmith is licensed, bonded, and insured, Vice President of the Maryland Locksmiths Association and a member of the Safe & Vault Technicians Association and the Association of Locksmiths of America. He's the single biggest holder of Scorpion high-security key blanks in the Maryland-D.C. -Delaware-Virginia-Pennsylvania area. He's also a Navy veteran, Rotary member and Premium member of the Greater Catonsville Chamber of Commerce.

It's a list of pillar-of-society credentials that he recites with pride, taking out his member ID cards and flipping them onto the table, as if to outweigh the boyish mischief that bubbles throughout his conversation.

As he serves up two cups of hot coffee, he launches into an explanation of that weather-defying uniform of short-sleeved, logo-embazoned polo shirt and shorts. "'I've been wearing short pants for seven or eight years now," he says. "Someone dared me while I was working for Airborne Express. I find shorts easier to move around in, and it's not hard to stay warm when I'm in and out of the truck all day.

"Of course there was the time when I slid off the road into a snowbank and wound up shoveling snow for a couple of hours in shorts." Pause for effect. "The next day I came in to work in long pants. And now I carry a pair of long pants in the truck with me for emergencies."

Year-round short pants are a small quirk compared to some of the human quirkiness he's seen. Mr. Lorenz grins as he tells about the... alternative... forms of payment that customers have offered for his on-site locksmithing services, not to mention the undignified conditions under which some of his customers got locked out. "I see all types in this business," he says, naming no names. "I never know what I'm going to find when I go out on a call."

There's no doubt – Bill Lorenz is a character, cultivating a persona larger than life. He tells his stories with a blend of machismo and little-boy glee, playing a one-man game of "Top this!"

It's a great marketing strategy...after all, when you're locked out of your home, car, business, or vault, who are you going to turn to: a generic Yellow Pages ad, or the civic leader in shorts with top-of-the-line credentials and professional ethics, who'll keep you laughing while he solves your problems?

