



## Peek at the Port: Left Lane Customs restores life to VW buses

Port workshop perfect fit for local specialty mechanic

A professional photographer of more than 10 years, Jarett Juarez fell into the Volkswagen bus restoration business by accident.

About 8 years ago, Juarez bought an old bus as a personal project, so he'd have a beach cruiser to fit his surfboards in his spare time. He figured the VW bus's reputation as a "road trip machine" suited his personal and professional lifestyles.

"I guess I've always had this wanderlust side of me where I like to pack up and go. If someone called me on a Monday and said they wanted me for a shoot in Utah on a Wednesday, I would just go," Juarez said. "The VW bus has always encapsulated that, so it was the natural choice when I started thinking about a vehicle, I could just have around to put my surfboards in and just go."

He learned about different methods and mechanics as he went along, quickly falling in love with the culture and history surrounding his vehicle. If he spotted one of the iconic bay window buses released between 1968 and 1979 while out on a photography assignment, he'd make a point to see if it were for sale to add to his growing collection.

Juarez's restoration projects remained a side hobby until March 2020, when the COVID pandemic squashed the events that fueled his photography business. Now, Juarez has established a restoration shop at the Port of Tillamook Bay, where he works full-time revamping buses for other VW fans across the country.

"Several people had asked if I would be able to work on their buses, but I didn't have the space to do it. I'd worked on my own bus in my parents' garage," said Juarez, who opened his shop at the port in December. "Finding a space to rent at the port is what kicked the whole thing off."

The location at the port makes a perfect workshop because it's not directly in town but still easily accessible. That means Juarez can work on the buses without interruption, but his clients don't have to drive too far to drop off or pick up their vehicle.

“I have found that people just flock to shops. They are intrigued with what you’re doing, and they like to stop in just to talk, which is great — unless it’s during the week at 11 a.m. and you have to get work done,” Juarez said. “My shop at the port is really nice because I have a sense of privacy.

Left Lane Customs specializes in replacing the original VW engine with a more powerful Subaru engine. Juarez said the reason for the swap is highlighted in the business’ name.

“VW buses have the equivalent of a lawn mower motor in them. A typical car has like 170 to 240 horsepower. These buses had 45 horsepower. They are notorious for being the slowest vehicles on the road, always stuck in the right lane,” Juarez said. “The Subaru swap gives you so much more power and reliability. It takes these buses from the right lane to the left lane, the fast lane.”

Left Lane Customs is currently booked for the year with jobs. Juarez said he’s working with clients from all over the nation.

“That’s what’s cool about these buses. There’s a culture of them throughout the whole world. It’s amazing to see how many people have an interest in these or have a bus,” Juarez said. “It’s really fulfilling for me, because I’m giving the gift of memories. I’m able to take a bus from a pretty rough state to a vehicle you can use to create experiences.”

You can find Jarett on Instagram.

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*The Port of Tillamook Bay serves as the core of the Tillamook region’s industrial economy. The port covers approximately 1,600 acres, including the Tillamook Municipal Airport, the Tillamook Air Museum, a railroad corridor, and a 200-acre industrial park home to some of the largest and enterprises in the county and an array of diverse, small businesses. [www.potb.org](http://www.potb.org)*

