30 years of “Moving Forward”

Toyota honors Don Jacobs

BY BILL NELSON


Car dealer Don Jacobs gave himself a special Christmas present in December 1977 – the Waukesha Buick-Subaru dealer took a chance and acquired a Milwaukee-area Toyota franchise.

It proved to be a wise decision. Squired on by the 1973 oil crisis, American consumers had begun to seek out small cars with better fuel economy. Japanese motorists had long demanded small, fuel-efficient cars manufactured to high levels of quality. For this reason, companies like Toyota, Honda and Nissan seized the emerging opportunity in the lucrative U.S. market, establishing a growing presence in the 1970s – a trend Jacobs foresaw.

Toyota would grow and grow until today the Toyota Motor Corp. rivals General Motors as number one in the world.

Don Jacobs Toyota has prospered in the 30 years since that milestone decision and Toyota Motor Corp. honored him in January as a significant contributor to the company known for its slogan of “moving forward.” The 81-year-old Jacobs is now retired but is seen often at the Toyota dealership at 5727 S. 27th St. on Milwaukee’s south side, and at his two other dealerships, Don Jacobs Mitsubishi, a stone’s throw away on S. 27th St., and Don Jacobs Buick Subaru.

Northern Wisconsin gives boost to AYES

BY LINDA POULSEN

The students who enter Wausau East High School’s gleaming new state-of-the-art automotive training lab are taking their first steps into a bright future in the automotive industry. The northern Wisconsin school is now part of a $2.5 million training equipment pool that serves the greater Wausau community.

Wausau East High School joined 13 other Wisconsin AYES programs and more than 360 high schools nationally in the Automotive Youth Educational Systems (AYES). “Wisconsin has one of the most active and successful programs nationwide,” said Ray Pedersen, executive director of The WATDA Foundation. Wausau East’s AYES program is so popular, the enrollment has exceeded initial projection with an expected 88 students participating this year.

In the face of critical funding short-ages in K-12 education, the school district, local automotive leaders, dealers and automotive foundations have made a major commitment to automotive technical education. “The kids, the community, and the industry will all benefit,” said Bob Marlowe, career and technical education coordinator for the Wausau School District.

“Many districts that are building new facilities are opting to exclude automotive labs because they are so expensive,” he said. “We feel that technicians are at a premium. We really saw a need for this type of programming.”

Constant change in automotive technology has made it difficult for traditional education and training systems to keep current. As a result, there is a serious shortage of qualified automotive technicians.

When voters supported the new high school building, Wausau educators and auto businesses seized the opportunity.
Madison Auto Dealers present $46,000 to HospiceCare, new car to raffle winner

The Madison Automobile Dealers Association presented HospiceCare Inc. and its employees a check for $46,025 and a brand new Subaru Impreza to Millie Swenson, this year’s Madison Auto Show raffle winner. This is the ninth year that MADA has donated full proceeds from the auto show car raffle to HospiceCare.

“The auto dealers are very supportive of HospiceCare,” said Jennifer Sweet, donor relations and special events coordinator for HospiceCare. “They put a lot of work into this raffle and don’t make a cent. The auto dealers donate the car and their time to benefit the more than 500 patients served by HospiceCare each day,” said Sweet. The money we receive from the auto show raffle helps HospiceCare to fund programs that all in our community are able to receive our expert services, regardless of their ability to pay,” said Dan Chin, spokesperson for HospiceCare.

“These donations also allow us to provide expert grief services to all in our community, to train and staff over 900 volunteers that serve our patients and families and to develop a world-class education program to educate the community on end of life issues that affect them and their families.”

HospiceCare Inc. is a nonprofit, community-based hospice dedicated to providing physical, emotional and spiritual support to patients and families dealing with life-limiting illnesses. HospiceCare Inc. has offices in Madison and Janesville, HospiceCare serves residents in Dane, Rock, and part of Walworth, Green and Jefferson counties.

From left are Dan Morse, development director; Tom Thorstad, Susan Phillips, HospiceCare president & CEO; Madison Auto Dealers Association President Pat Baxter; Don Miller, Jennifer Sweet, HospiceCare donor relations and special events; Tom Zimbrick, Sean Baxter, Joe St. Marie, Madison Auto Show and Raffle Director TJ Johnson of Smart Motors; and car raffle winner Millie Swenson.

KOBE STEEN OF MADISON AND MARK DUDAS OF SWEET FOR THE Money we receive from the auto show raffle helps HospiceCare to fund programs that all in our community are able to receive our expert services, regardless of their ability to pay,” said Dan Chin, spokesperson for HospiceCare.

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The “Future Fax” is about our world unfolding. Great stuff!

Your WATDA has many critical roles, but number one is keeping ahead of the knowledge curve. The world today, as challenging as it is, is incredibly exciting. What is being discovered, how we communicate, who we must fend off or make a friend — what one of us could have predicted a few years ago?

Dealers must be part of what is unfolding. For the most part, you must react to the realities of the day. Your WATDA must be influencing what is impacting the political sense of what is unfolding. Your WATDA projects. Your WATDA shows a path that leads, incorporating the new consistent with what needs to be our enduring values. Discovery will flourish. Discovery affects society. Society gains new expectations from discovery. The legislative arena reacts to societal expectations. This is normal. This is your WATDA’s and NADA’s role. Wow! A good operating model is this: “Take lessons from the past. Take care of today. Influence the future.”

Philanthropy makes good business sense! It’s a point and a click away. Visit watda.org and click on our Foundation Planned Giving page.

Ray Pedersen, Executive Director

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ISSUE SEVENTY-ONE/MARCH 2008

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January–March 2008
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Mike Burkhart

• Who Owns What? Poor countries, (annual per capita income of >$500 – Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, etc.) $63 billion in 1990 to $204 trillion through 2001. Pacific Economics and Computational Lab, Berkeley. Col: figures rich nations (per capita income >$10,726 – Japan, U.S., Europe) have caused up to $2.5 trillion in negative environmental impacts on poor nations from 1990 to 2000. Middle income nations did about the same damage to low-income countries. Impacts include climate change, ozone depletion, expansion of agriculture, deforestation, over fishing and loss of mangrove swamps. (Diphof: Science News; 1/19/08)

• Wearable Healthcare Systems monitor the wearer’s vital signs and beams data to a computer. Sensor Original Innovations, Inc. Wearable components include EKG, temperature and pulse, the heart. Thin, pliable strands of steel are spun into yarn with cotton or polyester fiber. Electrodes and conductive leads are sewn into the fabric. Software algorithms clean up the data and reconstructs the wearer’s movements. Sweaters, the clothing manufacturer, is developing a Firesafe electric shirt that will let disabled people operate a wheelchair using only shoulder nudges and specter-man-like gloves that allow sign language to be translated into words by a computer. (Ready To Wear; Wind: February 2008)

• Minimal RFID Tags, the size of a paper clip, is a possible anti-counterfeiting technology. The chip responds only when it’s inserted into a unique 13 of 56 digit number that cannot be verified in a database anywhere in the world. The tag is unbreakable and tamper-proof. The chip can be used with and is able to make a day of hard work fun. They inspire me to do well and get a job when I return to the community.

A couple who I would like to give special thanks to is Tremaine Walker, and his wife, Melissa (whom I am proud to call my sister). They have been with me since the beginning, showing and giving me love and support. I would also like to thank Coach CJ, Coach Scott, and Coach Andy for helping me develop mental toughness and encouraging me to do my best. Thanks to everyone both at Rawhide and out in the community that keep me going.

RAWHIDE PROFILE | Morgan

My name is Morgan and I am 16 years old. I am from Milwaukee County and have been at Rawhide for three months. In my free time, I enjoy playing basketball and boxing at gyms around Milwaukee. Making people laugh and helping out those in need is something that is enjoyable for me.

Rawhide’s Work
Experience Program is one of the many things that brings me fulfillment. This is because we help people in the community, and I am giving rather than receiving. My About Face project coordinator, Major O’Brien, and field trainer, Captain Guerin, are easy to work with and are able to make a day of hard work fun. They inspire me to do well and get a job when I return to the community.

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Thank you for your support!
Distractions, recklessness deadly in Wisconsin’s work zones

Tim Johnson didn’t see the car that nearly killed him. The Milwaukee County sheriff’s deputy was too busy clearing up a car crash scene that cold January morning in 2006 to watch traffic. At the time, he was surrounded by the bright, flashing lights that bordered all roadside work zones. He trusted drivers to see those warning signs and slow down or move over, as the law requires. Most drivers did. One didn’t. A car swerving to avoid stopped traffic spun into the work zone and struck Deputy Johnson, throwing him 60 feet—headfirst into a cement median.

Johnson’s injuries were critical, but his wasn’t the first work zone crash that year, or the most deadly. Nearly 1,100 people were injured in Wisconsin work zones every year. And, on average, eleven of those crash victims die. Like Dennis Roessler.

In December of 2003, the seven-year county highway employee was struck and killed by an impatient driver who tried to pass a truck while in a work zone. The vehicle sped through the area at 50 miles per hour, knocking over three cones before hitting Roessler. He died on impact.

Wisconsin Highway Commissioner Ernie Winters still remembers telling Roessler’s wife what happened. “We didn’t have to (tell her). She knew when she saw us there,” said Winters. “She cried quite a bit. The children did as well, obviously. Their father was dead.”

The number of work zone crashes proves that any time people are working near traffic, drivers and workers are at risk. But such crashes are preventable. According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, following a few safe driving basics can help everyone be safer in the zone.

Drivers should slow down and pay extra attention to their surroundings whenever they see flashing lights, maintenance, utility or emergency vehicles, orange signs, barrels and cones or people along the road. Eliminating distractions like food, loud music, and cell phones also helps.

And of course, drivers should follow the law. That means slowing down whenever flashing lights are present. Drivers should also move over, if possible, to leave the lane beside the work zone open. And in hazardous construction areas, lowered speed limits are posted and must be obeyed.

Breaking these rules can be costly. Tickets for traffic violations are doubled in work zones, and the penalties for injuring or killing someone in a work zone are especially high – up to $25,000 in fines and 10 years in prison.

But as Tim Johnson can tell you, the consequences of reckless driving can be much costlier. Two years after his crash, the deputy is still dealing with the aftermath.

“I miss being on the street in the squad car instead of behind a desk,” says Johnson. A light duty officer until his health improves, Johnson is now a crusader for work zone safety. “People need to move over or slow down, so nobody gets an injury like the one I had.”

For more information on work zone safety visit the Wisconsin DOT online at www.dot.wisconsin.gov/safety.

Story by Knupp & Watson

MAILBOX | Correspondence

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

choices.

With your help, our Boys & Girls Club will show youngsters that someone really cares about them and wants them to realize their fullest potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens.

You can be proud that you stepped up to ensure the futures of Wisconsin Rapids area children. Thanks to you, we can be The Positive Place for Kids! Nicole L. Bensay

Interim Executive Director, Boys & Girls Club of the Wisconsin Rapids Area

The Foundation of WATDA:

Thank you for your thoughtful gift of $500 to benefit the Mukwonago Catastrophic Medical Fund. Your donation will have an immediate impact on the community we serve by providing support to patients and families whose medical care presents a hardship to the family.

Since 1984 when the fund was established, our goal has been to assist families during medical hardships. The ability of the Mukwonago Catastrophic Medical Fund to carry out this goal has been made possible by the generous support of people like you.

William Kasch

Dear Mr. Pedersen,

Thank you and all of the WATDA personnel for your involvement with the 2008 ADAMM Technician of Tomorrow competition. In its fourteenth year, it is one of the events that continues to set the pace for businesses working with education. Bringing dealings together with technical colleges for the benefit of high school programs is truly a way to sustain the technical supply line for the future. Please pass along our thanks to all of the staff at WATDA who were involved in arranging this spectacular event. We will continue to strive for success as we represent ADAMM and WATDA in the upcoming national event.

Carl Hader, instructor; Ken McCormick, principal; Paul Britt and Chris Cheek, competitors; Grafton High School

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Toyota honors Don Jacobs

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The Don Jacobs story reflects enterprise and willingness to take a well-thought-out risk. In his early years, he had established himself well in the auto industry in Madison and hoped to buy into a local dealership. Instead, in the late 1960s he bought a downtown Waukesha Buick dealership and what had been a disappointment — not being able to buy into the ownership of the Madison dealership — “worked out to be my best break,” Jacobs now says.

Northern Wisconsin gives boost to AYES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to significantly upgrade the local auto-motive training program. The district recruited Mark Poppe, a top-notch new teacher with both industry and education experience.

“In real estate, we think about the location, location, location,” said Brad Peek, Wausau East High School principal. “In education, we think: teacher, teacher, teacher.” Poppe grew up in Wisconsin, went to Iowa to teach for a few years and when the position became available, he jumped at the chance. “It is important to me to teach automotive technology and when I came here, I knew everyone was committed,” he said.

Do partnerships work? Ask dealers, educational charities and the local auto businesses. They are providing lab equipment, certified instruction, and current-model vehicles for technician training. “Thanks to the hard work of this district, staff members, the business community, our WATFDA Foundation’s Team Wisconsin and the generosity of the Judd S. Alexander Foundation, Wausau now has the newest AYES program in the country — and we think it will become one of the best,” said Marlowe. “This is something we have been striving for the last five or six years. It is great to be working with a lot of good people at the state level who are willing to help us out with this process.”

The Foundation, which makes education its primary focus, joined with AYES in 1998 and created the AYES-Team Wisconsin initiative. The goal is to promote and enhance technology education in Wisconsin and build the critically short supply of trained technicians for the state’s auto service businesses. The total community benefits from Wausau’s involvement in AYES, along with the student and the industry, because skilled technical workers stay in Wisconsin.

“We are helping the local community by graduating students with a strong basic understanding of the automotive industry, who will work and go to a post secondary program in the community,” said Marlowe. “You hear about the ‘brain drain.’ We will be able to retain talented students in the area.” The AYES-Team Wisconsin program is market-driven, helping ensure that the teaching and the students stay current. The statewide network of auto service shops and dealerships that employ AYES graduates do continuous reporting on their training and preparedness.

“AYES is all about partnership that results in lifelong careers for young technicians,” said Pedersen. “The Wausau AYES program is an outstanding example of this. The Foundation’s resources most certainly must grow to ensure that these exciting training opportunities stay vital.”

The TMQDA award, given in association with TIME Magazine’s Quality Dealer Award.

Automobile and Truck Dealers Association Dealer of the Year in 1998 and Wisconsin’s nominee for the 1999 TIME Magazine Quality Dealer Award. The TMQDA award, given in association with the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, salutes exceptional performance and distinguished community service.

Jacobs has long been active in community affairs, serving on the board of the Waukesha Area Chamber of Commerce and as a recipient of the Chamber’s Volunteer Leadership award. He also has been involved in civic fund-raising, including the United Way, Carroll College and the Waukesha Symphony.

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In the late 1960s he bought a downtown Waukesha Buick dealership, a decision that did not come easily. Jacobs, his wife, Jeanne, and their five children lived on Lake Monona, with a view of the state capitol. “It was our hometown and the kids had to leave their schools and friends,” he remembers.

What had been a disappointment — not being able to buy into the ownership of the Madison dealership — “worked out to be my best break,” Jacobs says today. It kick-started his dealership career in new locations. That rewarded him well and brought him a house beside the fourth tee at Waukesha’s Merrill Hills Country Club and, in recent years, winters in Florida.

The automotive business, he said quietly, “has been very good to us.”

To Jacobs each person is an important cog in a team approach whose goal is total customer satisfaction and repeat business.

One of the reasons for Jacobs’ car-selling and service success is the dedication and loyalty of employees. “We’ve always felt that people don’t work for us, they work with us,” he said. To Jacobs each person is an important cog in a team approach whose goal is total customer satisfaction and repeat business.

His performance has not gone unnoticed. He was selected as the Wisconsin Automobile and Truck Dealers Association Dealer of the Year in 1998 and Wisconsin’s nominee for the 1999 TIME Magazine Quality Dealer Award. The TMQDA award, given in association with the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, salutes exceptional performance and distinguished community service.

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WISCO: The dealer's partner

It’s always a good time to be a member of WISCO Co-op, but especially this time of year. In June it will be time for the owners of WISCO to receive their share of the profits on WISCO’s record-setting 2007. Since we are a true cooperative the owners of WISCO are its members. WISCO will be sending out its annual rebate checks, over $756,000 this year, to more than 600 member dealerships. Member auto and truck dealers are paid the yearly profit in direct proportion to the amount of their purchases. WISCO adds to your bottom line in two ways. First and foremost, you save money on your purchases from the cooperative up front due to our low prices on products your dealership uses everyday. Secondly, any profits the Co-op earns are paid back to you in your annual rebate check. Who else pays their profits back to you?

If your dealership is a WISCO member, are you getting your share of the savings? Are you using the WISCO programs for equipment purchases, bulk oil, supplies, accessories, parts, batteries, vehicle appearance, and the many other products WISCO offers? If not you may be missing an opportunity to make your dealership more profitable. An increasing percentage of a dealership’s gross profit is coming from its parts, service, and body shop operations. WISCO can help you make these areas more profitable.

For those who are not members, check us out. It’s easy to become a member. By filling out a simple application and investing in a one time $1,000 share you too can save on your dealership’s purchases. $1,000 is not an expense, but stock in the cooperative. If for any reason you would ever want to get out of WISCO we will refund the money. While you are a member we pay you 5 percent annual interest on the stock even if you purchase nothing. This year the average rebate to our members will be over $1,200. That is above and beyond the value of the stock. It really is a no lose situation. Call us at (800) 274-2319 or visit us on the web at www.wisco.com to start adding to your bottom line.

Those of you who are WISCO members please mark your calendars for the WISCO annual meeting and golf outing. This year the meeting and outing will be held on June 24 at Lake Arrowhead Country Club south of Wisconsin Rapids. There will be a complimentary lunch, refreshments, and golf immediately after our meeting. Plan a day of fellowship with other WISCO members.

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August 12 Cranberry Country Lodge Tomah
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August 21 Country Springs Waukesha

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Virchow Krause 1/2 page vertical new
President Gary Williams was honored at the event for having the vision of starting The Foundation of WATDA:

"The next Foundation benchmark will be important for the community and important for WATDA members. Our work in the education arena will preserve our mission to help children and families. Ray showed me a comprehensive report that concluded that kids coming out of our high schools are not prepared for the workplace. Soft skills are lacking. Four hundred corporations took part in a study to research how we can advance the soft skills in communications, speaking and writing. I invite The Foundation to take a look at how this could impact our future work."
et-together 2008

Thanks to our co-hosts and sponsors: John and Cindy Amato, Mark and Carol Tousignant, Ken and Roberta Vance and Bill and Carol Wuesthoff

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Gary Williams and Bob Cornog, former CEO, Snap-on Corp.

Ken Vance, Eau Claire.

Lee Markquart, Eau Claire.

Retired Supreme Court Justice Bill Callow and Gary Williams.
Meet your directors profiles of your WATDA directors By Sharyn Alden

Entrepreneurial spirit sparked in the heart of road racing country

While some auto dealers can say they grew up around the auto industry, not many have had the entire to the world of wheels like Mike Wolf did growing up in the midst of auto racing.

Wolf, president of Wolf’s Motor Car Company, Inc., in Plymouth, was raised in the Village of Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin at a time when road racing was in its infancy. “It was the beginning of a new era in auto racing,” he said. “The birth of road racing on the streets was happening all around me, and so too was the construction of Elkhart Lake’s Road America.”

In addition to the world of auto racing, Wolf’s father and his uncles, all hard-working entrepreneurs, also influenced Mike. “Their work ethics definitely had a positive effect on me,” said Wolf. “These were people who didn’t leave a job until the job was done.”

Wolf, who has served on the WATDA board for six years and is serving his last year in 2008 due to his district’s realignment. “It has been a great pleasure serving with our group,” he said. “WATDA has a great work ethic—it is an organization I feel proud to be associated with.”

The excitement associated with the world of wheels started when Wolf was 10 years old. “That’s when I was racing Go Karts at the Karten Kettle in Elkhart Lake,” he said. By the age of 16, he was driving a motorcycle to work everyday. It may not have been a race car, but Wolf also remembers his first car with great fondness. “It was a 1958 Chevy Impala two-door, and it was really something,” he said. “It was in need of some engine repairs so to dress it up I put baby moons on its wheels.”

Unfortunately, he didn’t get a chance to drive the car because he was 14 years-old at the time.

A few years later, Wolf became even more passionate about cars when the excitement surrounding the sport of auto racing in the Village of Elkhart Lake filtered down to the Wolf family business. But there was something else that influenced the young Wolf.

Besides the setting of his hometown, which was at the core of the increasingly popular sport of road racing, his father, the entrepreneur, rented his garage to a premier race car team. His father owned an excavating and trucking business, but if it was a major race weekend in Elkhart Lake, Wolf’s father rented out his six-stall garage to the Cunningham Race Team. “It was great growing up and having a racing team fine-tune their cars for competition in my father’s garage,” he said. “That excitement also includes doing a test run down a local country road in a ‘D’ Jaguar with Walt Hansen driving. Those were ‘wow’ moments.”

Wolf also looks back on the time when the movie “Winning” with Paul Newman, was filmed near his hometown. “They filmed the movie in 1967 on location at Road America, and it was such an amazing experience. Excitement was everywhere in Elkhart Lake — the exhaust sounds were overwhelming and the cars were fast and beautiful.” The excitement of auto racing was also contagious for the film’s central figure. “That film ignited Newman’s interest in auto racing, and later it brought him back to Elkhart Lake as a competitor,” Wolf said.

This collection of fine autos also inspired Wolf. That excitement about being around such inspiring cars was the catalyst that led to a career in the auto industry.

Wolf started his career in the auto business as an automotive technician at a local AMC, Jeep and Dodge dealership. With 10 years of experience behind him, he started his own independent repair business, Wolf’s Car Care.

After a decade of growing the business, Wolf said, “It was time to grow in another direction. That’s when I purchased the Chrysler and Plymouth store in 1988. “My first sales challenge was to convince Chrysler that I had what it takes to succeed as an automotive dealer.”

Wolf has been married to Leoda, part-owner and CFO for Wolf Motor Car Company, for 36 years. Their oldest son, Bart, is not only the company’s sales manager, he has inherited his father’s love of auto racing. “He juggles being both sales manager and race car driver,” said Wolf. Other members of the family are Annalee, who teaches 7th grade, Zac, a chef, and Nathaniel, a student at Lakeland College. “They all have served time at the dealership. It’s a family thing,” said Wolf.

When he’s not running his business or racing autos, Wolf also serves on the Planning Commission for the Village of Elkhart Lake. He has also just completed his 14th year on the LTC Auto Tech Advisory Board.

As Porth would like to have dinner with, Wolf’s doesn’t hesitate when he said, “Auto racing greats, Carroll Shelby, John Fitch and Briggs Cunningham, as well as Cliff Tielie, the developer of Road America. They were all pioneers in the auto racing industry in the 20th century.”

If Wolf could wave a magic wand he would host this magical dinner at the venerable Siebkens Resort, a 1916 family-owned retreat at Elkhart Lake. The atmosphere, as repeat guests know, is perfect for reminiscing and relaxing. It’s also where Paul Newman, co-owner of Newman/Haas Racing has come to dine and relax.

While auto racing is an important element in Wolf’s life, he says keeping his customers happy is of utmost importance to him. The drive of meeting the needs of his customers, and paying attention to small details, are the same work ethics that his father and uncles handed down to him.

“Our motto... Everything we do is driven by you, reflects this.” Today, this is the mainstay of Wolf’s business acumen. “These are the principles that I enforce in my employees,” he says. “It’s important that our customers know that we truly care about them.”

If you believe in serendipity, you’ll appreciate the story of how Frank Porth, owner of Frank Porth Chevrolet Buick, Inc. and Frank Porth Chevrolet in Crivitz, got started in the auto industry.

In 1978, he moved to Columbus, Wisconsin as a partner of a Marshfield CPA firm. When his first client, Cal Meier Chevrolet Buick decided to retire, he approached Porth to see if he was interested in purchasing the dealership.

“I knew nothing about the auto business, but the industry interested me because Ford Motor Company was a client when I was with Coopers & Lybrand, a CPA firm in Detroit.”

Porth, a Michigan native, graduated from Northern Michigan University with a degree in accounting. He earned his CPA certificate while working at the Detroit accounting firm. Interestingly, our offices were in the Renaissance Center downtown Detroit in the same building which General Motors now owns,” he said.

After Porth seized the opportunity to take the Columbus dealership, there were plenty of challenges ahead. “Learning how the auto dealership works was the biggest challenge of my 22-year career,” he said.

Porth has made his second career a success by viewing challenges and changing dynamics as new opportunities. “Every day I look forward to being involved in all departments and aspects of the dealership,” Porth said.

He also enjoys serving on the WATDA board. “I was motivated to serve so that I could meet other Wisconsin dealers and gain different perspectives about our industry,” he said. “I wanted to help improve the quality of business for Wisconsin auto dealers.”

In 2002, Porth bought Banaszak Chevrolet in Crivitz, Wis. Not only did it offer another opportunity to have a dealership in a different location in the state, it gave Porth a good reason to set down business roots in the northern part of the state. Since he has a lakeside home in Crivitz, he has a deep fondness for this northern Wisconsin area. “My favorite activities are hunting and golfing so it was a natural fit for me to be able to spend more time in the North Woods,” he said.

Porth lives in Columbus with Cindy, his wife of 40 years. Their son Adam and his wife, both high school teachers in Sun Valley, Idaho, have three children. The Porth’s daughter Amy is in

Former CPA is dealer of 22 years
Barbara Anderson learns auto business from scratch

BY SHARYN ALDEN

Barbara Anderson, who was born on a farm five miles north of Baldwin, still has strong roots in her community. Today, she and her husband Larry have two Ford dealerships in Baldwin and Ellsworth. It has been a long and winding, but interesting road from farm life to dealership ownership.

The couple’s son Tracy lives in Woodville and also works at both dealerships as an expert technician. Their daughter Tami works at the dealership in Baldwin and her husband Doug, a registered nurse, works at Regions Hospital in St. Paul, Minn.

Barbara says learning about cars didn’t happen overnight. Twenty-two years ago she didn’t have any experience working in the auto business, but she was willing — make that eager — to learn. In 1985 Barbara and Larry received a notice from the Montgomery Ward catalog store would be closed down. “We knew we wanted to stay in the community but we weren’t sure what was around the next corner,” Barbara said.

The motivation to increase her knowledge about the industry led Barbara to serve as a WATDA board director. Even though she’s been in the industry for many years, she said, “I thoroughly enjoyed it because my character, and he lived in so many fascinating places in the world.”

Barbara Anderson

On top of that, when the Andersons started out in the industry, technology hadn’t yet made bookkeeping what it is today. “When we started out we didn’t have computers. We did everything by hand, including writing out finance contracts,” Barbara said.

Sixteen years after plunging in as owners of the first store in Baldwin, they bought their second store in Ellsworth in 2002. “I became dealer of that store while Larry continued with the Baldwin location,” she said. “It was an entirely new experience for me and I love it.”

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The family-owned business, Brennan Buick Inc., of Green Bay, has been keeping customers happy for several decades. Mike Brennan, owner of Brennan Buick, along with his brothers Dan and Bill, says his interest in the auto business is due to his father Jim, who remains very much involved in the dealership today.

“My father started working for the founder of this Buick franchise when he was 17 years old,” says Brennan. At the age of 16, Mike was following in his father’s footsteps. “I did the same things he did as a teenager – cleaning the cars, the floors, anything that needed attending to – that’s what I did.”

Up through 1986, Brennan worked on the service side of the auto business as a technician, shop foreman, and then service manager. Then came what he describes as “the biggest challenge of his career.”

“One of the biggest benefits for directors is being able to meet very involved and friendly dealers and WATDA staff members. Having a network like this is invaluable,” he said.

A LOVE OF WISCONSIN

Barbara says travel is one of her favorite forms of relaxation. “Larry and I have visited many places in the last 10 years but for us, Wisconsin ranks tops as the best destination of all. When you have the opportunity to see the state in its four seasons it is an awesome experience,” she said. “Larry and I love to take drives on country roads to savor the beauty of our state.”

Barbara’s other down-time pursuits include reading — she’s currently reading “Don’t Bet Against Me” by Deanna Favre, and watching movies. Scanning a list of all-time favorite films that she has enjoyed, she says Pretty Woman” and “Dirty Dancing” are standouts.

Oprah Winfrey may not know a lot about the auto industry but that doesn’t matter to Barbara. That’s who she would choose to have dinner with because, Barbara said, “Oprah is a very intelligent and genuine person.”

Give her the chance to change things in her life Barbara says she wouldn’t change a thing. “I have been very fortunate to have a loving family, and even we have had our share of difficult times, our love and faith has made us stronger.”

She also gives credits having a life well lived to working in an industry she thoroughly enjoys. “I love my work in the auto business and the people who have been for us over the years. I have been truly blessed,” she said.

pharmaceutical sales and lives in Stevens Point with her husband Scott, a basketball coach at University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, and their three children. When Porth isn’t hunting or playing golf, he enjoys reading memorizing books. One such book is “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.”

“I thoroughly enjoyed it because my dad was chief engineer on a carrier in the Great Lakes,” he said. “It’s not surprising to learn that Ernst Hemingway, great author and big game hunter, would be a chosen dinner companion if you could wave a magic wand. “He was such an interesting character, and he lived in so many fascinating places in the world.”

Book exchange popular at Brennan Buick

The family-owned business, Brennan Buick Inc., of Green Bay, has been keeping customers happy for several decades. Mike Brennan, owner of Brennan Buick, along with his brothers Dan and Bill, says his interest in the auto business is due to his father Jim, who remains very much involved in the dealership today.

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Brennan and his wife of 33 years, Patty, have three children. Jamie, a teacher and head of the gifted and talent program for the Two Rivers school district, lives in Two Rivers with her husband Travis. The couple has two children. Matthew lives in Charlotte, N.C., and is a mortgage and bond trader. He and his wife Kate have one son. Last year the Brennan’s daughter Melsia earned a Ph.D. in physical therapy and she works at Aurora Hospital in Manitowoc.

It is probably comes as no surprise to learn that one of Mike Brennan’s favorite pastimes is visiting his children and grandchildren. “In addition to spending time with my family I also enjoy golf, and fly-fishing in Canada,” he said. Brennan also enjoys reading. The dealership recently began a book exchange program for employees who want to bring in books and exchange them with others at the dealership. “Since the program began, many employees have found interesting books that they can take home to read,” said Brennan, who recommends the practice of book lending to other dealers.

What has he read that he likes? “I’ve read several books by James Patterson, but my favorite author so far is John Grisham,” he said.

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Sky's the limit for Pat Baxter

BY SHARYN ALDEN

Sometimes a first career unrelated to the auto industry later becomes a great springboard to owning a dealership.

That describes the career path of Pat Baxter, president of Kayser Ford, Inc. in Madison. Even though he grew up in the shadow of an auto dealer, he initially took a different path. “My father had a small Ford dealership in 1959 in Oregon, Wisconsin,” said Baxter.

One of the things on his career path that he points to with great pride is serving on the WATDA board. For the past three years he has been a WATDA director saying he was motivated to serve because he wanted to give back to this high-functioning, important organization. “As a lobbying organization, they do so much for auto dealers. They are on top of legislation that really matters; I want to be part of what I could to help other dealers.”

FROM CPA TO AUTO DEALER

Baxter has lived in the Madison area all his life. After graduating from Edgewood High School he earned a degree in accounting from University of Wisconsin Madison and worked for the next several years as a CPA.

In 1977 Baxter was at a transition point in his career when he saw an ad for vice president of leasing with Kayser Ford. Not only did he get the job, he remained in that position until 1984 when the leasing department was sold.

“I had an opportunity to buy the dealership, which at that time was the largest auto dealership in Madison, but I knew I needed some expertise behind me,” he said. “I got it from Ford who provided it to me.”

Baxter’s children are making their own strides in the family business. Baxter and his wife Lee have four children, Sean, 30, and Ryan, 27, head the Madison sales operation in a very hands-on capacity. “My sons are now doing many of the things that I used to do.” His training as an accountant is still very evident. “I still like to come in and look at the most recent sales records.”

A FAMILY BUSINESS

Asked what professional “thrill” has made him proud, he points to the growth of the Kayser Automotive Group. After taking those first steps as a new dealer back in 1985, he went on to buy five other dealerships, two in Stoughton, and others in Watertown, Sauk City and Palaski. “It is really exciting to see how far we’ve come,” he said.

Three of Baxter’s children are making their own strides in the family business. Baxter and his wife Lee have four children. Sean, 30, and Ryan, 27, head the Madison sales operation in a very hands-on capacity. “My sons are now doing many of the things that I used to do.” His training as an accountant is still very evident. “I still like to come in and look at the most recent sales records.”

It’s a fast airplane at 180 knots,” he said. “It has a glass cockpit, its own parachute and a high-tech cockpit with features like exceptional weather visuals.”

If you’re thinking about learning to fly, Baxter will tell you that in his experience, it was a dream come true. “For a long time, I had been thinking about wanting to learn to fly,” he said. “So in March, 2005, I started flight instruction at Morey Field Airport in Middleton (named for Howard Morey, a Wisconsin aviation pioneer), and by August, after 70 hours in the air combined with additional classroom instruction, I received my flying certificate.”

The Baxters also spend time in northern Wisconsin enjoying fishing and water sports at their home base at Three Lakes.

Baxter said the person he would love to sit down and have a conversation with is a “regular guy” with long roots in the Midwest. “I’d love to talk to Abraham Lincoln to hear what his thoughts were about the split in the country during the Civil War,” said Baxter. “He knew how to play by a new set of rules. It would be fascinating conversation learning about how he broke new ground.”
Jim Tessmer motivates people to perform their best

Challenges and rewards have long been part of the auto industry. "One of the most rewarding things for me is to see a novice salesperson become a sales professional who really enjoys their work," Tessmer said. "Another challenge is working with a disgruntled customer and turning them into a satisfied customer for life." He knows it's how you work with people that makes the difference. "Most customers that are disgruntled just need someone who will listen to their situation and care enough to find a solution," he said.

Today Tessmer oversees five dealerships. His biggest challenge? Without hesitation he sums it up in two words: "Staying organized. You have to prioritize your responsibilities."

Tessmer conceded he’s a hands-on professional who really enjoys their work. "I think a good motivator can see in someone's eyes when they are down and find a way to pick them up, either by suggesting a goal or story or just listening to them."

When he isn’t working he enjoys spending time with his family, traveling, boating and hunting.

As a WATDA director Tessmer also relishes the opportunities and responsibilities that go with board membership. "I feel I can bring years of experience in managing both import and domestic franchises to the work of the board," Tessmer said. "I believe WATDA has the goal of protecting our industry and I want to contribute to that success."

His love of the auto business started in high school. "I sold auto parts at BS Wisniewskis on the South side of Milwaukee while I was in high school," he said. It was 1979, somewhat of a watershed year for Tessmer because he started selling cars at Ernie Von Schledorn in Menomonee Falls and never looked back. "What really inspired me were the countless opportunities for helping people and working with customers," he said.

Tessmer loves to motivate others to do perform to their best. "I look forward to it," he said. "I think a good motivator can see in someone's eyes when they are down and find a way to pick them up, either by suggesting a goal or story or just listening to them."

For many years I was motivated by Brett, a friend with multiple sclerosis. "Brett showed me that most of our problems are very small compared to what he was going through. More importantly, he maintained a positive attitude through it all," Tessmer said.

Motivation is also very important on the business front. The dealership does many things to give its employees positive reinforcement such as handing out two-pound steaks to each employee after a good month.

During the Christmas holiday season, Santa, Mrs. Claus, three elves and a three-piece banjo band pay a visit to each dealership to sing carols and give turkeys to every employee.

"But I have been able to surround myself with great people who share the same beliefs as I do in caring for customers. That's what leads to long-term relationships."

Jim and his wife Nancy have two children – Jim, 25 who works as the pre-owned manager at Lexus and Infiniti Northshore, and Amy, 23, who is part of the human resources team at Jack Safo Toyota.

Growing up in a big family, Tessmer still recognizes the benefits that come from hard work – a work ethic that was instilled in him years ago.

"I have been able to surround myself with great people who share the same beliefs as I do in caring for customers. That's what leads to long-term relationships."

"It's wonderful to get away for awhile, scuba dive, cruise around the islands and spend more time with my family," he said.

The trip also coincided with his 50th birthday. "It was a terrific way to celebrate any birthday, but this year it was even more special because it was something of a landmark," he said.

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Dealer philanthropy through Foundation matching grant program helps communities

The following organizations were helped as a result of dealer philanthropy through The Foundation’s 2007 Dealer Community Challenge Grant program:
- Langlade County 4-H, Antigo
- Merrill Area Community Foundation, Wausau
- Neighborhood House of Milwaukee
- Mukwonago Catastrophic Medical Fund
- Salvation Army Emergency Shelter, La Crosse
- Hayward Foundation for Education
- Children’s Museum of Fond du Lac
- Nature’s Edge Therapy Center
- Boys & Girls Club of the Wisconsin Rapids Area
- Bobbie Nick Voss Charitable Fund
- Women with Courage Foundation, Ladysmith
- Eau Claire Community Foundation
- Thanks to all of the dealers who were a part of this. For more information about the 2008 Community Challenge Grant Program contact Linda at (608) 251-5377.

As part of the Foundation of WATDA’s 2007 Dealer Community Challenge Grant program, Tom Horter Chevrolet donated the proceeds from its third annual car show to the Mukwonago Catastrophic Medical Fund with a matching grant from The Foundation for a total of $1,000. Horter’s fund began when a local boy accidentally drank cleaning fluid and required a great deal of reconstructive medical treatment. The fund was set up to help families without the means to pay medical bills resulting from such accidents. From left is Tom Horter and Richard Sellhausen of the dealership and Don Hotz, president of the fund.

Photo courtesy of Carol Spaeth-Bauer, Mukwonago Chief

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Ten tips that will give your dealership an edge

Q. How can you make your dealership more attractive to customers?

A. First, recognize that in order to survive and thrive, you have to grow. And to grow, you have to attract new loyal customers who see your dealership as the brand they want to identify with.

It also pays to recognize that you can’t rest on your laurels and expect business to increase if you haven’t done your homework, and purposely planned on developing new symbiotic customer relationships. After all, every dealer is apt to lose a percentage of their customer base due to attrition every year.

Here are some ways to use the tools you already have to do a better job attracting and retaining loyal customers.

• Take a hard look at what your dealership’s image looks like from your customers’ perspective. Sit down with your marketing team and ask yourself, “Why should customers visit your dealership?” This may seem sophomoric, but it’s good to go through this exercise every so often. If you’re not doing it, your competition probably is.

• Take a good look at your demographics. Maybe it’s time to market to younger or older customers or to other target markets that you’ve thought about but have not actively pursued.

• What are the top three things that differentiate you from your competition? If you haven’t built that into your branding or messaging, it’s time that you did. Put away the old slogans unless they are part of your logo, and roll-out a message that reflects your dealership, now, today.

• Maximize the use of your website. If it is streamlined and easy to navigate, it’s a great marketing tool for advertising current promotions. It is also a cost effective way to build you’re a positive image and to build new relationships. Just make sure your site is updated on a very frequent… as often as daily, basis.

• Are you using your website as an interactive tool? Don’t use it just for a brochure site to impart information. Use it to interact with customers. On every single page make sure your e-mail and phone numbers are highly visible.

• Does your dealership’s physical building’s have curb appeal? Sure, you’d probably say. But when was the last time you actually stood on the curb and looked at your business from a customer’s perspective. How visible is your signage and logo? Does your business have adequate customer parking? Is the exterior well maintained and inviting? Would you want to do business here?

• Does your showroom have a customer/friendly atmosphere, staffed with pleasant sales personnel who are ready to answer questions but don’t hover unnecessarily around customers.

• Do you have coffee perking in the background and available to customers? Even if customers don’t want to take you up on your coffee offer, that welcoming gesture is usually appreciated. It’s a small gesture, but it’s a perk that can go a long way in keeping customers happy and interested in doing business with you.

• Make shopping at your dealership a highly pleasant experience. Turn off loud TVs and overhead music that competes for attention. Did you know that customers often subconsciously choose to shop at stores where soft lighting is used versus retail establishments where hard, glaring spotlights vie for attention?

• Make sure your dealership is involved in the community. People may not retain all the information in your TV or print ad, but they usually remember which businesses are contributing to good works in their community. To learn more, contact Linda about your WATDA Foundation Dealer Community Challenge Grant Program at (608) 251-5377.

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