

Dealer POINT

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inside |

Don Brenengen is Wisconsin's Dealer of the Year

Meet Don Brenengen: Wisconsin Dealer of the Year and Wisconsin's TIME Magazine Quality Dealer of the Year (TMQDA) nominee, a genuine community leader who has enjoyed 17 consecutive years of profitability at Brenengen Chevrolet in West Salem.

Brenengen also owns Brenengen Ford-Mercury and Brenengen Chevrolet, Buick, Olds, Pontiac in Sparta, and Brenengen KIA in West Salem. He recently purchased a fifth dealership with Dodge, Chrysler, Jeep, Ford and Lincoln lines in Tomah. Add to the list Bodies by Brenengen, a collision repair facility and The Firehouse, a public, brushless car wash adjacent to his West Salem Chevrolet store.

Brenengen's retail automotive career reflects the larger whole of his family and his employees.



"My career has challenged me and allowed me to learn, grow and prosper beyond all my expectations," he said. "At the age of four, I could name most makes and models of cars. My father fixed damaged vehicles for a second income and I inherited the

'car gene' from him. I worked my way through college and began my business career working in the accounts payable department of J C Penney Company in Milwaukee. It didn't take long for me to determine that accounting would not be my life-long career."

Brenengen wanted to work in the car business, but most dealers weren't hiring college graduates back in 1975,

he said. Fred Mueller and Harry Dahl of Dahl Ford in La Crosse granted Brenengen an interview for a sales position. "When they asked about my long-range plans, I told them that I didn't want to sell cars all my life," recalls Brenengen. "They liked my answer."

While employed at Dahl Motors, Brenengen was approved as a Ford Dealer Council representative in 1985, even though he had no ownership in the dealership. At the age of 39, his dream came true when he and his wife Cheryl purchased Curlys Chevrolet of West Salem.

What is his success secret? "I monitor inventory days supply, staffing needs, and expenses very closely," said Brenengen. "I also try to anticipate changes in new and used vehicle demand, changes in customers' expectations and identify the opportunities that will arise from the anticipated changes."

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Vruwink is 2009 WATDA Used Car Dealer of the Year

Jim Vruwink is the proud and deserving recipient of the 2009 WATDA Used Car Dealer of the Year award. He is the owner of Eighth Street Auto and T.J.'s Auto in Wisconsin Rapids.

The award was presented to Vruwink during the WATDA Education Conference held at the Wilderness Conference Center in Wisconsin Dells Oct. 13-14. It recognizes those individuals who make significant contributions to the retail automobile and truck industry and their communities.

Vruwink believes in working hard and recognized the WATDA staff, his employees, friends and family members who attended his award presentation event.

"I was born and raised on a dairy farm," he said in his acceptance speech. "There were eight children in my family and one thing we knew how to do was milk cows, seven days a week, from early in the morning until late at night."

"What you put into your business, you get out of your business. I work from the time we open until the time we close, but without all of the great people in my business and family, I would not be here today. Our success is based on team effort."

Nearly 30 members of Vruwink's family, friends and employees attended the award event. His speech ended with standing ovation from over 130 attendees at the conference.

"Jim is loved by many. He has a civic involvement list that is a mile long, and I don't think there is a char-



Jim and Tracy Vruwink

ity in Wisconsin Rapids that he hasn't touched," said Mary Ann Gerrard, WATDA legal counsel and organizer of the conference. "His business is 100 percent customer-focused from the beginning until long after the sale."

To be eligible for the Used Car Dealer of the Year Award, a dealer needs to be nominated by a fellow dealer. Just to be nominated is an honor. The nominee then completes a detailed application, which is judged by Professor Jack Nevin of the University of Wisconsin School of Business.

Applicants for the award are judged on four criteria; the way they sell and merchandise cars, the service they pro-

vide their customers, their involvement in civic affairs and the way they assist fellow dealers in the automotive industry. "Jim knows his customers are satisfied because of the terrific team effort he fosters at Eighth Street Auto," said Gerrard.

Jim's brother Tom is a co-owner of T.J.'s Auto, and came up with the initial investment for their first dealership. "We started with \$7,000 and a dream of owning our own car business, over the objections of our dad," said Vruwink.

"That was 17 years ago. My dad said, 'Boys, don't get into that business.' We went ahead anyway and started with two cars, then three, then four cars. Now, we have about 140 cars on our lots. We opened T.J.'s Auto in 1991, then we opened Eighth Street Auto eight years later. Tom deserves this award as much as I do." Vruwink often volunteers as an auctioneer to raise money for numerous local charities. His businesses employ 32 people in Wisconsin's Rapids, including employees from a fixed base operation he owns at Central Wisconsin Airport. He and his wife, Tracy, have six children.



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FROM AROUND THE STATE | Changes

Lisa and Tim A. Darr, Sr., Plymouth Motorsports, Inc. opened a used vehicle dealership in September. Their two sons, Tim, Jr. and Taylor Darr will also work in the business. The Darrs also have a daughter in high school. Lisa is a broker/realtor for Re-Max Universal Realty in Plymouth. They will offer full-service lending, licensing, registration and extended warranties, up to 200,000 miles. They use Gritt's Auto Service for servicing most domestic and foreign vehicles. Tim, Sr. and Tim, Jr. have a combined 24 years of experience in selling and servicing automobiles. Taylor joined the staff recently.

Wilde Automotive, based in Milwaukee, will begin construction of a new dealership on the northeast side of Madison near the intersection of Interstate 90/94. The group will partner a former Harley Davidson executive, Jorge Hidalgo, on a new Honda store. Construction is scheduled to begin later this year with completion by late 2009. Wilde Automotive currently runs the largest Honda and Toyota dealerships in the greater Milwaukee area based on vehicles sold.

Bergstrom Automotive moved its

Bergstrom Hummer Milwaukee dealership on Highway 45 in Milwaukee into its Bergstrom Chevrolet dealership, both located on Metro Boulevard. The Hummer store will be converted into a used car store and the Quonset-hut style roof removed. The Bergstrom organization also has plans to open five used vehicle showrooms across the state.

Bergstrom Ford of Rhinelander was sold to **Rick Karcz.**

Dan Keenan, Keenan's Ford and GMC in Whitehall sold his franchises in November.

Brenengen Auto Group, headquartered in West Salem, purchased the **Norris-Vernier Motors** dealership in Tomah in December and renamed it **Brenengen Chrysler Ford.**

Mark Motors in Wisconsin Rapids will discontinue its Chrysler and Dodge franchise at the Mark Chrysler Dodge store in Grand Rapids. Mark Motors Toyota in Plover will not be affected.

Van Dyn Hoven Automotive Group, including 10 car franchises in three locations is for sale. They include Van Dyn Hoven Buick Chrysler Jeep in Kaukauna, Van Dyn Hoven Imports in Grand Chute and Van Dyn Hoven

Chrysler Jeep Dodge in Ripon. The dealership group was founded in 1947.

Bergstrom Automotive moved its Bergstrom Hummer Milwaukee dealership on Highway 45 in Milwaukee into its Bergstrom Chevrolet dealership, both located on Metro Boulevard. The Hummer store will be converted into a used car store and the Quonset-hut style roof removed. The Bergstrom organization also has plans to open five used vehicle showrooms across the state.

Ray O'Leary, president of **Everhart O'Leary Motors** in Janesville has closed his dealership and sold his Mazda franchise to Gordie Boucher Ford-Lincoln Mercury and his Volkswagen line to Frank Boucher Chrysler Dodge Jeep. The Everhart 'O' Leary Pontiac franchise has been sold to Dick Stockwell, president of Rock County Buick Pontiac GMC Honda. All dealerships are in Janesville. Stockwell will raise the Everhart O'Leary building to erect a new Honda Image facility on the site.

Holiday Automotive of Fond du Lac has purchased the **Stark Chevrolet-Cadillac dealership,** also located in Fond du Lac. Mike Shannon,

president of Holiday Automotive, said this would expand his current Buick, Pontiac, and GMC and Mazda dealership. Holiday will continue operating as one corporation with three distinct product-specific locations. New and pre-owned Mazdas will be sold and serviced at the Stark location.

Larry Ayres, Ayres Chevrolet, Pontiac, Buick, Inc., in Brodhead, sold his GM franchises to Jim Bozich of Woodstock, Illinois, owner and dealer principal of **Lake Geneva Chevrolet, LLC,** in early November. Lake Geneva Chevrolet is affiliated with Alphorn Ford in Monroe. Ayres will retain the dealership buildings and land and his employees will continue to work at the dealership. Ayres' father founded Olin & Ayres in 1934 and after his retirement in 1978, Larry Ayres became the dealer principal. Larry was a dealer for 36 years. Bozich has other dealerships in Illinois. The new name of the dealership is **Brodhead Chevrolet, Pontiac, Buick;** general manager is Tom Dulaney.

Schlossman Auto Group purchased the **Don Jacobs Subaru** Milwaukee dealership. The dealership reopened as **Subaru City** and made the used car store at its Dodge City of Milwaukee location part of Subaru City, with renovations are planned for early next year. Don Jacobs Subaru in Waukesha will continue and Don Jacobs Toyota and Mitsubishi have been retained by Don Jacobs.

In Stevens Point, **Len Dudas Motors, Inc.** bought **Cooper Motors** and will become a regional dealership for GM, Jeep, Buick and Pontiac. Len Dudas' line of Volkswagen will move to Scaffidi Motors and Scaffidi will drop its GM products. Scaffidi also sells Ford and Hyundai. Dudas plans on building a new showroom for the Jeep line.

CENTER STAGE | Awards, honors, milestones

Ewald Chrysler Jeep Dodge in Franklin held its grand opening and ribbon-cutting of an all new facility on Highway 100 in Franklin in October.

Toyota of Wausau, owned and operated by Ballweg Automotive Group, was honored with a Telly Award for a commercial campaign, "Dealer for Life", produced by Rutledge and Associates, earlier this

year. Also receiving a Telly Award for use of humor and animation was Denil Wall Oldsmobile Cadillac, LLC.

Horter Chevrolet-Pontiac is one of 23 Chevy dealers participating in the Chevy Youth Baseball Program, which raised \$86,000 in donations this year. Horter partnered with Tomma Mukwonago Recreation Department, donating equipment, t-shirts and a Chevy Tahoe SUV, which was raffled off by participating leagues. He is also active in The Foundation Community Challenge Grant program and sus-

tained a matching gift for the new Mukwonago YMCA .

Braeger Automotive Group owner Todd Reardon helped pay for the South Shore Frolics parade in June 2008, just days after organizers discussed its possible cancellation because it lacked a sponsor to cover the cost. The parade was held in July on Milwaukee's Bay View lakefront at South Shore Park, drawing over 30,000 people. Reardon is working with Lion's

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Dealer POINT

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Bart & Cherry Starr honored for work with Rawhide

In November, at the Association of Fundraising Professionals annual National Philanthropy Day luncheon, Bart and Cherry Starr received the Outstanding Lifetime Philanthropy Award for more than 40 years of work in support of the Rawhide Boys Ranch.

As lifetime philanthropists, Bart and Cherry were instrumental in assisting John and Jan Gillespie as they co-founded Rawhide in 1965. What started out as one home serving as a residential alternative to juvenile corrections, now includes a campus of

seven youth homes, an eight-classroom school, and numerous work experience environments.

As young parents, and at the height of a professional football career, Bart and Cherry became involved with their lifelong mission of helping troubled young men find hope for a more successful future.

One of the most instrumental meetings in support of Rawhide that Bart Starr participated in was with Gary Williams, president of the Wisconsin Automobile & Truck Dealers

Association, and Ron Boldt and Jerry Long from the WATDA board of directors.

The 1987 meeting held at Rawhide led to the creation of a statewide network of volunteer, WATDA-member Donor Service Centers that serve as drop off sites for donated vehicles. This partnership allowed the Rawhide vehicle program to grow rapidly in following years and brought in millions of dollars in support for Wisconsin's troubled youth.

In addition, the WATDA membership was the driving force behind the creation of the WATDA Carriage Boys Home that serves the About Face program today.

"The Starrs are an example and catalyst of what community service is all about. Bart and Cherry's love and concern for people, and especially youth, continues beyond Rawhide as they travel throughout the nation sharing their heart and passion for many nonprofit causes," said John Solberg, executive director of Rawhide. "They share a desire to improve the material, social, and spiritual welfare of humanity, especially through charitable activities. For all of these reasons, Rawhide Boys Ranch is pleased to have nominated Bart and Cherry Starr for the Outstanding Lifetime Philanthropy Award. I can't think of more worthy recipients."



Attending the Association of Fundraising Professionals National Philanthropy Day luncheon honoring Bart and Cherry Starr were, from left, Roger Kriete, Bill Sepic, Larry Carey, Bart and Cherry Starr, Bob Pietroske, Ron and Karen Boldt.

CENTER STAGE | Awards, honors, milestones

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Club members to ensure the parade's future viability.

Burtness Chevrolet in Orfordville and Whitewater donated \$100 from the sale of every new and used vehicle for two weeks in December raising \$7,500 for food pantries.

Pommerening Dodge-Jeep sponsored two soccer teams this summer.

Dave Marston has operated his Ford dealership in Minocqua for the past 25 years. In 1983, he purchased 51 percent of Matz Motors. With Ford's approval, he bought out Matz in 1988 and renamed his dealership Marston Ford. He has expanded four times since then. Marston also owns a Chrysler-Dodge-Jeep franchise that he purchased in 1989, Lakeland Rental and a Quick Lane Service Center



The McCoy Group Family of dealers: (front row) Jack McCoy, president of Truck Country of Wisconsin; Bob McCoy, founder; and Greg McCoy. (Back row) Brian McCoy, Jon McCoy and Mike McCoy.

Jack McCoy and his family celebrates 50 years in business with Truck Country, the truck dealership branch of the McCoy Group, with 11 locations. Jack's career in the industry started in trucking with his father, Bob McCoy, back and forth to Milwaukee, Chicago and Madison, hauling livestock. Jack said his job back then was keeping his father awake. His father bought a livestock company with six or seven trucks from Lloyd Huntington in Darlington in



Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson with Gary Williams, left, and Bob Pietroske.

1954 and opened his first repair shop four years later, which later became GMC Truck Sales, the original name of Truck Country. Congratulations to all of the McCoy's!

Bernard's Northtown in New Richmond celebrated its 75th anniversary of doing business in December.

Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson spoke to the WATDA Board of



Emily Mueller-Flanigan, Norm Mueller, Kelly Flanigan and Bob Pietroske.

Directors at their annual meeting in December. She is running for another term in the Supreme Court. "My plan is to run a campaign that is positive, not nasty or based on fear. My interest is to maintain the independence of the justice department and maintain the excellence in the judiciary," she said, "I'm in no one's hip pocket."

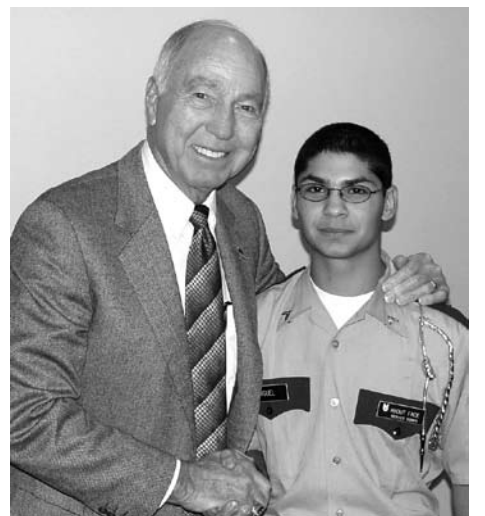
Norm Mueller of Oshkosh received the Hero Award from the WATDA staff for his tireless support in doing the little things very well and one who the staff relies on. The Hero award is presented to a dealer who has not been an officer, a TIME Magazine Quality Dealer Award nominee, or a Gold Award recipient, but who carries an extra measure of weight of input on matters of importance.

Editors Note: Our apologies to Chris Kari of Kari, Inc. in Superior, NADA/ATD Dealer Candidate Academy graduate, for misprinting his name in the previous issue.

RAWHIDE PROFILE | Miguel

My name is Miguel and I am 15 years old. I am from Door County and have been at Rawhide for four months. My favorite sports include wrestling, football, and track. I really enjoy art class with Mr. Johnson. My goals are to complete the About Face program as a corporal, graduate from high school, go to college and join the Marines.

When I first arrived at Rawhide I knew what to expect because my brother, Moses, was here about five years ago. At first, I really didn't like it, but had to get through it so I could go home. I waited two weeks to apply for promotion and was promoted to private, which is really good. Then, two weeks later I applied for promotion to private first class. After that, I applied for the rank of corporal but had to wait eight weeks before I finally received the promotion.



Bart Starr and Miguel

I accepted Christ into my life and I've prayed every night I would successfully complete the program. One of my biggest goals is to be like my brothers, Joe and Moses. Joe is in the Army and Moses is in the Marines. I'm mostly following Moses because I want to join the Marines. My role models are my brothers because they help me. I've gotten in so much trouble in the past, but ever since I came to Rawhide it's helped me a lot. I learned SODAS, which means Situation, Options, Disadvantages, Advantages, and Solutions. There are things you should think about before you do something stupid. Rawhide taught me to hold myself accountable.

The best experiences in my life were at Rawhide and I'm glad I'm here. Throughout this program the best parts of it were being able to meet Bart Starr, being here on the 4th of July, going to a Brewers game and Packers game, participating in Friday electives and Adventure Week.

After I accepted Christ and prayed every night, I hoped that I would go straight home after About Face, but my social worker is putting me in a Rawhide treatment foster care home (CATCH) for awhile. It will be good to go home every weekend and attend school here at Starr Academy until I go home for good. This military-style program is helping to show me what the Marines will look like with the marching and color guard. This program has helped me a lot, and I thank everyone here at Rawhide for it. I enjoyed staying and getting to know everyone here.

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STAFF PROFILE | Karen Swenson

It's all in the details

BY LINDA POULSEN

Some people think meetings are boring, but not Karen Swenson. She is a vivacious single mother of two whose passion is in the detail of putting things together. Hired in February of 2007, Karen is WATDA's administrative assistant and receptionist.

Originally from the Madison area, Swenson is also a transplant from Atlanta, where she worked in the administrative office of a German-owned, ceramic tile importing business. There, she was exposed to many trade shows, marveling in the excitement that went into planning such events.

Swenson said planning a meeting or a conference is kind of like planning a party. "I love planning parties," she said. "I lose myself in the doing of it. I love thinking about the details and being creative. I saw an opportunity at WATDA when I was hired. I was impressed with Gary Williams' philosophy that our strength must come from a smart, professional staff. He was committed to continuing employee educa-

tion and I saw growth for myself. I've been enjoying my work a lot lately."

Coming from a big family with 10 siblings, Swenson shared a birthday with her now deceased, fraternal twin brother who died in a car accident. "Our birthdays were on Dec. 23 and because it was so close to Christmas, we never got birthday presents or had a birthday party," Swenson remembers. "Now I plan my own parties and they are the best!"

Swenson believes that out of her greatest pain comes her greatest contribution. She participated in planning a holiday party for Madison homeless women with other WATDA staff. She also loves to entertain in her home and has planned many theme parties ranging from Casino Nights to 50's parties, always with lots of music.

"I sang in a band in Madison in the '80's. I was an '80's wedding singer' like the singer in the movie, 'The Wedding Singer,' and I was the first to admit that we weren't making any money at it. When I was 21, I talked my best friend into moving to Atlanta with me so I could test my talent in a big city," she said.

Swenson entered several singing con-



tests and always ranked in the top three at several Atlanta nightclub competitions. Her "Janice Joplin" pipes were ready to belt out a piece of her heart at any of the disco clubs where contests were held.

It was then she met her first husband and soon gave up her musical career aspirations to become a wife and mother. Her daughter Lexie is now attending the University of South Carolina, currently studying abroad in Ireland.

"Lexie is living another dream I had

to go to college," said Swenson. She is quick to point out that Lexie also carries the musical gene and loves to sing like her mother. "We even have a karaoke machine and we have a lot of fun with that when she's home. She's really a great singer and is an inspiration to her 7-year-old brother, Caleb."

Swenson is also learning about association management at WATDA. Like many of her co-workers, she wears many hats during the course of the day, bringing her own individual talent to the table. She attended a seminar a few months ago and was impressed with the speaker who talked about how to make meetings more environmentally friendly and green.

Swenson's desire to advance her training during her tenure at WATDA is also shaping her desire to seek an advanced degree at some point.

"I want to take my position to the next level and for me that means taking more responsibility," said Swenson. "Once I'm clear on what I want, I know it will happen."

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Education — the social issue of our time

BY DONALD M. FORKNER

Two major charitable foundations have partnered to support education and help provide good paying jobs in the transportation industry.



The Wisconsin Masonic Foundation and The Wisconsin Automotive & Truck Dealers Association Foundation are both focusing on facilitating the availability of scholarships for individuals seeking education and training to attend technical schools, which will allow them to achieve good paying jobs to support their families.

In their Sept. 13, 2008, board meeting, the WMF voted to partner with The Foundation of WATDA to provide financial support to attract students to the technical schools. This focus includes the support of the Distributive Education Clubs of America at the high school level to make students aware of the opportunities in the transportation industry.

Just in Wisconsin, the auto and truck dealers combined make up about a \$12 billion industry which provides jobs for 36,000 people contributing to the Wisconsin economy. Right now, about 50 percent of the students taking advantage of the scholarships are going into the service end of the business. The new initiative will be expanding this effort to include opportunities in sales and administration. These are all good paying jobs that don't lend themselves to being exported.

The input in seed money to boost this effort will come from the Humphrey Fund, which is administered by WMF. This fund was established by Glenn and Gertrude Humphrey with the stipulation that the earnings from the fund be spent in educating our young people to improve their lot in life. Glenn's business carrier was spent in the transportation industry.

This is just one example of the fiduciary responsibility that the WMF serves presiding over 150 special named funds. If you are interested in knowing more about these opportunities, call 1-800-242-2307 and talk to Bill Barns.

The real story here is the charity and how these two nonprofit foundations are placing education in the forefront to provide tomorrow's opportunities.

Editor's Note: Donald M. Forkner is executive secretary of the Wisconsin Masonic Foundation.



The NADA Legislative Conference brought WATDA and ADAMM leadership to Sen. Herb Kohl's office in Washington. From left are WATDA attorneys Chris Snyder and Mary Ann Gerrard, Sen. Herb Kohl, ADAMM's Don Hansen, past WATDA chairman Bob Pietroske, NADA Wisconsin dealer delegate Jim Tolkan and past president Gary Williams.

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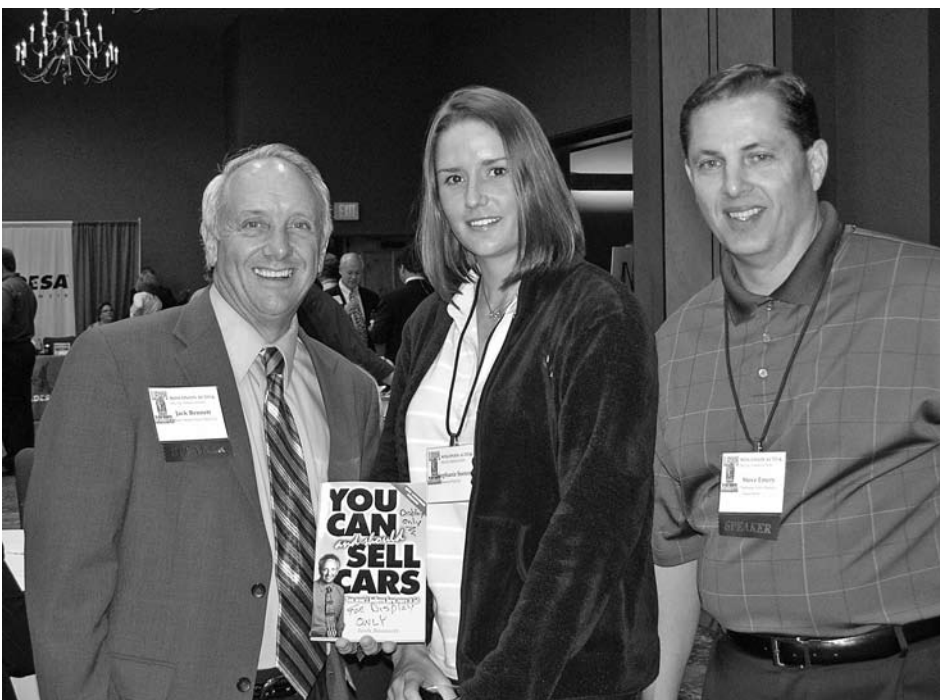
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Jim Vruwink of Eighth Street Auto, Wisconsin Rapids, and Used Car Dealer of the Year 2009

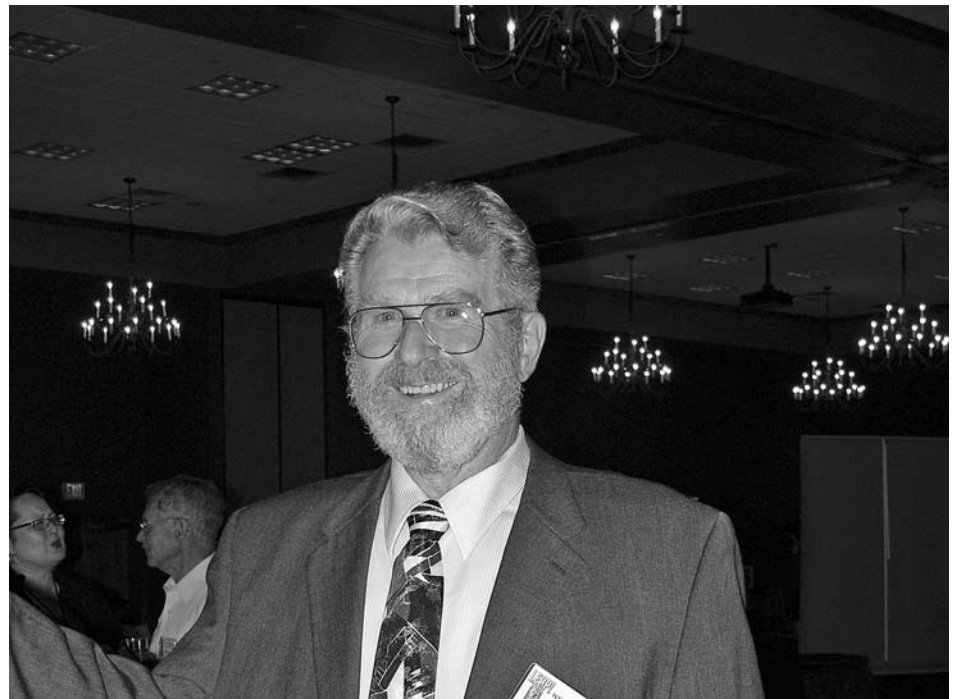


Speaker Jack Bennett, Stephanie Soerens, Soeren's Ford Mercury, speaker Steve Emery

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Troy Wynn, Uptown Motors, Milwaukee; Mary Carlson and Phil Esche, Autoseller; and Scott Quimby, Reg-Trak



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WATDA's Julie Farmer



Shirley and Don Litchfield of Litchfield Auto Sales, Eau Claire

Don Brenengen is Wisconsin's Dealer of the Year

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Brenengen has eliminated layers of management in his stores and empowers his staff to take care of the customer's needs, which in turn promotes his Customer for Life philosophy.

"Working alongside the right people makes all the difference in the world. Dennis Zee, general manager, has been with us since September of 1992 and has been an integral part of our success. Dennis purchased stock in the dealership in 2003," Brenengen said. "I credit a large part of the success of my other stores to the efforts of my sons and my brother Tony and of course the great staff which reaches all the way to the most recent detail department hiree.

"My career has afforded me the privilege of giving back to the communities that helped our family grow the Brenengen Autogroup. I have watched my three sons, Matt, Scott and Nick, mature into men who have chosen to pursue careers in the same business and progress into talented managers, earning the respect of their peers and our customers," said Brenengen.

Cheryl, Brenengen's wife of 36 years, shares kudos for most of the dealership building design, development and charity



Nick Brenengen restored this Camaro when he was in his early 20's with Don assisting in a minor role. The Brenengen family members are from left, Tiffany and Nick with Elaina and Danica; Matthew and Gabriella with Sawyer; Scott and Angie with Paige (behind the wheel) and Hannah; Cheryl and Don Brenengen.



Don and Cheryl Brenengen raise steers at their tree farm to donate to the local food pantry.

work they've done in Wisconsin's Coulee Region. Both are members of the Village People, a revitalization organization in the West Salem community. The Brenengens are the voice for their youth group.

"My greatest legacy has been the role I played in the creation of the Boys and Girls Club in West Salem," said Brenengen. "Over the last five years, Cheryl and I have spent countless personal hours leading the Village People Youth Committee in remodeling a clinic building, furnishing the club and raising \$645,000 which will fund the first three years of operation and start an endowment fund. After only one year the club has over 600 members, far exceeding everyone's expectations.

They share a long list of good deeds done in time, materials and money for numerous other causes. A significant example was their purchase of 28 acres of land so they could donate it to La Crosse County with the stipulation that a paved bicycle trail be built to provide safe access from the Village of West Salem to Veteran's Memorial Park. Brenengen also serves on the board for the LaCrosse County Economic Development Fund and is a member of the 7 Rivers Region, a study group



Fellow auto dealers, Rahn Pischke, "Dodge man", Brenengen, "Chevy Man" and Nick Haring, "Ford Man" compete in the "Bobbing for Beef Tongue" fundraiser.

for economic and social betterment of a seven county area.

Brenengen has a long list of "firsts." He was one of first 50 dealerships in the country to purchase over 1,000 vehicles on the Internet through GMAC's Smart Auction. When he opened Brenengen Chevrolet in 1991 he started the first "one price" dealership in his market area and in 1996 his was one of the first dealerships to employ non-commissioned sales consultants who earn bonuses based on units sold, rather than gross profit.

His proudest moment, however, is not reflected in his business, but his humble beginnings at Logan High School in La Crosse. His name and picture was placed on the School "Wall of Fame" in 2003, recognizing his outstanding ethics and community contributions.

"I felt greatly honored when Logan High School recognized me. I was the oldest of six children and came from very modest beginnings. From early on, I wanted financial security that would allow me to become a contributing member of my community," he said. "I have never forgotten my roots and to be recognized by my high school and to speak motivationally to the graduating class was unforgettable."

Congratulations Don!

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A career choice that’s paying off

BY BILL NELSON

When Tim Miles graduated from Racine Horlick High School in 2003, he decided college wasn’t his best path. “College isn’t right for everyone,” said Miles, who had excelled in high school auto-tech classes. “I love cars.” Not only is he good with his hands, he’s comfortable working with machines and is blessed with mechanical aptitude. While still in school, he had worked as an apprentice at Racine’s Frank Boucher Chevrolet Cadillac Saab, where he was carefully mentored by a veteran technician, Jerry Kobriger. Automotive success had come quickly for Miles. He and a fellow auto-tech class student, Tim Scheidel, had teamed up to win the 2003 Technicians of Tomorrow state competition, conducted by ADAMM. That qualified the Racine team to represent Wisconsin in the National Automotive Technology Competition staged at New York’s famed International Auto Show. “We didn’t win nationally but we did well, finishing fifth,” Miles said. To be in the top 15 percent is a high honor since almost 40 teams – all winners of regional competitions – participated in the rigorous, two-day national competition. Miles knew that promising possibilities were ahead. He had been chosen for an advanced-study scholarship from The Foundation of WATDA. That option came as no surprise because he had learned his auto-tech basics well, both in high school auto-tech classes and at the Boucher apprenticeship. Miles would waste no time distinguishing himself in his career field. While still a teenager (at age 19), he became a “master technician,” having passed all eight Automotive Service Excellence exams. “I feel good about my career choice,”

he said. “It’s a good way to make a living. I’ve chosen a field that is in constant need of people with my skills” – an occupation that isn’t going to go away. Almost seven years after he came aboard at the Boucher dealership, Miles serves as a Saab specialist and – remarkably – has been a Racine homeowner since the tender age of 19. Now, just turning 24, the former trainee has come full circle, from student/trainee to technician to mentor. In his new role as a mentor, he and a young technician, Jon Ramczyk, work on service-department projects as a team. Their several months together thus far have been rewarding, Ramczyk said. “I learn new stuff every day.



Tim Miles and Jon Ramczyk

Tim explains everything step-by-step, which is helpful.” Ramczyk is fortunate in a number of ways. His partner knows the ropes, has been through the mentoring process, and, as a professional, enjoys watching over the “learn-as-you-go” approach. Frank Boucher, who heads the Racine dealership, is pleased, too. “We like having young, home-grown technicians,” he said. “They’ve worked out nicely.” And, added the dealership’s service manager, John Kaiser, “We appreciate the fact that we can groom them,” to fit dealer needs.

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ASE pioneer Dave Lynch is Northwood Dealer

When second-generation auto dealer Dave Lynch was asked to serve on the National Institute for Automotive Excellence board of directors, he knew the level of time and commitment it would take away from his business. He called ASE's president to inquire about the job.

"I learned that ASE was born out of necessity to protect consumers from the perceived, unscrupulous auto repair mechanics in the 1970's and 1980's," said Lynch. He was told that the purpose of ASE was to test, identify, and certify technically sound individuals. That struck a chord with Dave.

"I remembered my father's passion for his trade as an automotive service director who started his auto career in the service department of Humphrey Chevrolet in Milwaukee," he recalled. The connection between cars and the Lynch family can be traced back to the post-WWII era to David's father, John Lynch, Sr., who served in the Army Air Corps until his discharge in 1945.

"I remembered his frustration with the public's perception of technicians as 'shade tree

mechanics' and 'grease monkeys' and I knew what a high value he placed on the abilities of skilled technicians in the dealership service department, so I decided to accept

a seat on the board. I recognized that ASE was the vehicle to give integrity to our auto techs," he said.

Dave served on the ASE board of directors from 1993 until just beyond his chairmanship in 2003. His 10 years of dedication to the mission and purpose of ASE, has helped raise the public's perception of automotive technicians and the industry as a whole. He saw his participation as a way in which



Nick Dulisse, Pat Grady, Eric Varrelmann, Frank Plam and David Lynch.

he could pay back ASE for their vision and results. He saw his work with ASE as a way to elevate the caliber of good technicians.

In September 2007, David Lynch helped create Gateway Technical College's Horizon Center for

technology.

"Dave is a major donor to the Horizon Center for Transportation Technology," said Bryan Albrecht, Gateway Technical College president. "He and I have had numerous discussions regarding the value and impor-

tance of education. Along with a financial gift, he supplies vehicles for display in the Center and for career day events."

David supports the participation of his team in serving on Gateway's advisory committees, program development committee and curriculum committee. He has been a guest speaker for teacher training, student events and he has spoken with the college board about the need to support technician training.

"David invests in the training of his staff at Gateway and recruits from the program he supports, is a supporter of the Gateway College Foundation through his participation and spon-

The Bureau of Labor Statistics expects employment of automotive service technicians to increase 10 to 20 percent through 2012, representing and increase of 82,000 to 164,000 new jobs. This, coupled with demand for increasingly higher quality service, will spike the need for industry-certified instructors and instructional programs.

Transportation Technology, located in Kenosha. He personally donated a five-figure gift to help forward an idea that became a reality. Along with his partners from Gateway Technical College, Snap-on Corporation, the U.S. Department of Labor and The Foundation of the Wisconsin Automobile & Truck Dealers, David helped create a home to transportation education programs using leading edge

sorship of foundation events," said Albrecht. "The relationship he has fostered with Burlington School District and Gateway Technical College serves as a model for others throughout the state."

Ron Jandura, Burlington Superintendent of Schools, echoes Albrecht's words. "I have known Dave for nearly 12 years as an active Rotary Club member. He is involved in the many educational initiatives and became a supporter and contributor to a community-based literacy project that raised approximately \$120,000. He is a person of action who supports education and learning at all levels."

Congratulations Dave!

WISCO | John Hackman

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One of our biggest challenges in saving our membership money on their purchases is educating them on all the products and programs we have available. The annual show is an excellent way to do just that. The 38th annual WISCO Show will be held on March 14 at the Radisson Paper Valley Hotel in Appleton. Attendees will see our vendors' product offerings, new products, and will be able to take advantage of money saving specials. Many of our suppliers, including our major equipment manufacturers, have developed "WISCO Show Specials" on their products. Often these specials yield the year's best pricing available on these products. That could be a good thing to remember for those of you who see an equipment item of interest at this year's NADA Show in New Orleans.

There will be 100 vendor booths to browse at the WISCO Show which runs from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday. Door prizes will be given out throughout the day. Saturday night will start with a cocktail reception followed by a dinner and dance. The WISCO Show is, and always has been, free for our members. The only expense for attendees is the cost of their room if they stay overnight.

The show weekend is a good blend of business and fun for our members and their spouses. We hope to see you along with your managers at this year's show. Plan now to attend. WISCO has reserved a block of rooms at the Radisson Paper Valley with a special group show rate of \$89. Phone number for reservations is 800-242-3499. Refer to the WISCO Show block of rooms to receive the special group price. You can save your dealership money and have an enjoyable week-end with your fellow WISCO members.



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How well is your company brand working for you?

BY SHARYN ALDEN

Is it possible to do anything of value without a high level of trust? That concept is one of the core messages of the book, "The Speed of Trust" by Stephen Covey. It's also one of Corita Schilling's key components in her work with auto dealers to help them achieve their organizational effectiveness goals.

Schilling works for Maritz Inc, a market research, training and learning solutions company, and works as a GM Standards for Excellence facilitator in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

"A great brand reflects every aspect of your company," said Schilling. "An authentic brand can build trust. Conversely, a lack of trust can be poison for a business." What have you done today to make yourself and your company an authentic, and better, brand? Opportunities come with interactions on the phone or in person, and by making customers feel important after the sale. Do you take time to show people around the dealership? Do you let your staff know you value them by telling them in person? These actions can all have great influence on your brand message.

Schilling hopes to make dealers aware that having a great brand runs far deeper than just having a recognizable company logo. A great brand for a dealership positions them to be trusted advisors to their customers in purchasing and maintaining their vehicle, and builds ongoing loyalty.

If you want to be a trusted advisor, you have to understand how your public image or brand is perceived. If a person walks on the sales floor with a notebook or briefcase, would your sales people ignore them because he or she has been "sized up" as a vendor waiting for an appointment?

What about judging a person looking at luxury model vehicles in your showroom. Just by looking at him, are you are sure he couldn't possibly afford to buy one?

People tend to make assumptions based on appearances and first impressions.

"Everyone is their own brand," said Schilling. "We evoke impressions by how we present ourselves. Your brand as a business may suffer if you or your employees, make assumptions about customers before giving them an opportunity to express their interest in your products or services."

The company's owner isn't the only person who projects the company message. "What percentage of your employees truly reflects your intended image in the marketplace? Thirty percent, 75 percent, 95 percent? How have you communicated your brand message and values to your employees? Have you hired people to just fill the slot rather than carefully selecting those who can truly carry out your brand message?" Schilling asked.

Your company's (and your own) brand message can be compromised and derailed in a matter of moments.

A great brand will stand out because it has a feeling of authenticity throughout the entire company

Here is an example of how you might unwittingly project an image that conflicts with your intended brand message.

In her travels, Schilling was in a meeting with a business owner whom she found to be a courteous, likeable person. "Then something occurred that created some doubt in my mind," she said. "A phone call interrupted our conversation and the owner answered, listened a moment, and then yelled into the phone, 'You're talking to the person who owns the dealership!' and then he hung up on the caller. I suspect both the caller and my own impression of that organization's brand, were influenced by the tone of those few words."

To earn customers' trust, you must

have integrity and be authentic in every situation. A great brand can't just be window dressing. A great brand represents the core values of the organization in a way that consistently garners trust: among customers, associates, vendors and employees.

Let's say you have a great brand message that you want to project to the world. Have you done the important soul searching to determine that you, yourself, truly "walk your talk" in living that brand message in every situation? Where do you start building your brand message? What will you do to show the world your brand message? Do you tell employees they are doing a good job when indeed they are?

"Managers often say, 'The employee

is supposed to do a good job. I shouldn't have to pat them on the head every time they do their job.' But we crave the human connection, no matter what type of work we do. Give employees acknowledgement," Schilling said. "It's not just the paycheck that counts. People want, and need, to know that they are valued and that their work is important. Give them credit in their emotional bank account."

From Schilling's perspective, one of the most important take-away messages about branding is this: "Your brand should reflect who you truly are. A great brand will stand out because it has a feeling of authenticity throughout the entire company."



Schilling



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It's déjà vu, for Dodge City technician

BY BILL NELSON

Dodge City of Milwaukee's Mike Mirsberger stands tall, not only in stature (he's 6 foot 7), but also as a master certified technician and on-the-job mentor.

Good work, this service-department stalwart knows, is its own reward. But for Mirsberger corporate recognition, which came in November, has accompanied it, too.

For the second time in the two-and-a-half decades he has been turning automotive wrenches, Mirsberger has been selected as the AYES "mentor of the year" by Chrysler's Midwest Business Center in metropolitan Chicago.

AYES is an acronym for Automotive Youth Educational Systems, a partnership involving auto manufacturers, dealerships and technology programs at selected local high schools. The AYES mission is to upgrade school technology programs.

Mirsberger's mentorship has involved mainly students at Pulaski High School on Milwaukee's South Side, just two miles from Schlossmann's Dodge City store, which is at the busy corner of S. 27th St. and W. Layton Ave. Pulaski is among more than a dozen Wisconsin high schools whose automotive programs have received ASE certification. The National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) tests technician competency and school automotive programs through four dozen

exams/checkpoints covering every major diagnostic and repair specialty.

Mirsberger has worked with four apprentices in eight years of mentoring.

"Mike relates extremely well to young people," said service manager Jerry Kostman.

"We've been blessed" to have techs of his caliber," added Mike Schlossmann, dealer principal.

The 2008 Chrysler/AYES plaque, which hangs prominently at the Dodge City store, cites Mirsberger's "dedication to your profession, demonstrating commitment to training excellence."

He's proud to be a repeat winner. He won "mentor of the year" for the first time in 2003. Young adults, said Mirsberger, a father of four sons, need guidance. Many of today's schools "aren't teaching enough in shop classes. They're slanted toward (instruction in) computers. It's a shame there isn't enough emphasis on technical training," he said.

As a mentor, apprentices pick up on his "can do" attitude. Asked to sum up his approach, he said, "I love my job. I look forward to work every day. I really enjoy my time here – the work atmosphere is great – and I try to pass along that feeling."

When Kurt Bohman, his current apprentice, was asked about his mentor, Bohman said, "Mike's a heckuva guy. He's never too busy to help when you're stuck."

Bohman also admires his mentor's



From left, Jerry Kostman, Mike Mirsberger, Dodge City of Milwaukee dealer principal Mike Schlossmann, and Chrysler reps, Julie Sherwood and Richard (Rick) Baldry.

dazzling tool cabinet. The big orange toolboxes in Mirsberger's customized work space are full of tools valued at some \$100,000, as well as a small refrigerator, pizza oven, 13-inch TV and laptop. "It's awesome," Bohman said.

The 43-year-old Mirsberger, whose son Jimmy also works at the Dodge City shop, knows firsthand the value of a caring instructor.

"My dad taught me well. When I was a kid, he would do remodeling on the side and I was his go-fer. He taught me how to do things, not just mechanical things but also woodworking, and electrical and plumbing work. Much of my success today is due to him."

Mentoring, he pointed out, shouldn't be viewed as extra-duty responsibility. The process provides all kinds of

special rewards, he said. "It's inspiring to see the progress trainees make in Chrysler's CAP project (the Chrysler Apprenticeship Program)," a two-year venture that involves rotation of technical school sessions and work time at the dealership. "They're picking up new skills all the time. You see they're learning a lot. Sometimes, we learn from them, too. Their school instruction involves the latest stuff in auto technology," he said.

Mirsberger recalls his first apprentice, a Pulaski alum, who got married a few years ago. Mirsberger found himself assigned to sit at the table of the bridegroom's parents. Obviously, the groom had great respect for his workplace teacher.

"That was quite an honor," Mirsberger said.

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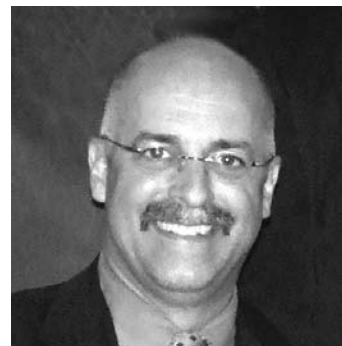
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Full circle at Dodge City

BY BILL NELSON

Dave Jodat was simply applying for a summer job. He wasn't aware of the fast track he was about to step onto when, as a soon-to-be senior at Oak Creek High School, he walked into Dodge City of Milwaukee in 2000 and asked about summer work in the service department.

It was a good choice. Ahead not only would be a potential adult career but also a scholarship and tools – worth a combined \$4,500 – from The Foundation of WATDA.

Longtime Dodge City service manager Jerry Kostman was impressed by what he saw in the teenage applicant.

"I liked his attitude," he said. Jodat seemed eager to learn and had a maturity and quiet confidence that came in part from the auto repair work he had done in the family garage with his father, Brian Jodat, a machinist. Dave also had a 3.4 grade-point average.

Soon he had a Dodge City job and, as a senior, enrolled in his high school's work-cooperative program, taking classes in the morning, then spending 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the dealership.

"I had a blast," Jodat said. "What kid doesn't want to get out of school early. Every day I loved coming to work. And I was getting paid to do something I enjoy."

Another good break would be heading his way. After graduating in 2001 from Oak Creek High School he was



Jerry Kostman, left and Dave Jodat.

given an opportunity to participate in Chrysler's CAP project (the Chrysler Apprenticeship Program). A two-year program, CAP involves rotating eight-week technical-school sessions and eight weeks of work time at the dealership; its mission is to upgrade the technical competence of incoming dealership technicians.

Jodat took a wide range of classes at Milwaukee Area Technical College's North Campus in Mequon, and the program led to an associate degree in automotive technology in summer 2003.

The CAP program is heavy on auto tech courses, but for Jodat it also involved studies in English, math and psychology, among others. A big boost

came from The Foundation of WATDA.

"The scholarship I received amounted to \$2,500 for school and \$2,000 for tools," he said. "As an 18-year-old, that was the best gift I could have gotten."

Although CAP takes young technicians away from the dealership half the time, car stores sing its praises.

"We love the program," said

Kostman. "We've been doing it for a dozen years."

The CAP training is a win/win proposition, Kostman added – beneficial to the tech and the dealership.

Jodat agreed and said his experience invaluable. Not only did he broaden his knowledge on a number of academic subjects, it also gave him a professionalism in the ever-changing world of auto technology.

The intensive program is packed with useful instruction, he explained. "It's so condensed and you do so much in just a short time. I've heard it said it's worth almost 10 years of book knowledge."

Now a Dodge City auto-tech veteran at age 25, Jodat has come full circle.

He just finished his first stint as a mentor. His student-colleague was Jimmy Mirsberger, a 2006 West Bend East High School grad who later this year also will graduate in October graduated from the CAP program. Mirsberger's father Mike also works in the Dodge City shop and serves as a mentor.

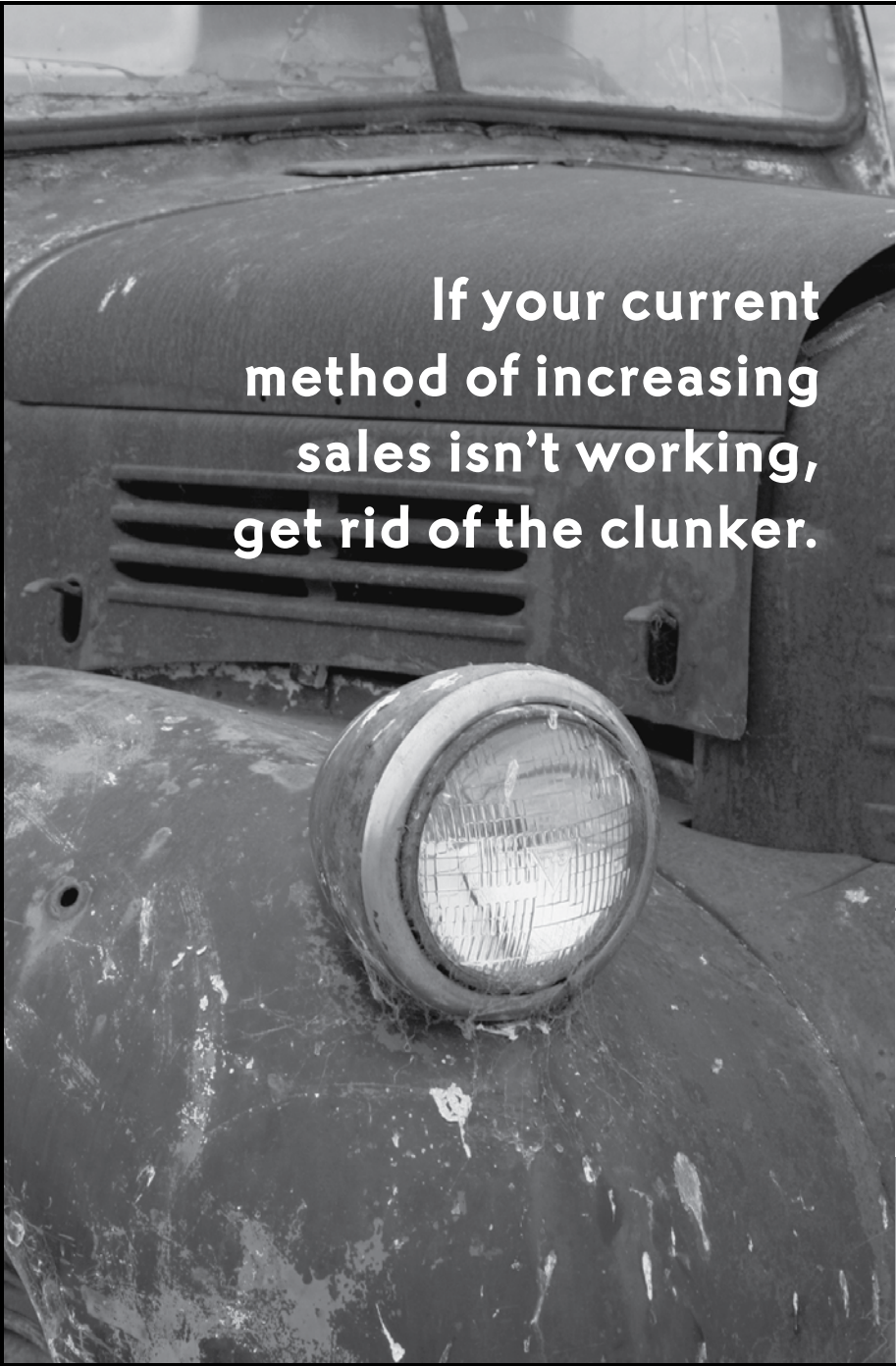
"Dave's smart and helpful," Mirsberger said. "If you did something that wasn't exactly right, he quickly straightened you out, but he doesn't ridicule you."

"I've been in his shoes," Jodat said. "I know what it's like and how people want to be treated." At the same time, he said, "it's important to be firm and assertive, right from the start. As a mentor, you set the tone and that's the way it is."

When Jimmy gets the green light to do things entirely on his own, which isn't that far away, Jodat wants to be sure his pupil is well-grounded and that success is ensured.

Now that Jimmy has the green light to do repairs on his own, he doubly appreciates how Jodat went out of his way to ensure that he was well-grounded.

The Dodge City store, at 27th and Layton on Milwaukee's south side, has 15 techs and three apprentices, and its involvement in the CAP program continues, service manager Jerry Kostman said. "There's a shortage of auto techs," he said. "We're pleased to be able to grow our own."



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