JULY 2023

RV PRO

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The industry's manufacturers weigh in on what it means to be *American made.*

Matthew McArdle, *Engineer*
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CERTIFIED AUDIENCE

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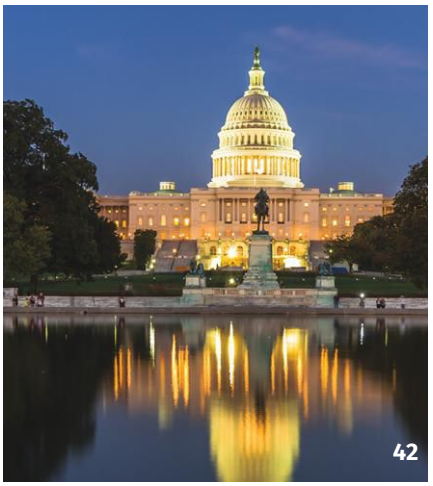
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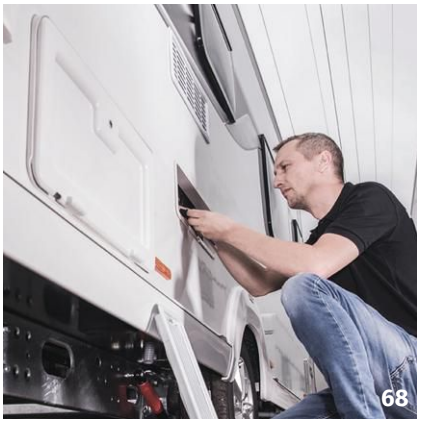
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MORE OF WHAT MATTERS

RV PRO



Growing up, I lived in six states before I graduated high school – I was born in New Hampshire, then went to North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, California and New Jersey. As the daughter of a captain in the U.S. Air Force, I learned to wear my adaptability as a badge of honor. A fierce sense of patriotism was also instilled in me at a young age, and I can still recall hot Fourth of July nights, watching fireworks while singing along to "God Bless the USA" by Lee Greenwood – my favorite line was always "I'm proud to be an American." Tears still come to my eyes when I hear that song.

That tenacity to roll with the punches, to band together and face the odds and rise up against the challenges are some of the qualities that I have seen in Americans across the country. I saw it as a young reporter when interviewing families who had lost a loved one on 9/11. I saw it in communities across Alabama – where I now live – when 64 tornadoes rampaged the state on April 27, 2011, killed 254 and destroyed more than 23,000 homes. I know we all saw it during the first wave of the pandemic, as little was known and we huddled in our homes, watching brave doctors, nurses and first responders answer the call of duty.

That American spirit is alive still, and as we face uncertain economic conditions, that toughness will see us through.

In this issue, we highlight what it means to be Made-in-the-USA and why so many companies in the RV industry are proud to place that statement on the products they make (pg. 34). We hear from the RV Industry Association's government affairs team on what they're advocating for in Washington, D.C., on behalf of its members (pg. 42). And we hear from a father-and-son duo – Rodney and Nick Johnston – who, like many others in this industry, say their American dream is to make a living for their families while providing jobs for others to provide for their families as well (pg. 26).

As we head into the third quarter of 2023, we know a lot of uncertainty lies ahead. Units aren't moving off the lots as quickly as in recent years, causing dealerships to pull back their inventory and production to slow down for OEMs. This industry is resilient, though, and still in high demand. And since 87% of the units available in the U.S. and Canada are produced right here on American soil, we will tap into that adaptability and tenacity and continue forward, strong as ever. We at RV PRO applaud the industry's strength, and we thank you for making all of us "proud to be an American."

As always, thanks for reading!

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REV Group Names CEO

REV Group, a manufacturer of RVs and other specialty vehicles, has appointed Mark Skonieczny as president and CEO. Skonieczny previously served as interim CEO and chief financial officer. He joined the company's board in January 2023 and will continue to serve as a director. The company said it will begin a search for a new CFO.

Prior to joining REV Group, Skonieczny held positions as vice president and corporate controller of Adient PLC and spent 17 years at Johnson Controls in a variety of financial roles.

"We are pleased that Mark will continue to lead the company," said Paul Bamatter, chairman of REV Group's board of directors. "He has demonstrated the expertise and urgency towards action needed to profitably grow the business and provide its shareholders with long-term value. The board has great confidence in Mark and believes that under his continued leadership REV Group will accelerate its transformation."

Skonieczny added, "I look forward to serving as president and CEO at this pivotal time for REV Group. Over the past three months as interim CEO I have been deeply engaged with our local teams to understand and put in place action plans designed to eliminate barriers to quickly unlock value. With an unmatched portfolio of iconic brands, resilient operating model, and strong balance sheet, we have significant opportunity to take our business forward. I look forward to continuing my work with leadership and leveraging my knowledge of the company to drive our strategic priorities."

Genesis Updates Leadership Structure

Genesis Products announced a new leadership strategy coming on the heels of its latest major acquisition. The company said now that the ink is dry on the recent acquisition of Funder America, it is investing again – in a new leadership structure designed to organize its divisions around customer needs and lean into the talent of its executives and managers.

"In this moment of growth, at our current scale, it is time to give more result ownership to our broader management team," said Jon Wenger, president and CEO.

Genesis Products also announced the celebration of the grand opening of its new Plant 10 in Goshen, Indiana, on May 16. The plant will specialize in solid surface countertops, offering expanded capacity to serve their OEMs. The company operates a total of 14 plants in several states, including Elkhart County, where it employs more than 1,200 people.

The company said the management changes create an opportunity for it to align product and operations teams to the industries they serve. Formerly structured in four divisions based on operating facilities, the company will now shift its organization to two industry-focused business groups: RV and vehicles, and industrial wood products.

It's good timing for the restructuring, the company said, as Matt Hazelbaker, vice president of panels and mouldings, announced his plan to retire last year. Hazelbaker has been a partner at Genesis since 2013 and was integral in the success of the company's lamination business. He worked closely with leadership on a transition plan that will culminate at the end of June. In addition, the company recently chose to go in a different direction and separated with Trent Evans, former vice president of interior components.

All RV and vehicles product and operations teams will be centralized under the leadership of Dave Stace, business group vice president, who will step into the role after having led the Welformed Division at Genesis for the past year. Stace has deep roots in the secondary automotive and RV industries, serving in various product and plant management roles at Dura Automotive Systems and Coachmen. Most recently, he was the general manager at Shyft Group, strategically leading his division through a major period of growth with continuous improvement across sales, procurement, quality and engineering, according to his new company. His 28 years of executive leadership unites a team of experienced product business leaders on the RV side who will continue to serve OEMs with passion and expertise: Nic Bontrager, cabinet doors and components; Cody Harman, panels, mouldings and tape; Phyllis Beyers, laminates and design; Kam Betzer, countertops. Paired with the seasoned leadership of Heather Jenks, vice president of sales, Genesis is excited to nurture and grow its RV business under this new optimized structure.

David Moser takes on the industrial wood business group's vice president role, after leading industrial sales and business growth efforts at Genesis for more than three years. All product, operations and sales activities, in addition to four recently acquired plants in the Southeast, fall under his leadership.

THOR Remarks on Passing of Aram Koltookian, KZ RV CEO

THOR Industries announced the death of KZ RV's CEO Aram Koltookian, who passed away unexpectedly May 3. The following is the parent company's entire statement, released May 4:

"It is with heavy hearts and great sadness that THOR Industries announces the passing of KZ Recreational Vehicles president and CEO, Aram Koltookian. Aram was passionately dedicated to his family. He leaves behind his wife and two sons. The loss felt by his passing cannot be put into words.

"A long-time dedicated leader in the RV industry, Aram started on a dealership lot owned by his father, became a general manager at Keystone, executive vice president of Dutchmen, and ultimately the president and CEO of KZ. His tremendous work ethic and ability to consider unique solutions to challenges was key in helping propel the business. Aram had a passion for providing families with the opportunity to create lifelong memories. His long-term commitment to KZ, THOR, KZ's dealer partners and owners was integral to both his personal success and the success of KZ, and truly made him one of kind."

"Aram has been a trusted friend and colleague for nearly 30 years. We started in the industry together as sales reps at Coachmen RV Company and transitioned to Keystone where we shared a sales territory,'" said Bob Martin, THOR president and CEO. "Aram played a notable role in the success of our company, and, more significantly, has always been an important friend to my family. That will be a statement of which I'll be immensely proud for the rest of my life. Aram will be deeply missed by many."

THOR said Matt Zimmerman, THOR's North American RV group manager, will assume the role of interim president and CEO for KZ. The KZ team is grateful for the partnerships and support of their dealers and suppliers and looks forward to continuing the path

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to success shaped by Aram, together, the company said.

Dragonfly Energy, Ioneer Sign Lithium Supply Agreement

Reno, Nevada-based Dragonfly Energy has announced an agreement with Ioneer Ltd., an energy storage company, that the two say will strengthen U.S. battery supply chains and invest in the production and manufacturing of Nevada-sourced lithium. The agreement between the two Nevada-based companies is expected to pave the way for continued investment in the state and provide Dragonfly with a domestic supply of lithium carbonate, a critical component in lithium iron phosphate battery cells.

According to Dragonfly, the agreement builds on an effort to produce, utilize and recycle lithium, closing the lithium loop in Nevada that Gov. Joe Lombardo has prioritized for his administration, detailed in both his recent State of the State address and his Five-Year Strategic Plan.

"Deploying our innovative dry powder coating cell manufacturing process is exciting. But ultimately, cell production is only made possible by access to lithium," said Denis Phares, CEO of Dragonfly Energy. "This agreement gives us the opportunity to bring our entire manufacturing process not only to the U.S. but to Nevada, from mining to manufacturing to recycling."

"As the world's demand for lithium in electric vehicle and energy storage increases, the need to secure a reliable and domestic source of lithium is critical. Ioneer is pleased to partner with Dragonfly and deliver these critical materials from Rhyolite Ridge," said Bernard Rowe, managing director and CEO at Ioneer.

The agreement demonstrates Ioneer's tremendous value to the American supply chain. Rhyolite Ridge is one of the most sophisticated undeveloped U.S. lithium projects, and one of few in the world where lithium will be extracted and refined locally. Once federal permitting and construction is complete, Rhyolite Ridge is expected to quadruple current U.S. lithium output. The agreement also moves Dragonfly Energy closer to achieving the company's mission of establishing a vertically integrated lithium battery cycle, from mining to cell and pack production to recycling.

LCI Industries Issues Annual Corporate Sustainability Report

LCI Industries, parent company of Lippert, has issued its second annual corporate sustainability report.

"In 2022, we made great strides towards bettering the communities we serve. Our commitment to reporting on these critical ESG (environmental, social and governance) initiatives has enabled us to meaningfully measure and monitor the progress we are making to improve the lives of our customers and team members," said Jason Lippert, president and CEO of Lippert. "As an enabler to the outdoor lifestyle for recreation enthusiasts, it is not only good citizenship for us to focus on the actions that will enhance our world for future generations, but it's also good business. Advancing our culture, while at the same time coming together as a team to make a cleaner, safer and happier world, remains a key priority for our leadership team. We look forward to continuing to share this journey with our stakeholders."

Lippert's second CSR Report presents the company's continuing initiatives to elevate its team members, as well as monitoring and mitigating the environmental impact of its operations. Some highlights:

- Lippert expanded its greenhouse gas (GHG) data collection footprint from five sites in 2022 to all global sites in 2023.
- Lippert collected, and is disclosing, the entirety of its GHG Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions.
- Lippert conducted its first materiality assessment to identify and address the sustainability priorities of the company's key stakeholders.
- Seventy-five percent of its team members participated in Lippert Cares volunteer events as part of the company's 100,000 hours initiative and surpassed that goal by 50,000 hours.

Winnebago Extends National Park Foundation Partnership

Winnebago Industries announced it will extend its partnership with the National Park Foundation (NPF) through 2025.

The company said the partnership will support NPF's efforts to ensure everyone can enjoy and create lifelong connections with the country's national parks.

For the next three years, the partnership, which began in 2019, will focus on expanding outdoor exploration programs such as Park Ventures and Junior Ranger Angler in parks across the country. This work teaches valuable lifelong skills to visitors, collaborating with partner organizations to make the outdoors a more inviting space for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) communities and empowering the next generation of park stewards.

"We believe in investing in programs that eliminate barriers, promote access, and cultivate connections to the social, mental and physical health benefits of the outdoors," said Kunal Mehta, head of strategy, business development and marketing for Winnebago Industries' Winnebago brand. "We're thrilled to continue our support of the National Park Foundation and their critical work to make the outdoors a place where all are welcome."

Winnebago Industries has supported critical preservation and restoration projects in parks across the country through the Park Foundation's Service Corps programs.

"We share a dedication with the National Park Foundation to advance outdoor equity and inspire new generations of outdoor enthusiasts. It's part of our commitment to be all in, outdoors," said Jil Littlejohn Bostick, executive director for the Winnebago Industries Foundation. "By extending our partnership with NPF, we can build on the foundation of great work already underway, while deepening and extending our impact for future generations."

The brand has also worked with the National Park Foundation to create co-branded, limited-edition Vista, Sunstar and Solis RV models, encouraging outdoor enthusiasts to visit #ParksLessTraveled. Learn more about National Park Foundation special edition motorhomes on the company's website. RVP

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Alliance introduces new travel trailers and super-light fifth wheels, keeping with a tradition of providing quality RVs backed by excellent customer service.

BY RONNIE WENDT

> **“These units are for the weekend RVer… the RVers who go out on the weekends and have a different lifestyle than full-time RVers.”**

Alliance RV is known for two things: luxury and customer service. It’s also renowned for its Valor toy haulers and fifth wheel known as the Paradigm.

The Elkhart, Indiana, company, which proudly proclaims “Do the Right Thing” as its mission, recently introduced price-point pieces across its lineup to keep this tradition going. The new lineup includes travel trailers and super-lightweight fifth wheels that are 3,000 to 6,000 pounds less than Alliance RV’s other offerings and are 26 feet to 39 feet, 8 inches long.

“These units are for the weekend RVer,” says Jeremiah Dumka, a general manager of the company, which completed a state-of-the-art production facility in 2019. “This RVer might not need all the bells and whistles. They are for Rvers who go out on the weekends and have a different lifestyle than full-time Rvers.”

The new units offer unique floorplans and great features, as well as the core construction customers expect on Paradigm or Valor products. “They are just lighter weight and shorter to make them a little more tow friendly,” Dumka says.

To make units smaller, engineers had to get “very creative with bed, bath and decks,” he says. “With the fifth wheels, this enabled us to come out with larger garage







sizes. For example, our 36A15 floorplan is under 40 feet with a 15-foot garage, East-West bed, nice-sized bathroom, beautiful kitchen/living/dining room. We took that same fifth-wheel floorplan and incorporated it into a travel trailer, creating the industry's first toy hauler travel trailer with a 13-foot garage, island kitchen and triple slide."

In fact, new units come standard with robust running gear, weather-resistant ramp doors, lightweight composite garage flooring (which saves a ton of weight), 30-gallon fueling stations and 320-watt solar panels with a 20-amp charge controller. Every coach is Wi-Fi prepped with stereo systems and televisions.

On the outside, customers can expect the same styling as before.

"The units offer everything RVers want and expect with Alliance products. We are just trying to hit a different price point and be more lightweight for greater state park accessibility," he says.

The new units also are still warrantied for full-time use. However, their price points are $20,000 to $25,000 lower than the brand's other units.

"Weekend RVers will not spend $120,000 for a unit they use six to seven times a year," Dumka says.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALLIANCE



The new Delta travel trailers will start shipping in July and first floorplan offering will be a bunkhouse and a rear bath floorplan with all the features customers expect, from shut-off valves to robust running gear and Azdel-backed sidewalls.

SERVICE FOCUSED

The key selling point with any Alliance product is customer service, Dumka says.

Dumka entered the RV industry out of college in 2003. He's been involved with all facets of the industry, from production to sales. When he came to the company in January 2020, the company's focus on customer service stood out.

"That's what drew me to Alliance RV – the customer focus and the fact the company is employee-owned," he says. "I felt we could really move the needle by being heavily focused on customer service, where we took care of customers at the dealer level all the way through to RVers."



He explains when he came on, the company only had four models. At its first show, the Tampa RV SuperShow, the company sold 16 units. Though successful, Dumka admits introducing units during the pandemic came with challenges.

"We had to get really creative because of the supply chain challenges of the time," he says. "We developed a toy hauler line around the supply chain issues and executed at the highest level.

"The Valor has been tracking as the No. 2 best-selling, fifth wheel toy hauler. We've done a great job of getting the brand out on social media and with dealers who feel confident in our brand. And we've got great service, which I think is the pinnacle of what makes a product successful in today's climate."

Besides designing products that meet customers' needs, Alliance serves them well by scaling its service and sales departments as production rates grow.

"The more products we sell, the more people we add to our service department," he says. "Service calls are the phone calls no one wants to answer. But when our customers have problems, we don't put those calls off. We answer the phone and try to get their problems taken care of.

“Besides designing products that meet customers' needs, Alliance serves them well by scaling its service and sales departments as production rates grow.”

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We are very nimble in our approach. If a customer calls with a problem on a Sunday, there's no red tape. We just work to get things done and get them up and running down the road."

WHY TOY HAULERS?

Dumka has developed a specialty and an affinity for toy haulers. And he says he has seen toy haulers' popularity soar in his 20-plus years in the business. He attributes toy haulers' exponential growth in recent years to their increased functionality.

"Ten years ago, I'd be at a show and ask someone if they'd seen the new toy hauler and they'd say, 'We're not toy hauler kinds of people,'" he says. "They had a reputation for being used by those who had motorcycles or side-by-sides that they hauled along. They were geared toward that and looked like a garage inside."

Now toy haulers are geared for everyone, and the industry has worked hard to increase their appeal and grow their acceptance.

"These units are for all buyers, not just the guy with a toy," he says. "You can use the garage as an office, a mudroom, a second bedroom or a bunkhouse. You can have the grandkids over or haul your golf cart from campground to campground. You can take your canoes or kayaks along or use it as a back patio to take in the view."

INDUSTRY PIONEERS

Alliance makes a name for itself by being industry pioneers. It was the first RV company to offer solar and pioneered the move toward 12-volt power, the company says. It was the first to make lithium-ion batteries standard and to add 12-volt refrigerators and 12-volt recliners.

"We offer the most functional RV without starting a generator or hooking up shore power, which is why our core clientele goes off-grid more than other buyers out there," he says. "Around 60% of our Valor buyers do things like park in the desert or on the side of the road and camp. Our Paradigm buyers are more plug and play."

Alliance also offers functionality in its units, according to Dumka. Its standout offerings include:

- ***Airline Tracks.*** Adding airline tracks in the back increases adjustability. Most manufacturers offer nine to 16 points of contact in the back. "We have an airline track with total adjustability," he says. "Whether you're strapping down a motorcycle, a ladder or a box, there is so much adjustability in the back of the garage."
- ***Air Compressors Onboard.*** With its own air compressor, this lets Rvers fill bike, motorcycle and golf car tires as well as their inflatables. "I know from first-hand experience that the first thing you will need is an air compressor," he says. "I cannot tell you how many times I've arrived and there's a flat tire on one of our bikes and we had to search for an air compressor. Now it's right there to fill your tires and your inflatables."
- ***Big on Storage.*** "There is storage galore," Dumka says. "We offer interior and exterior storage, with storage underneath the gooseneck and in massive passer bays. There are also easy access panels to all the water fittings and stuff you may need to access. Quality isn't just in your face. There is also attention to detail behind every panel."
- ***No App for That.*** Don't go looking for an app to control everything. There isn't one. "We've had tremendous success without offering apps with our units," he says. "It's gotten insane in the industry with apps to turn on lights, recline furniture or turn on the RV. It gets over complicated for the buyer. Our buyers are trying to disconnect when they go out."

Standing out in a crowed RV market, where customers have many choices, is a must in today's business world. Alliance RV sets itself apart by providing quality products that overflow with functionality and unparalleled customer service.

"We want to provide the best possible RV ownership experience we can," Dumka concludes. RVP

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39002	Rhino Tote Tank, 21 gal
39004	Rhino Tote Tank, 28 gal
39006	Rhino Tote Tank, 36 gal

Part #	Description
39005	Rhino Tote Tank w/ Front Wheels, 28 gal
39007	Rhino Tote Tank w/ Front Wheels, 36 gal

RhinoEXTREME RV Sewer Hose Kits

RHINO® EXTREME



Part #	Description
39861	RhinoEXTREME 15' Sewer Hose Kit w/ 4n1, Elbow, Caps
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TST Max Citrus Scent

Part #	Description
41191	Singles, 8 pack
41192	Liquid, 32 oz
41195	Liquid, 64 oz
41197	Liquid, 1 gal
41178	Drop-INs, 10/bag
41183	Drop-INs, 30/bucket
41189	Drop-INs, 15/bag



TST Max Lavender Scent

Part #	Description
41551	Singles, 8 pack
41552	Liquid, 32 oz
41553	Drop-INs, Lavender, 30/bucket
41555	Liquid, 64 oz
41556	Drop-INs, 10/bag
41557	Liquid, 1 gal
41559	Drop-INs, 15/bag



Curved Leveler & Wheel Chock



Part #	Description
44423	Curved Leveler & Wheel Chock
44425	Curved Leveler & Wheel Chock 2 pack

EvoFlex Drinking Water Hoses

EvoFlex



Part #	Description
22590	4', 5/8" ID
22592	10', 5/8" ID
22594	25', 5/8" ID
22595	35', 5/8" ID
22596	50', 5/8" ID
22597	75', 5/8" ID

Water Hose and Electrical Cord Basket



Part #	Description
20166	Water Hose and ELectrical Cord Basket

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Toy Hauler Playtime

With an eye on the hottest toys, and responding to its customers' needs, Eclipse RV knows how to succeed in the toy hauler game.

BY JOHN MCCURRY






ATTITUDE



Staying on top of function, durability and design trends has served toy hauler specialist Eclipse RV well since its founding in 2003. Eclipse, based in Riverside, California, produces 500 to 1,000 RVs per year, about 90% of them toy haulers.

"We are working to stay ahead of the market," says Joanne Trealoff, company president, who co-founded the company with her late husband, Dallen, who passed away in 2021.

Trealoff notes the RV industry is realigning itself as the COVID-19 era fades away and dealers work to clear excess inventory.

"Through this period in time, we are focusing on making sure our toy haulers are meeting consumer needs, with function and style," she says.

One of those efforts is keeping track of the ever-changing toys consumers want to haul. Trealoff notes they are getting bigger, necessitating design changes in toy haulers. The sales team at Eclipse RV has first-hand experience and a track record of using toy haulers, while also owning and using off-road toys.

Eclipse RV builds three lines of toy haulers: Attitude is the flagship line and the first brand launched by the company. Next came Stellar and then Iconic was added.

Brent Macias, sales regional toy hauler specialist, says each brand has its own styling, interiors and amenities.

The toy haulers target off-the-grid adventure seekers as well as traditional campers.

"There is a lot of open terrain in the West, to allow people to enjoy the wilderness," Macias says.

While noting the RV industry in general continues to move beyond the pandemic-propelled sales spike, Macias is optimistic better days lie ahead.

"The market has been showing promise, as the dealers have been trying to move the inventory they bought during the pandemic, so in the 2023 market they are moving past that," Macias says. "We are seeing the actual retail coming through, seeing movement and getting new inventory out. The recent inventory we sent out retailed really quick, some in less than a month."

Eclipse's dealer network covers primarily the western United States.

"Our toy haulers are geared more to that western style of riding," Macias says. "Most of our customers adventure to the sand dunes, deserts, mountain ranges and off-roading. We cater to that side-by-side market."

Toy preferences have changed over the

> **"Through this period in time, we are focusing on making sure our toy haulers are meeting consumer needs with function and style."**

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years. In the past, dirt bikes and quads dominated.

"Nowadays, it's a side-by-side market. Polaris RZR, Can Am, Honda Talon, all the off-road vehicles that operate off the grid. This is what has driven the toy industry. If you don't fit those certain vehicles, you are behind the times," he says.

The age range of Eclipse toy hauler owners varies widely. Years ago, Macias recalls, it was a younger crowd, but now users are more mature and have a greater appreciation of how they work.

"You can go out and just use it as a regular trailer, or you can take your toys with you," he says. "The amenities and the holding tank capacities are crucial features that allow the customer to virtually dry camp anyplace they choose, that's been the biggest change in the demographics. We are not getting just one age group; we have the whole gamut."

Recently, Eclipse RV reintroduced its travel trailer line Milan and also brought a new line to market – the overlander Mojo, and Moxie for the off-road enthusiast.

Performing well this year are Eclipse's smaller fifth wheels, which Macias says have been gaining market share.

"They have been doing really well for us. I think that is because of our slideouts, and the way we operate them to be able to accommodate the wider vehicles. We have floors that are integrated to fold up and add more room to the slideout. That is something we have been doing for a while, and other manufacturers are just now catching on to that, and trying to catch up."

Macias says Eclipse has some "cool things" in the works in terms of product development. Prior to the pandemic, Eclipse usually debuted its innovations at the Southern California RV Industry Show in Pomona. That event returns this year in October, after missing the past three years due to COVID-19's effects.

"That is a good time to debut new things," Macias says, "because off-roading season starts at the beginning of winter. Although we are seeing year-round usage."

Eclipse pays close attention to customer feedback. An example is the development of a custom-made outside light.

"We went as far as having our own exclusive light made that no one else can grab," Macias says. "It provides more outside light than any other floodlight available on the market. If you've never gone camping in the middle of the desert, there is obviously no source of light from anywhere else, because you are the only one out there. You want/need to have light to be able to see around your campsite, and even work on something if you need to.

"The toy hauler industry may have slowed for a while, but it is showing signs of kicking back through again," Macias says. "The customers are not going away, and the market is not. Some of the brands may have gotten a little too big, too fancy. I think that market is going to turn to us."

Trealoff anticipates sales will improve by the second half of the year. As Eclipse contemplates a successful first two decades, she says it is well prepared to meet the cyclical nature of the business.

"It is always important to never think you have it all," she says. "We look at where the needs are, and where we want to move. It's important to look beyond what you are currently doing."

Macias credits Eclipse's highly seasoned staff. Many of them are toy hauler owners and know what it takes to build a top-quality trailer.

"We all started in the late '90s and early 2000s. We've been around trailers a long time. We are people who use trailers and go camping with our families," he says. "Customers understand the value we put in our trailers. We can show them places where other brands are skimping on the quality of the small parts, things that make the trailer last longer." RVP

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Johnston RV Center's *Slice of American Pie*

Conducting business honestly and offering outstanding service are two ways this dealership succeeds in the Yellowhammer State.

BY JENNIFER KING

For one father-and-son dealer team, the American dream is pretty simple: run a successful business that allows them to make a living.

A bonus? Employing good people, allowing them to make a living for their families, too.

Rodney Johnston and his son Nick Johnston of Johnston RV Center in Decatur and Cullman, Alabama, both say that's what it all comes down to.

"I love the industry," says Rodney, owner of the dealership. "There's opportunity for people like me and Nick to come in and do an honest, good dealership and take care of things, work hard at it. I'm an old-school 'American dream' capitalist, I guess, but it really is true.

"The products that we sell are manufactured and put together in Elkhart or Topeka or Shipshewana – they're coming from the heartland of America. And we employ 50 people, so that's 50 families that make their living through what we envision. I'm just really proud of that."

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

In his early 20s, Rodney started out working in manufactured homes in Winston County, Alabama, which he likened to Elkhart, Indiana, in terms of an area being known for producing a particular product.

"I worked for a retail company and then I ended up owning that business after a period of time," Rodney says. "I bought the business when Nick was still in school and young. And then we sold that business to...a big manufactured home company. They actually had a factory here in north Alabama, because there was a workforce here, kind of like Elkhart."

Rodney says he then did a few other things, but eventually started looking at the RV industry and his interest piqued after RVing with his family when his kids were young.

At the end of 2013, an existing dealership went up for sale after the owner principal experienced health issues. In February 2014, Hood RV Center in Decatur, Alabama, became Johnston RV Center, and Rodney and Nick – who is the general manager – have worked together ever since, opening a second location in Cullman in 2016. They also employ Rodney's daughter and Nick's sister, Kelsi Nuss, as web director and her husband, Cody Nuss, as operations



Kelsi Nuss, web director of Johnston RV Center



Rodney Johnston (left) and his son, Nick, are the owner and general manager of Johnston RV Center.

EMPLOYEES WHO ARE FAMILY & *FAMILY WHO ARE EMPLOYEES*

The Johnstons take pride in having employees who feel like family – and family members who have become excellent employees.

"My sister Kelsi is an integral part of the business on one side, and her husband, Cody, is an unbelievably integral part on another when it comes to operations," Nick says.

Most dealers have trouble finding quality trained technicians, Rodney says. At Johnston RV Centers, Cody introduced a key performance indicator (KPI) program that employees are graded on and provide incentives for doing well.

"He has a weekly main meeting where we grade where we were, where we're going," Rodney says.

There are a lot of young people who need training, he says, but the workforce is out there. "Once you can get a good process in place, you can find out people's talents," Rodney says.

Nick and Rodney both speak very highly of their employees. "I feel like right now we have the best staff that we've ever had – they do an incredible job for us," Nick says. "I'm very proud to have each and every one of them."

"We've been very fortunate that they've come our way," Rodney continues. "We've had turnover like everybody else, but our core group of people have stuck with us through thick and thin."

manager. Nick and Kelsi's cousin, William Cockrell, is the desk manager.

"We had a goal of having a very good customer center," Rodney says. "Our goal was to have the customer-facing part to be really warm and friendly and a family deal."

Johnston RV Center worked with Forest River from the get-go but went exclusive with Forest River in 2015.

"Having a relationship like we do with Forest River, if we have an issue, if something comes up...they'll help us," Nick says. "I have a 100% confidence in what Forest River does. I love having that relationship as opposed to being the candy store that handles absolutely everything. I want our salespeople to be proud of that. That's something I want our service folks to be proud of."

FINDING THEIR FOOTING, AND THEN SOME

Despite starting out with only eight or so units on the lot when they purchased the business, the Johnstons managed to grow the company from roughly 10 employees to 50, and went from selling a couple hundred units a year to more than 800 a year by 2018 and 2019.

Rodney and Nick agree that those were stellar years for their business and then the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020 and accelerated sales even more due to the record number of people turning to RVs as the safest possible way to travel in such an uncertain time, leading Johnston RV Center to deliver more than 1,000 campers in the years 2020 and 2021 to people not only in the Southeast, but across the U.S.

According to Statistical Surveys, Johnston RV Center was the No. 1 travel trailer dealer in Alabama in 2021.

Things are still looking good so far this year, Rodney says, using the term "bullish" to describe 2023. But with lessened demand for RVs post-pandemic, the reasons behind the success are a little different.

Service has always been a big focus for Johnston RV Center, and post-pandemic it became even more important. Also, dropping inventory to pre-pandemic levels was crucial to the business's health, Rodney says.



(left to right) Judy Thomason, office manager; Alisha Hilley, receptionist; Kelsi Nuss, web director; Kimberly Hicks, controller



Cody Nuss, operations manager



Kimberly Hicks, Johnston RV Center controller, was recognized as one of RV PRO's Women in Business 2023.

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A LIFETIME WARRANTY – JOHNSTON RV CENTER'S DIFFERENTIATOR

One thing Johnston RV Centers is known for doing differently is offering a lifetime warranty on their units through Assurant.

"We pay a premium on each camper on behalf of the customer to have this warranty, and to keep that warranty in place, customers have to bring it back to the shop each year for an annual inspection. It doesn't have to be ours, which is useful for customers who purchased from Johnston for states away. He explains that while some dealers offer extended warranties, the coverage is not typically as good as the Johnstons' lifetime offering.

"We believe in it," Rodney says. "It's something that separates us from the crowd."

Word of mouth among other campers has benefited the Johnstons, Rodney says.

"Our percentage is pretty high that our customers come back to us. We have sold some five and six campers to the same family. But [it's] something where they sat around the campfire, roasting marshmallows, generally talking about dealers, like, 'Where did you buy yours? Mine's got a lifetime warranty.'"



Mike Miller has been with Johnston RV Center since the business was founded in 2014.

Affordable campers have always been the bread and butter at Johnston RV Center, he says, with Cherokee being a big seller for them.

"That's our niche. We're very active with toy haulers and we were the No. 1 toy hauler dealer in Alabama for several years," he says.

"We do a lot of promotional stuff. We're active in our communities and that was something that came natural to us," Rodney says. "We have a big concert here in town that's called Rock the South. This year, Chris Stapleton's going to be at, [and] we're one of the title sponsors."

The Johnston family is passionate about the outdoor lifestyle – with their location near Guntersville State Park and the Tennessee River in north Alabama, there are a lot of outdoor enthusiasts in the community.

"We're kind of small-town guys and a small-town mentality. Everybody knows everybody," Rodney says. "It was extremely important for our reputation to be as impeccable as much as possible. We worked on process a lot and, all of a sudden, we started following the stats, and we were climbing.

"We're just like everybody else, we watch trends and all," he says. "Our staffing [has] dropped a little. Our inventory level we've dropped accordingly.

You know, [we're] small potatoes compared to the big companies that are consolidating and have 50 lots or a hundred lots or whatever. But we just focus on our two lots to try to do the very best we can, and it's been very successful for us." RVP



(left to right) Rodney and Nick Johnston and Cody Nuss

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THE CRAFTSMANSHIP BEHIND AN RV'S WINDOWS

Cleer Vision celebrates its 20th anniversary and gives an inside look at creating tempered glass.

BY RV PRO STAFF

Glassmaking originated about 4,000 years ago in the cradle of civilization, created by the Mesopotamians. A mix of sand, silica, soda ash and lime, the recipe for glass has not changed much over the years.

Four thousand years later, Cleer Vision, a supplier of RV windows, takes the product of that original recipe and turns it into tempered glass to be used for RVs. The company celebrated its 20th anniversary in April.

"We saw strong demand for a quality window supplier in the travel trailer market and that has remained our niche over the last 15 years," says Rick Collins, president of Cleer Vision.

Cleer Vision, a subsidiary of Airxcel, based in Elkhart, Indiana, takes manufactured glass and cuts and fabricates it for RV windows. They added their tempered glass production facility in 2010, becoming what one might say is the cradle for RV industry tempered glass.

"We felt if we wanted to be a serious contender in the RV market, it was critical we control the lead times, quality and cost of our glass," Collins says.

The glass tempering process is a unique one. Large, nontempered sheets of glass are brought in and processed through one of several automated cutting machines that load the glass using robotics. The sheets are optimized, cut to the specific customer dimensions and



Photos courtesy of Chris Cieto, Airxcel



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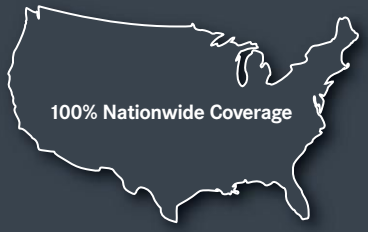


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(left to right) Rick Collins, Cleer Vision president, and Jimmy Harlow, general manager

then broken apart by a trained worker. The operator moves the giant piece of glass to the scored areas by use of a table that has air blown through from underneath, much like an industrial air hockey table.

The specifications for cutting are input via a computer. The goal is to yield a 90%-plus usage of the glass while the rest is recycled.

The color of the glass sheets depends on their thickness. This is why some glass may appear to have a green tint while other sheets may appear gray. The size of a single glass sheet can be up to 130 inches by 96 inches. Individual sheets are stacked together and separated by a small layer of powdered coating to keep each sheet from scratching against the next one.

The individual pieces are then washed and dried before entering the 1,200 F tempering oven. This is how the glass gets tempered and how "quenching temper" occurs. The glass is then cooled using air applied by large blower motors.

Less than 10% of all RV windows are frameless. For frameless windows, all windows must go through a process known as edging, which will remove all burrs and sharp edges from the sides so that it can be touched and handled without someone accidentally cutting themselves.

Also, a silk screen is applied to frameless windows, which appear as the small dots around the edges of the glass.

As noted, most RV windows are framed and at Cleer Vision, that framing process happens at the company's facility located on County Road 6 in Elkhart. Here, window-making transitions from robotics and machinery to a more labor-intensive activity and that is where the Cleer Vision labor force gets to work.

The bending of long pieces of aluminum into frames that surround the tempered glass is the first step on the assembly line. From there, different workers will add in the glass panels, screens, seals and hardware with each process occurring at a different workstation.

Some windows have two panes and the meticulous effort that goes into each individual window must be adhered to keep out moisture and provide a superior product that RVers can enjoy. Considering that more windows are being added to RVs to help with light, airflow and aesthetics, it's easy to understand why Cleer Vision's workforce is keeping busy during the cycles of the RV market.

According to General Manager Jimmy Harlow, "When we hire employees, we're not looking for someone who just wants a job. We try to identify people with great attitudes that will not just fit within our culture but will enhance it. That simple hiring mentality has served us very well through the years."

This has helped Cleer Vision retain employees who have been with the company for many years.

"A significant number of our employees come from referrals. We strive to maintain a family environment and culture while fostering a small company, family-owned feel," Collins says. RVP

CLOSE TO HOME

American-made cars, refrigerators and television sets were just the tipping point for what became the bread-and-butter of the nation's economy in much of the 20th century. The fabric of American life shifted with industrialization, as workers left family farms for factories in the city. Hubs like Pittsburgh's steel mills and Detroit's auto market have evolved into new industries and more U.S. jobs. The RV industry has taken its place as an economic engine, producing nearly 87% of all its U.S. and Canadian product here at home, in Indiana.

RV PRO asked the industry's manufacturers to weigh in on **what it means to be "American made"** and how companies are navigating today's manufacturing landscape.

COMPILED BY JORDAN BENSCHOP

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FOREST RIVER AND TRINSEO



“100% of Forest River’s production takes place in the U.S., and the vast majority of that output is sold in the U.S. Forest River has a camping culture and we take tremendous pride in helping to solidify the reputation for quality that “made in the USA” has throughout the world.”

– Forest River

How many employees do you have total, and how many of those are manufacturing jobs? How long have you been providing jobs in the United States?

Trinseo – plastics and latex binders
Trinseo is proud to have more than 3,300 employees globally, with more than 2,200 of those being manufacturing jobs. More than half of our U.S. employee base are in manufacturing roles.

Forest River – OEM
Headquartered in Elkhart, Indiana, Forest River has been one of the industry's largest employers since its inception in 1996. With manufacturing facilities throughout Indiana, as well as in Michigan, Georgia, California, Oregon and Texas, we create thousands of manufacturing jobs and provide additional opportunity through our vendor partners.

Daimler Truck – heavy-duty trucks
We have more than 1,000 team members at this location. As a corporation, we have been operating since 1941. This particular location was opened in 1989.

PullRite – fifth wheel hitches
We employ approximately 70 people with about 60% of those in manufacturing, packaging and shipping. We have been building hitches for the RV market for 45 years solely in the state of Indiana.

Airstream – OEM
Airstream employs nearly 1,500 associates, about two-thirds of which are manufacturing jobs. Founded in 1931 in California, Airstream established an eastern distribution center in Jackson Center, Ohio, in the early 1950s. The California plant was shut down in 1980, and since then every Airstream has been manufactured in Ohio. We draw employment heavily from the surrounding county, and in 2020, opened a new travel trailer manufacturing facility that cemented our commitment to providing quality manufacturing jobs in west-central Ohio.

Why is your company proud to provide U.S. manufacturing jobs?

PullRite
We have a story to tell of our commitment to American-made products by American workers. Very few hitch manufacturers can truly claim that all their products are conceived and created on American soil.

In the 2008 financial crisis, when banks were closing local RV businesses around us, we were faced with some hard decisions. The easy way out of such a crisis was to let 80% of our employees go and send the manufacturing off to China. A meeting was held during this critical time with our employees, and we talked with them in an honest, one-on-one forum. The commitment to being 100% U.S.-made was agreed upon by all. We weathered the storm and will continue to do so despite current day economics.

We tell our story not to boast or get an "edge" over the competition, but to show that we have committed to keep our products made in the USA, never compromising on quality and service.

Airstream
Our standards for quality have always been self-imposed since the days of our founder Wally Byam. He didn't think it made sense to build products in any way but the absolute best way – and we still agree. Our travel trailers and touring coaches are built by hand by true craftspeople with attention to detail. We use only the best materials and the most innovative ways to create and assemble them. And we never cut corners – especially when we can round them. And it's all done right here in the United States at our Jackson Center, Ohio, headquarters.

Blue Ox
We pride ourselves on manufacturing everything we can in-house and domestically.

Trinseo
We take pride in knowing that providing manufacturing jobs in the U.S. fuels the health of the economy. Additionally, providing manufacturing jobs in the U.S. furthers Trinseo's vision to be the global leader in driving specialty and sustainable material solutions across all markets we impact. One way we achieve this vision is through our ability to attract, develop and retain outstanding talent in each of our strategic locations.

Daimler Truck
Our vision statement is "Embracing our customers, delivering memories, one ride at a time." Our team members connect with our customers during factory tours and visits. Those connections are why we get up every morning.

What impact has your company had on the larger community?

Giving back to the communities where we live and work is intrinsic to who we are as an organization. Trinseo employees volunteer to make a positive impact in the areas of environmental stewardship, STEM education and community involvement. In 2022, employees volunteered more than 4,900 hours of service in their local communities. – Trinseo

Daimler Truck
Our company plays a large part in local STEAM activities with elementary schools and works to preserve our local history. Investing back into our community is critical.

Airstream
Airstream is a corporate partner with the National Forest Foundation (NFF), and our "Caravan to Carbon Neutral" (C2CN) initiative provides funding to the NFF that helps them plant trees in our national forests. This effort not only sequesters the carbon footprint





Forest River's Palomino brand staff with a Top Performer award from the manufacturer.

generated by the manufacturing, transportation and first year of travel for every Airstream travel trailer and touring coach, but also helps the NFF's reforestation efforts while beautifying and preserving our public lands. Owners can re-up their commitment to the C2CN every year by purchasing Carbon Reduction Kits through our e-commerce site, Airstream Supply Company.

Forest River

Aside from being one of Elkhart County's largest employers, Forest River has a legacy of giving back to the community. We support a number of initiatives including Care Camps, Ronald McDonald House, Habitat for Humanity, Toys for Tots and more. We also support Manufacturing Days and Startup Moxie with local high schools.

Blue Ox

Our manufacturing facility is located in Pender, Nebraska – a town with a population of 1,000 or less, depending on who [is] headed into the city that day. We recently completed a massive plant expansion, and part of the diligence process before breaking ground was whether to expand in Pender or look at a larger cosmopolitan area for a larger labor pool. The deliberation process didn't take long, and we decided to keep all the jobs in our current community. The workforce we have in Pender and the surrounding area is the reason we continue to be the leader in quality, innovation and customer satisfaction.


Trinseo employees loading a skid at the end of the continuous cast production line at its facility in Florence, Kentucky.

What opportunities are there for employees to grow with your company?

A manager's role is to continually find paths to elevate and mentor our team members to the next level. This is a big part of our job. – Daimler Truck

Forest River

Forest River is focused on developing talent and providing opportunities for growth. Whether it's moving from an hourly manufacturing role to shift manager, or from sales rep to sales manager, the investment we make in training results in an experienced employee base with opportunities for advancement.

Blue Ox

As we continue to look at ways to automate our process, it provides employees the path to learning new skills and higher earning potential. All our operators of robots, CNC machines and our new E-Coat line have been promoted from within and educated on the job both on- and off-site.

Airstream

Airstream has long been known for promoting from within. Associates on the production floor are provided with curated and specific training opportunities for career advancement, including career pathways on job postings, career exploration sessions and



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tuition reimbursement programs, just to name a few. Associates are recognized for their dedication, ingenuity and hard work through promotion opportunities to highly specialized or leadership roles. A high percentage of our leadership team in operations, as well as those in our office roles, began their careers at Airstream on the production floor. This home-grown experience and expertise help inform our efforts on the digital front, product development, marketing and design.

PullRite

We believe that a successful U.S. company grows from within. Most of our management team started in lesser positions within the company.

Trinseo

At Trinseo, we take a people-first approach to our business and recognize that our future success lies in making investments in our employees. By delivering talent development and training opportunities, we can help them achieve long-term success, growth and recognition. Our stakeholders share this belief, which is why "Attract, Engage, Develop and Retain Talent" remains an important objective. Our development opportunities include mentoring, assignment to special projects, apprenticeships, leadership development conferences and even interactions with our executive leadership team and board of directors.

Where do you recruit employees for manufacturing roles?

We strive to be the premier employer in our area and the vast majority of our recruits come from word-of-mouth in the community. – Blue Ox

Forest River

While we utilize standard recruiting tools and sites, the vast majority of our recruiting comes from word-of-mouth. As new opportunities become available, our workforce communicates that to their personal networks, and we have a track record of success finding quality new talent.

PullRite

We recruit from the Michiana region of northern Indiana and southern Michigan.

What's the biggest challenge you face on the manufacturing side?

Recruiting for manufacturing jobs has been a real challenge for years and was negatively impacted by the COVID pandemic. – PullRite

Airstream

Like manufacturers around the world, the challenges brought about due to the pandemic have been a struggle to overcome. Supply chain snarls and staffing shortages have presented unprecedented challenges to keeping our production lines moving. Airstream products are labors of love – it's a complicated manufacturing process that requires extensive training in some departments. We regularly shift associates across departments, giving them opportunities to grow their knowledge and learn from more experienced associates. And we've taken many steps recently to shore up our quality assurance, employing digital tools, 21st century technology and in-house software development to better track issues, find solutions and build our iconic products with the highest quality possible. RVP

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The same hitch fits 6,000-16,000 lb GTW



KEEPING AN EYE ON THE NATION'S CAPITAL

The RVIA's government affairs team has its hands full working with legislators to keep RV industry priorities top of mind. Here's what's on the docket currently, and a word from Forest River and Dragonfly Energy on what they're paying attention to as well.

BY JENNIFER KING



If you want to get a clear picture of what's going on in our nation's capital that will affect the RV industry, have a chat with the government affairs team of the RV Industry Association (RVIA).

Between Chris Bornemann, senior director, government affairs; Jason Rano, vice president of government affairs; and Samantha Rocci, senior manager of government affairs, they have all the bases covered for the hundreds of manufacturers and component and aftermarket suppliers they represent in Washington, D.C.

RV PRO spoke with the three industry advocates in late May – just ahead of RVs Move America Week – and one message rang loud and clear: If you couldn't attend this year, put this event on your calendars for 2024.

"I think it's important for members to be engaged," Bornemann says. "We work for them, so they more that you show up to these events, the more that you're engaged with policymakers, with association staff, the more that they'll get out of the association work."

Rano adds that it's also an enlightening experience to see how the sausage is made, so to speak.

"I think it's often eye-opening for folks when they first come to Capitol Hill," he says. "I've heard, 'I've done lobby days in the past,' and you always hear, 'that staffer was really young, and we met in the hallway for 10 minutes.' And that's not necessarily a bad thing because those young staffers are what make the Hill work and make legislation happen. A hallway meeting can be just as effective as a sit-down meeting with a member of Congress."


RICHLOOM



While RVIA is certainly monitoring issues that impact the industry, Rano points out that members have a voice in that, too.

"It's vital that the communication be both ways so that we understand what's impacting them and we can come up with a plan and a strategy to help our members continue to be successful," Rano says.

As for the big issues the RVIA government affairs team is working on now, here are the Top 3 that all industry professionals need to be aware of.

49% OF GEN Z AND **48%** OF MILLENNIALS PLAN TO GO RVING IN THE NEXT YEAR

1. GENERALIZED SYSTEM OF PREFERENCES

Rocci's No. 1 priority right now is seeking a way to alleviate the burden on the industry since lauan – a flexible wood panel used in most RVs manufactured in the U.S. – lost its waiver under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). GSP "provides duty-free treatment to specific goods imported from approximately 120 developing countries that are not available domestically," the RVIA website says.

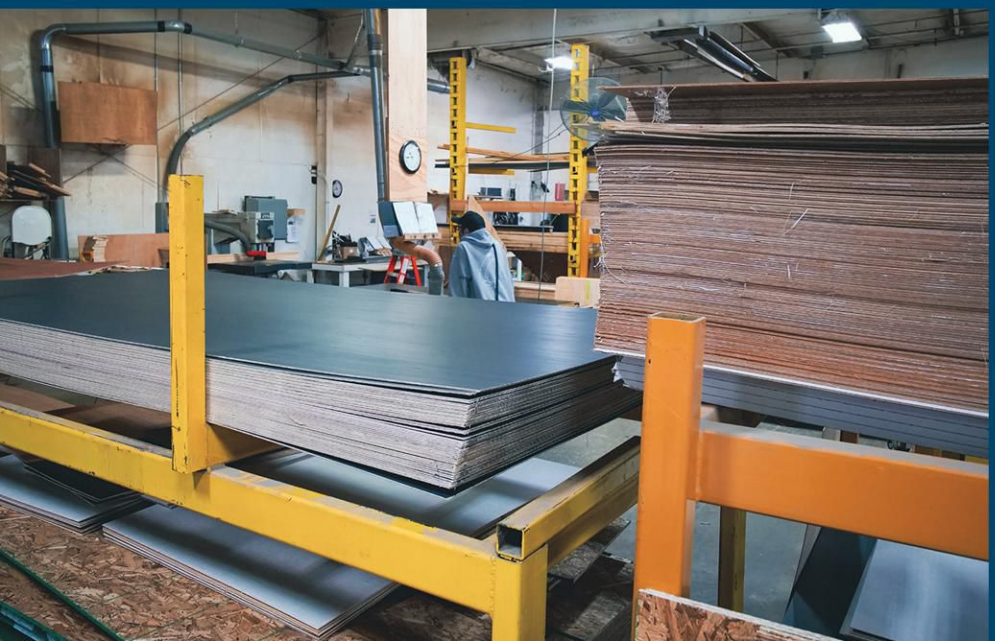
Rocci says while Congress reauthorized the GSP program in 2018, it allowed the program to expire in 2020.

"So, since that program has been expired, we've paid an 8% duty to bring in this product. And so we estimate that that runs [RV manufacturers] around $1.5 million each month that we don't have that program," Rocci says.

While the program has always received broad, bipartisan support in Congress, Rocci explains that it "tends to be the victim of other political fighting that's going on." Last year, a trade package was attached to the CHIPS and Science Act that would've renewed GSP for four years in the House and six years in the Senate, but all of the trade provisions were "torpedoed" before passing the final act, Rocci says.

"So, we're back with a new Congress going into our third year of no program and I've been having meetings since

1 IN 5 LEISURE travelers worked remotely in an RV in the past 2 years



What do you think the RV industry needs to do to be more attractive to the U.S. workforce?

Forest River: As one of the largest employers in Indiana, Forest River is continuously looking for ways to create a positive work environment for its workforce. This includes a focus on community, safety and training. As an industry, we must continue to highlight the opportunities related to RV tech and service where demand for skilled labor remains high.

92 MILLION
U.S. households identify as **CAMPERS**

2/3 OF ALL CAMPER HOUSEHOLDS IN 2022 WERE YOUNGER THAN 42

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What is the toughest challenge facing the RV industry in the U.S. today?

Dragonfly Energy: The upward trajectory of interest rates has added another layer of complexity to issues plaguing the RV market. Even though we have an excess of demand, higher interest rates make financing an RV more difficult. As a consequence, OEMS are facing greater challenges attracting and retaining customers. While the challenges posed by inflation, rising interest rates, and supply/demand imbalances are formidable, they also prevent an opportunity for the RV industry to redefine itself. By embracing adaptability, and with a forward-thinking mindset, the industry can overcome these obstacles.

the new Congress came in, and once again, everybody for the most part is supportive. Everybody knows why it matters. We just need to get the legislation out there and we need to get enough constituents telling these offices that it matters," she says.

CAMPGROUND MODERNIZATION AND EXPANSION



$52 BILLION
estimated spent by campers in local communities last year –

AN INCREASE OF
$8 BILLION
from the prior year

For every dollar Congress invests in national parks, $10 is returned to the U.S. economy, RVIA's website says. Thankfully, the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), which passed in 2020, is a step toward improving outdated federal campground infrastructure. According to RVIA, there is a $19 billion maintenance backlog for projects such as crumbling roads and bridges and while GAOA won't address all of this, $9.5 billion of nontaxpayer funds will be allocated "to address infrastructure needs within the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and other federal agencies. The new law will also fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and provide $900 million per year in investment in public lands, state parks, and trails…"

"I always say boats need water, RVs need campgrounds, and within our industry, we've been experiencing over 40 years of growth and we have a younger, more diverse demographic of consumer coming into the industry," Bornemann says. "We know that 72 million Americans are going to be taking an RV trip just this year, and we want to make sure that campground inventory keeps up with the demand and when people are visiting campgrounds that they're having positive experiences."

Part of the modernization efforts include improvements to existing infrastructure, Bornemann explains, and also future technologies. So, in addition to making sure roads and parking lots are paved, visitor centers are open and trails and other outdoor recreation assets are available, that also means Wi-Fi connectivity.

"It just moved out of Senate committee, so the next step on the Senate side would be a full Senate vote, which should happen hopefully within the next few months," Bornemann says.

On the House side, he says RVIA is working with their champions and the House Natural Resources Committee to build an outdoor recreation package that brings together individual bills that would help outdoor recreation, campground and RVing communities.

What is the toughest challenge facing the RV industry in the U.S. today?

Forest River: While the pandemic presented unique supply chain challenges, the health of the U.S. economy will always have the biggest influence on the RV industry. When the economy is thriving, more Americans have the ability to make their RV travel and camping dreams a reality. When the economy is slow, many of these same consumers will put off lifestyle purchases. As a leading manufacturer, we must effectively gauge this demand to right size our output and support our dealers.

56% CAMPERS
say it's important to introduce the next generation to camping and the outdoors

Statistic Sources: RVIA, KOA

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ACCESS TO EV CHARGING



The RVIA has a big initiative right now at the state level, Rano says, because $7.5 billion will be available from the federal government for fast-charging and Level 2 charging initiatives.

"We're very active in talking with states, talking with charging companies, talking with site hosts, talking with third parties to make sure that all of those folks are accounting for the current and future use case of RVs that we'll have to use that will be electrified," Rano says. "The current use case is EV passenger vehicles [and] trucks that are towing RVs, but certainly there are companies out there that are exploring and prototyping electrified motorized RVs and electric assist travel trailers that will require EV charging as well.

38% will continue to camp and take other types of vacations even if the economy worsens

"And so we've been very focused on that both along highway corridors and also thinking about rural communities where RVers will go and will be seeking out charging."

Thankfully, the states and site hosts are receptive to the message, Rano says.

"It's important to us to convey [that] the government's probably not coming back around anytime soon with billions of dollars for EV charging infrastructure," he says. "So this is really a once in a generation opportunity to get it right and to build for future use cases of motorized RVs or electric assist trailers."

What do you think the RV industry needs to do to be more attractive to the U.S. workforce?

Dragonfly Energy: While wages are competitive, working in the RV industry can be all gas or all brake – it's the nature of the industry. Working conditions can be improved by OEMs, starting with reevaluation of processes and a renaissance of automation amongst the fast-paced industry. By addressing these areas, OEMs can create a more balanced working environment and more stability, drawing in more consistent skilled labor.

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Are supply chain issues still affecting your business? How so?

Forest River: The pandemic presented a particularly difficult situation that required creative solutions. But supply chain management is a primary focus area for Forest River, and we feel we have a competitive advantage in this area regardless of economic conditions.

Are supply chain issues still affecting your business? How so?

Dragonfly Energy: Through strategy and meticulous anticipation, we prepared for supply chain issues. Of course, nothing is perfect, and we have experienced our own struggles, but we have been in a successful position for the past three years.

The discussion involves making sure states include the necessary items in RFPs (requests for proposals) and that site hosts are aware the use case exists and there is financial benefit long term.

"If you are an EV driver that's pulling a travel trailer, you're going to seek out the infrastructure and you're going to spend time there, you're going to spend money there. So there is financial benefit for the site hosts," Rano says. RVP

4 OF EVERY 10
camper households included someone of Hispanic, Black, Asian or other non-white ethnicity

How has inflation affected your business in the past year?

Forest River: Inflation has had a significant impact on the cost of raw materials and subsequently on the cost of our products. And while inflation doesn't seem to have slowed enthusiasm for camping, higher interest rates are having an impact on sales. We are working closely with our dealer network to manage inventory and drive sell-through while we continue to monitor federal interest rate activity.



THE SUPPLY CHAIN CHALLENGE

Businesses bolster inventories, woo suppliers to keep customers happy.

BY PHILLIP M. PERRY



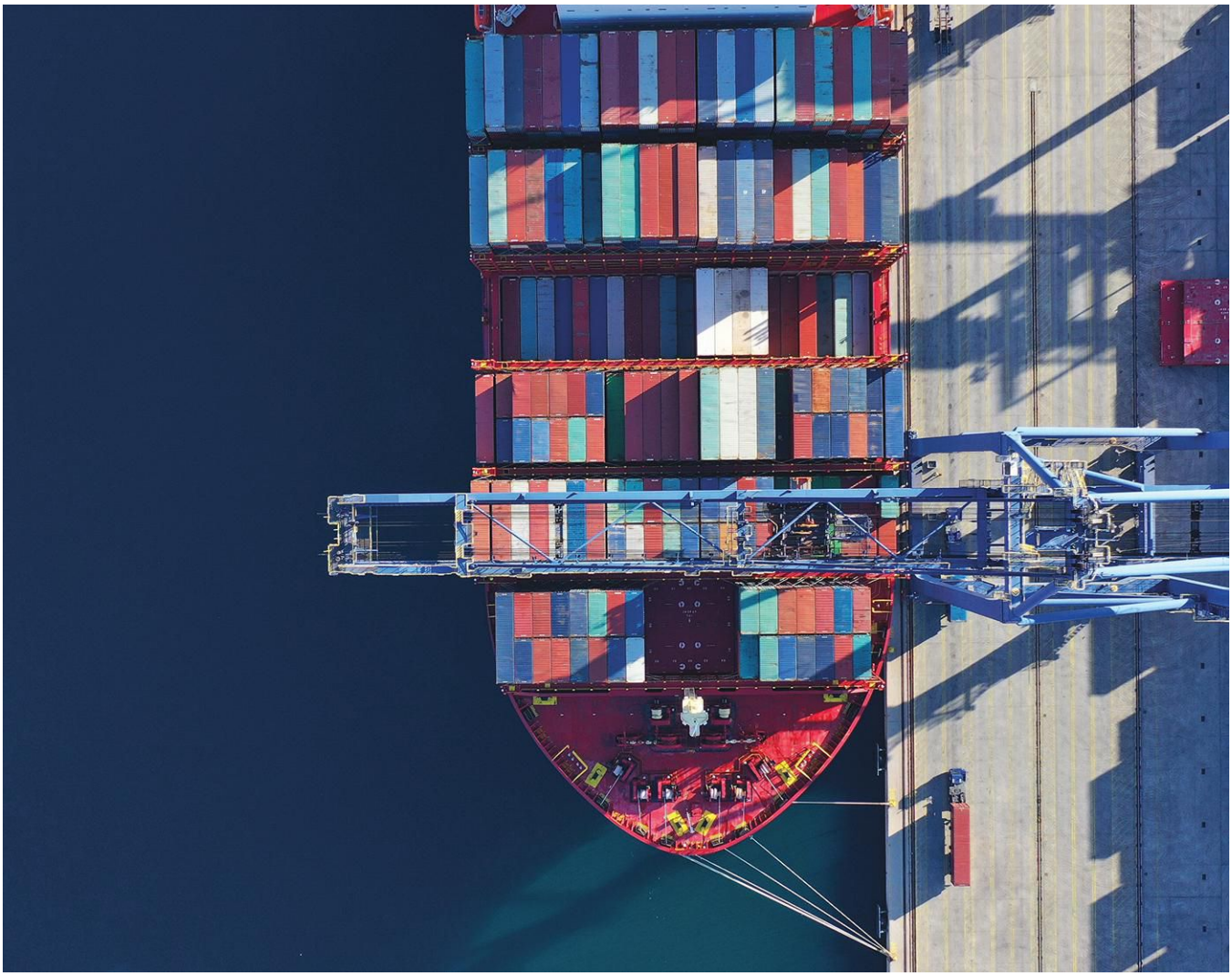
We thought the supply chain issues that arose in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic would be resolved by now.

No such luck.

Businesses are grappling with recurring problems caused by labor shortages, a new round of inflation-spurred over-buying, and shipping disruptions caused by the Russia-Ukraine war. Faced with robust consumer and commercial demand, companies are beefing up costly inventories and wooing second-level suppliers to help close the gaps when shortages arise.

Product shortages and delays – and associated price hikes – have been no strangers to companies in recent years, thanks to international tariffs. What had been an exercise in efficient materials distribution, though, morphed into a full-scale crisis with the arrival of COVID-19 and its effect on labor shortages, bottlenecked ports and shuttered production facilities. The return of a vigorous economy only increased pressure on an already thinly stretched delivery structure as businesses and consumers accelerated their purchasing. Most recently, the arrival of inflation caused businesses to increase their buying of goods even more, in a move to beef up inventories before anticipated price hikes kicked in.

All of these forces have come together to create a challenging environment for businesses looking to balance the dependable delivery of raw materials with the need to keep inventory at manageable levels. "Everyone in manufacturing and wholesale distribution seems to be dealing with supply chain disruptions,"



says Bill Conerly, principal of his own consulting firm in Lake Oswego, Oregon (conerlyconsulting.com).

Broad Effects

The supply chain imbroglio has engaged a broad spectrum of industries.

"For a number of years our member companies have been dealing with disruptions caused by factors such as tariffs and higher energy costs," says Tom Palisin, executive director of The Manufacturers' Association, a York, Pennsylvania-based regional employers' group with more than 370 member companies (mascpa.org). With its diverse membership in food processing, defense, fabrication and machinery building, Palisin's association can be viewed as a proxy for American industry. "Companies in just about all sectors have experienced pauses and shutdowns. Some have even gone out of business."

Labor shortages are one of the most persistent causes of distribution slowdowns.

"One banker told me that his four manufacturing customers could each hire 50 additional workers if enough applicants were to show up," Conerly says. "When a company I work with in Portland was awaiting a shipment of brass from Los Angeles, it turned out there was no driver for the truck."

The reasons for labor shortages are varied.

"Part of the problem is that people are not yet willing to come back to work," Conerly says. "But the fact is that there were not as many pandemic-related layoffs in manufacturing as in, say, food service. A larger issue is demographics: Older people are retiring, and younger people don't want to go into dirty, noisy factories. And then you have government



cash payments for people who get laid off. And finally, there are childcare issues."

The labor shortage has caused an increase in automation as a way to produce goods with fewer man-hours.

"In recent months there's been a surge of business orders for capital equipment," Conerly says. "The fact that manufacturing production has not reached all-time highs, though, indicates that the new equipment is not intended to boost capacity.

"So, I think a lot of the business capital spending is intended to replace empty positions with machines. The idea is 'If I can't hire somebody to assemble this product, maybe I can hire a robot to do it.' And I think that's a good strategy."

A decline in the cost of automation has helped fuel this trend.

"The cost of labor has gone up while the cost of electronic equipment has gone down," Conerly says. "Something that did not pencil out a few years ago may well do so today."

New Strategies

Companies are responding to the supply chain challenge by doing more with less, running machinery beyond its prime and collaborating with vendors to predict shipping delays. Such moves strike a familiar chord with Palisin at the manufacturer's association.

"The pandemic has really highlighted the need to develop strategies to mitigate potential disruptions in the flow of critical components," Palisin says. "That means doing a deep dive into the supply chain, mapping the geographical locations of the first tier of suppliers and learning about the reliance of second tier as well."

Pandemic-related shortages have affirmed the need for backup vendors even for lower volume items.

"Instead of relying on one supplier, a company might have three to manage

> **"The pandemic has really highlighted the need to develop strategies to mitigate potential disruptions in the flow of critical components."**

risks," says Jim Hannan, practice leader of manufacturing, distribution and logistics service group at consulting firm Withum (withum.com). "We expect this trend to continue with the advent of environmental, social governance (ESG) standards at larger companies."

When deliveries are spotty, companies are tempted to keep more stock on hand.

"Companies should no longer rely on just-in-time [JIT] inventory strategies, which too often have become just-too-late failures, and stockpile more supplies both in the United States and abroad," says John Manzella, a consultant on global business and economic trends in East Amherst, New York (johnmanzella.com). "This approach reduces efficiencies but favors risk reduction."

Companies are willing to turn upside down the traditional views of inventory control, given the increased risk of shortages and customer goodwill. "Many companies are investing more cash in inventories, and banks seem content with lending against that," says Hannan.

While businesses must pay the price for bolstering inventory levels, such costs must be balanced against operational expenses such as the need to pay higher prices for goods when a company scrambles to fill customer orders – or lost revenues when an unhappy customer jumps ship for a competitor. As companies balance such costs, many are viewing higher cash flow on the shelf as acceptable.

"Risk mitigation has become more important than efficiency gains," Manzella says.

Recent increases in interest rates, however, highlight the need to carefully consider bulging inventories.

"Companies need to be thinking, 'what might be in short supply when we try to ramp up our production?'" Conerly says. "They may well buy a year's supply of a relatively cheap item that is a small part of what a company uses but is vital to producing a finished product."

Certainly, business owners feel that a return to the days of warehouses bulging with inventory is not in the cards.

"Everybody has become accustomed to reducing costs by minimizing touch points, moving goods from the ship straight to the distribution facility and on to the customer," says one operator. Indeed, cooperative efforts with suppliers and customers may bring back a greater emphasis on JIT.

"I believe that the economy will eventually get back to that just-in-time concept as market disruptions lapse and the continued collaborative partnerships with vendors and suppliers remain a priority," Hannan says.

The Road Ahead

Businesses have faced a conundrum as the world emerges from the pandemic: How quickly will demand increase for products and services, and will the increase be steady or



erratic? The wrong answers can result in a pile up of inventory or lost revenues and customers.

"The risk is especially great for consumer and business goods requiring long lead times where businesses can't easily turn the supply chain spigot on and off," Hannan says.

The solution, Hannan says, is to develop a playbook to address possible disruptions and evaluate risks up and down the supply chain, then develop a plan to address those risks. And management must grapple with other unknowns such as whether the recent surge in the price of manufactured goods can be passed along to the consumer.

All this may soften profits until everything shakes out.

"Revenues will probably hold up or even increase because of higher demand, but margins will likely be hit because of increases in the costs of raw materials, labor and inventory," Palisin says. "It's a very unusual situation where all of these cost increases are happening at once—and at a time when tariffs are still in place. Companies just can't pass along everything to customers."

As for the road ahead, Conerly anticipates a gradual improvement in the operating environment.

"Now that people are able to travel, they may well return to spending on vacations instead of home improvements as they did in 2020 when demand for household furnishings and building materials challenged the whole supply chain," he says. "Consumers who have already completed their projects will be spending their money elsewhere."

Indeed, many operators feel that with the pandemic coming to an end, now is the right time for businesses delivering quality service to gain market share.

Says one: "We're assuming the worst and hoping for the best. Our overriding goal is to protect the health of our people and service our customers. Those things haven't changed a bit. And we'll do what it takes to get it done." RVP

Award-winning journalist **Phillip M. Perry** publishes widely in the fields of business management and law.



MADE IN USA

Manufacturing products close to home offers big benefits.

When it comes to manufacturers that target product quality, savings and a speedy turnaround, location is essential. Many companies in pursuit of cheaper production and labor costs find themselves with a big decision to make – move overseas or weather the storm at home among today's shifting economy.

As global sourcing becomes increasingly more common, the "American Made" stamp has become a pledge to some big, long-term benefits: more U.S. jobs, lower delivery costs, shorter lead times, eco-friendly practices, homegrown customer service and better quality control – to name a few.

This month's Special Product Focus is a tribute to aftermarket suppliers that know what it means to be Made-in-the-USA. From towing equipment and safety products to camping essentials, plus limited edition Wounded Warrior Project handtools, read on to learn about the industry's high-quality products made for high-quality customers, grown right on American soil.



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adjust-a-brush.com



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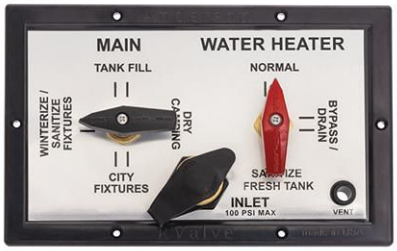
Aqua-Hot, Frederick, Colorado, offers its 125 Hydronic Heating System. The 125 Hydronic Heating System is a thermal fluid heat and hot water on-demand system by Aqua-Hot, an Airxcel brand. Designed specifically for Class B vehicles, the 125 is a compact, all-in-one unit that produces moist, even interior heat and continuous hot water at 110 to 120 F at 0.8 gpm. Bringing high-end climate control to campervans and overland vehicles, the 125 series has gasoline, diesel and modular models with a compatible in-floor heating kit available.

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WATER SERVICE PANEL

Anderson Brass Co., Hartsville, South Carolina, presents its MANRV102 RV Water Service Panel, featuring an inlet four-function brass valve that is used for filling the holding tank, pressurizing the fixtures when you have a water supply, pumping from the tank during dry camping and winterizing, and sanitizing your unit. The panel also includes a three-function brass water heater bypass valve. Normal position when the unit needs hot water to fixtures.
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abcorv.com





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arconelectrical.com



TIRE BLOWOUT PROTECTION

Armis RV Guardian, Seguin, Texas offers its signature product that protects RVs from devastating damage tire blowouts frequently cause. This patent-pending design is a solid steel, axle-mounted system designed to work with most trailers and does not void manufacturer's warranty. Armis' integration of Trailer SumoSprings offers one of the best safety and stability upgrades in the market today. Many RV blowouts side-line families for months, if not an entire season with high repair cost. Armis RV Guardian trivializes blowouts and protects your adventures.

armisrvguardian.com



LUBRICATOR AND PROTECTANT

Bio-Kleen Products, Kalamazoo, Michigan, presents its Kleen Lube. Bio-Kleen's Kleen Lube is an effective lubricator and protectant for key locks and catches, squeaky hinges, mechanism on automatic steps, cables, windows and door tracks, rollers, conveyor belts, stabilizer jacks and anywhere else there is friction. Works at temperatures of -20 F up to 210 F. Safe on rubber, plastics, vinyl, metals and more. Dries fast and will not attract dust and dirt. Extends the life of RV slides.

biokleen.com



WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION HITCH



B&W Trailer Hitches, Humboldt, Kansas, presents its new Continuum Weight Distribution Hitch that has several notable features to better control the towing experience. Its composite spring bars are five times more flexible than steel with similar strength. This allows the product to cover tongue weights of 600 to 1,600 pounds with a single bar size. A closed-loop hydraulic cylinder and pump assembly make it possible to fine tune your setup. If your trailer load changes or if your steering doesn't feel quite right, you can easily add or subtract weight for optimum towing in just a few seconds with the pump of a handle.

bwtrailerhitches.com

TIRE LOCKING CHOCK

BAL R.V. Products, Elkhart, Indiana, offers its X-Chock Tire Locking Chock, designed to help minimize movement in trailer tires while camping. Extends between the tires and applies opposing force to limit tire shifting. Two models ranging from 1 3/8 inches to 17 inches. The only tandem chock made in the USA!

balrvproducts.com



RV/MARINE WATER FILTER

Camco Mfg., Greensboro, North Carolina, presents its TastePURE RV/Marine Water Filter with Flexible Hose Protector. Enjoy fresh, great-tasting drinking water. TastePURE's Inline KDF Water Filter ensures that the water coming into your RV tastes better, smells better and is better. It filters down to 20-microns and contains GAC to reduce bad taste, odor, chlorine and sediment in your water. KDF prevents bacteria growth while the filter is in storage. Includes a flexible hose protector to help maintain high water flow, reducing strain on connections and hose kinking. Proudly made in the USA.

camco.net



TOW BAR

Blue Ox, Pender, Nebraska, offers its Avail Tow Bar. The Avail tow bar features all-steel construction, rated to tow up to 10,000 pounds with a total weight of 53 pounds. The Avail is self-aligning and designed to work with wide or narrow towed vehicles. The revolutionary nonbinding latch design allows the legs to extend and collapse with one-touch for easy hookup and release on any terrain. Rubber boots protect the tow bars legs from dirt and debris and offset triple lugs offer easy attachment to the towed vehicle's baseplate.

blueox.com



RV GOOSE COUPLER

PopUp Towing Products, Chanute, Kansas, offers its RVGC-CA (RV Goose Coupler - Cushion Adjustable), a complete pin box replacement allowing you to pull your fifth wheel with a Gooseneck Hitch Ball, no need for a bulky fifth wheel hitch taking up bed space. Product has one large cushion for up and down movement and one shock dampening sleeve to reduce the front and back movement, providing the smoothest ride possible with little maintenance required. Models available for almost any bolt pattern your RV may have.

popuphitch.com



HOLDING TANK MAINTENANCE

Cheltec, Florida, presents its Camp Champ RV Holding Tank Maintenance. Camp Champ is a premium line of holding tank odor control and treatment products by Cheltec, a woman, veteran-founded company established in 1996. Camp Champ's RV Odor Abate and RV Super Digest are variations of Cheltec's biodegradable and eco-friendly industrial odor control products. Each product comes in an easy-to-use squeeze and pour bottle for easier applications. RV Odor Abate eliminates odors instantly and Super Digest breaks down all organic waste in holding tanks. Both are compliant in all 50 states.

campchamprv.com



TOW BARS

CURT Mfg., Eau Claire, Wisconsin, offers its Tow Bars. CURT has been providing industry-leading towing solutions for nearly three decades. The company tests its products to rigorous standards because successful towing starts with safety. Years of knowledge and experience have culminated to produce its line of tested, proven RV tow bars. CURT tow bars are expertly crafted, easy to use and reliably tough to give you the peace of mind to enjoy every mile of the road ahead.

curtmfg.com



PET SCREEN DOOR PROTECTOR

Duo Form, Edwardsburg, Michigan, presents its Pet Screen Door Protector. Make traveling with your pet easier with the company's popular American-made pet screen door protector. Compatible with almost all RV doors and easy to trim and install.

duo-pets.com



BUTYL RUBBER SEALANT

Dicor Products, an Airxcel brand, Elkhart, Indiana, offers its Gunnable Butyl Rubber Sealant, an easy-to-use alternative to traditional butyl tape with mess-free application that cures to a putty-like consistency. Dicor's Gunnable butyl provides a watertight primary seal between lapping substrates and joints ideal for skylights, vents, windows and termination rails on RVs. Gunnable butyl has superior adhesion to many surfaces on a rig including TPO, EPDM, PVC, glass, metals, aluminum, concrete, wood and select plastics.

dicorproducts.com

FIFTH WHEEL PIN BOX REPLACEMENT

GEN-Y Hitch, Nappanee, Indiana, presents its EXECUTIVE Fifth Wheel Pin Box replacement with Gooseneck Coupler and Torsion-flex technology that provides customers with a safe and smooth traveling experience. The built-in suspension system reduces up to 90% of inertia between truck and trailer, which helps minimize chucking and jerking providing safety for the customer and cargo from harsh bumps. Past customers' testimonies have also mentioned that the reduced shock transfer increases fuel economy and reduces tire wear on trucks and trailers. The combination of control, safety and a smoother ride creates the ultimate towing experience for all RVers.

genyhitch.com







OE FIFTH WHEEL HITCHES

Demco, Boyden, Iowa, presents its Demco Autoslide OE fifth wheel hitches. Demco's Autoslide series for OE pucks is revolutionary in its portability from truck to truck. Simply changing out the modular side plates allows a user to take the hitch with them even if they switch truck brands (Dodge, Ford, Chevy). With 14 inches of travel and built-in capture plate for standard pin boxes, the Demco OE Autoslide series will make your customer's life on the road much easier.

demco-products.com

LIQUID BUTYL RUBBER

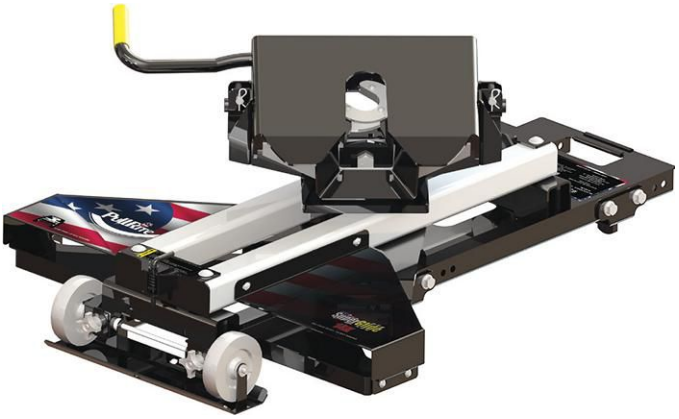
EPDM Roof Coatings, Shelton, Connecticut, offers its Liquid BUTYL Rubber. Fix roof leaks and extend your roof another 18 to 20 years with the only Liquid BUTYL Rubber in the world. With over 30 years of success, a primer is not needed with this one coat system. EPDM's proprietary solvent allows for a unique chemical cross-link to occur during the drying process unique to EPDM coatings. Applies directly over bur, EPDM, metal, asphalt, foam, etc. Wholesale pricing for orders over 25 gallons. Made in the USA from USA-sourced materials.

epdmcoatings.com

PULLRITE HITCH FOR HALF-TONS

Keller Marine and RV, Port Trevorton, Pennsylvania, presents its #3200 14K ISR Series SuperGlide, designed specifically for half-ton trucks with beds shorter than 6 feet. This SuperGlide has 22 3/4 inches of travel and quickly moves the trailer away from the cab while turning or backing up. The #3200 also features PullRite's first built-in wheels that make it easy to maneuver in and out of the bed or while in storage. The #3200 mounts to any industry standard-type rail. Like all PullRite hitches, it is 100% made in the USA. Distributed by Keller Marine and RV.

kellerrv.com





FOOD/BEVERAGE PLATE

GreatPlate, Elroy, Wisconsin, offers its GreatPlate combo food/beverage plate with a matching GreatCup. Reusable, durable and made in the USA.

greatplate.com

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ROOF-MOUNTED TV ANTENNA SYSTEM

KING, Bloomington, Minnesota, offers its KING Phoenix. This automatic roof-mounted satellite TV antenna system is the latest KING innovation, with industry-leading signal strength providing full HD programming with DISH Network or DirecTV. Watch multiple TVs simultaneously without interruption and enjoy simple, one-button automatic operation.

kingconnect.com



EXPANDING FOAM SEALANT TAPE

LAMATEK, West Deptford, New Jersey, presents its expanding foam sealant tape. Sure-Seal brand expanding foam sealant tape seals like a closed cell foam with the flexibility and compression recovery of an open cell tape. Advanced sealant tape replaces putty tape, butyl tape, caulk and spray foam to stop air, vapor, moisture, dust, sound and vibration. Ideal for use in exterior corner trim, windows and doors, plumbing, heating and AC, curtain walls, tank supports and more. Highly compressible foam molds itself to irregular surfaces for extreme sealing that lasts more than 20 years.

lamatek.com



ROLLER SHADES

MCD Innovations, an Airxcel brand, McKinney, Texas, presents its American Duo Roller Shades. American Duo Day-Night Roller Shades by MCD Innovations provide heat and UV reduction, daytime and nighttime privacy, and are available in hand-operated or powered models. The treatment's day shade offers excellent outward visibility with UV protection; the night shade was designed for privacy with 100% blackout material. MCD roller shades are custom-made to fit your RV's aesthetics and design flawlessly with professional, in-house installation offered at the MCD facilities.

mcdinnovations.com



WI-FI THERMOSTAT

Micro-Air, Allentown, New Jersey, the EasyStart and EasyTouch RV people, offers its EasyTouch RV Wi-Fi Thermostat. "Born in the USA" was an early Bruce Springsteen album and, like him, Micro-Air is "The Boss" from New Jersey. Its products are wrapped in the stars and stripes. The EasyTouch RV thermostat is the one-of-a-kind replacement option for digital thermostats found in RVs today. This intuitive control/smartphone app make an excellent choice for pet owners on the go.

microair.net



RAIN PROTECTION

Maxxair, an Airxcel brand, Wichita, Kansas, offers its Fanmate for superior rain protection over rooftop vents and powered fans with less than 5% airflow restriction. With a Fanmate, RVers can use their fans or vents even in inclement weather or while the RV is in motion. EZClip Hardware makes for easy, tool-free installation fitting over the molded, waterproof mounting tabs on a Maxxfan Standard (hardware with clips included for mounting on other fan types).

maxxair.com



RESIDENTIAL-STYLE HANDRAIL

MORryde, Elkhart, Indiana, presents its Safe-T-Rail residential-style handrail that provides safety for your RV. Entering and exiting your RV is now easier and safer with MORryde's Safe-T-Rail. Features 54 inches of continuous rail surface and extends 42.5 inches from the RV wall. Easy and quick to install. Magnetic lock securely holds rail in place during travel.

morryde.com



RV/MARINE CLEANING SOLUTIONS

Century Chemical Corp., Elkhart, Indiana, offers its Travel Jon and Supreme Green. With 97 years of experience eliminating unpleasant odors in marine **and RVs,** Travel Jon and Supreme Green are the most trusted cleaning solutions for travelers. Throughout Century's history, its products have demonstrated quality and consistency. Century Chemical has recently launched Blue Max Glitter Edition, a new product in their Travel Jon line, to enhance the glamping experience. In an age where more groups are camping, it makes sense to provide sparkle and add to the excitement of their journey.

centurychemical.com

WORD OF THE MONTH

HINT

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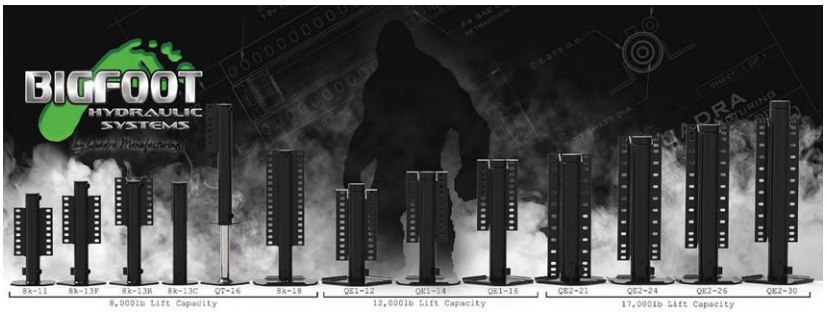
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Answer: ObseRVable



HYDRAULIC LEVELING SYSTEMS

Quadra Mfg., White Pigeon, Michigan, presents its Hydraulic Leveling Systems. Hydraulic landing gear and leveling systems are for a variety of industries, from the RV world to commercial and heavy industrial equipment applications. The company's cylinders are machined, assembled and tested at its facility in White Pigeon. All other main components come from the Midwest region of America.

bigfootleveler.com



OEM RESTORATION TREATMENT

RENEW PROTECT, Woodfin, North Carolina, offers its D3 RENEW PROTECT, a wipe-on annual treatment to provide OEM restoration, preservation and dry rot prevention for RV markets. D3 RENEW PROTECT replenishes the plasticizers and polymers, which have been lost to usage and exposure and seals with a strong ozone and UV blocking polymer/ceramic hybrid dry-seal. It prevents outgassing of protective elements to give tires, plastics and vinyl far greater longevity, weather protection and dry rot prevention.

renewprotect.com



PERMANENT FLAT TOWING BRAKE

RVi, Castle Rock, Colorado, presents its RVibrake Shadow. RVibrake Shadow is a permanently installed flat towing brake, always ready and waiting to keep them safe in whatever RVing adventure awaits. With Tow-Mode Detection, your customers never have to think about it again once you install it. There is nothing to install on the motorhome, and with its simple plug-and-play system, you can install RVibrake Shadow in around two hours.

rvidealer.com



ADAPTOR KIT FOR SCISSOR JACK STABILIZERS

RV SnapPad, Calgary, Alberta, offers its SnapJack. SnapPads for scissor jacks have arrived. Introducing SnapJack by Origen RV Accessories, the new universal adaptor kit for scissor jack stabilizers. Enjoy the same comfort, convenience and added stability that motorhome and fifth wheel owners enjoy today.

rvsnappad.com

ANTI-SWAY BARS

Roadmaster, Vancouver, Washington, presents its Anti-Sway Bars. Roadmaster's Anti-Sway Bars are the perfect solution for improved motorhome and truck handling. Made in the USA from raw chromoly steel, these anti-sway bars are designed to dramatically reduce body roll and sway, providing a smoother, safer driving experience. Roadmaster has Anti-Sway Bars for the Ford F53 chassis as well as hundreds of other chassis. Say goodbye to white-knuckle moments on the road and hello to increased stability and control. Don't settle for anything less than the best. Upgrade to Roadmaster's Anti-Sway Bars today.

roadmasterinc.com





WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT HAND TOOLS

Southwire, Carrollton, Georgia, presents its Wounded Warrior Project Limited Edition Handtools. The company is proud to announce its partnership with Wounded Warrior Project (WWP). This special partnership represents our deep passion to support our veterans, our communities and the markets it serves. Through this partnership with WWP, Southwire is able to directly support programs and services that give veterans access to independence, mental and physical health, career counseling, peer support and family support.

southwire.com

ELASTIC ADHESIVE/ SEALANT

Sika Corp., Lyndhurst, New Jersey, offers its Sikaflex-232 US Elastic Adhesive/Sealant. Sikaflex-232 US is a one-component, thixotropic, polyurethane adhesive/sealant that exhibits a high initial green strength. It adheres well to a wide variety of substrates and cures on exposure to atmospheric moisture. It is suitable for sealing and simple bonding applications where high green strength is required to improve the assembly process such as trailers and RVs. Sikaflex-232 US can be painted and sanded, has good gap-filling properties and is low odor.

sikaindustry.com



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FIFTH WHEEL HITCH

NSA RV Products, Iola, Kansas, presents its Zeus fifth wheel hitch. Features 24,000-pound towing capacity, a 4,500-pound tongue weight and a lifetime warranty. All steel construction and the only hitch on the market where the ball placement can move forward or backwards to accommodate a short bed or long bed truck. Fits industry standard bed rails. The most versatile hitch on the market, made in Kansas.

nsarvproducts.com



HOSE/CORD CADDY

Stromberg Carlson, Traverse City, Michigan, offers its HC-75 Hose/Cord Caddy. The Stromberg Carlson HC-75 hose/cord caddy holds up to 75 feet of water hose or 50 feet of 30-amp cord. Each hose end unwinds while the bulk of the hose remains neat and tidy in the caddy. It conveniently stores hose accessories. The hose caddy is stackable and measures 17 inches wide and 6.5 inches tall. Made in the USA.

strombergcarlson.com





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What Customers are Saying:

★★★★★

"After installing the sway bar, the difference was immediate. The sway back and forth was ***night and day better.***"

— John

★★★★★

"It fits like a glove and looks great. Best of all, my kit was ***made in the U.S.A.!*** I will recommend your products to everyone I know. Thanks."

— T. May

★★★★★

"The installation was relatively simple. What a difference! The pitching and leaning of my coach was dramatically improved. ***Money well spent!***"

— Brian D.

★★★★★

"Sway on turns very much reduced. Sway due to passing trucks reduced also. ***My RV handles like our car***. Very smooth."

—A. Dunham



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"Jesse Stopnitzky provided exceptional strategic advice and a laser targeted list of buyers from a variety of industries, not just limiting us to the RV industry. This approach allowed us to maximize our value and find the perfect partner to acquire our entire dealer group that was both an operational and cultural fit. Integrity, high work ethic, transparent, driven, and honest are characteristics I would use in describing Jesse and his team."

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from Findlay Automotive Group
& Michael Hohl Automotive

campers inn RV

SCOTT MOTOR COACH SALES
Toms River, New Jersey
Acquired by
Campers Inn RV
from Brad Scott

BISH'S
WHERE MEMORIES BEGIN
RV

STEWART'S RV
American Fork, Utah
Acquired by
Bish's RV
from Mark Black & William Giorgis

Meyer's RV Superstores

JOHNSTON RV COUNTRY
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Meyer's RV Superstores
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WATER HEATER

Suburban, an Airxcel brand, Dayton, Tennessee, presents its Direct Fit Water Heater. The Advantage Direct-Fit 6-gallon Water Heater by Suburban replaces select competitively sized water heaters without major modifications to sidewalls, cabinetry or plumbing for easy-fit installation. The Advantage Direct Fit Replacement Water Heater features a porcelain lined steel tank with anode rod design to protect against corrosion plus industry exclusive flue tube baffles to transfer more heat to water in the tank. Suburban has been located in Dayton, Tennessee since 1947.

suburbanrv.com

ADHESIVE-BACKED HEAT BARRIER

Thermo Tec Automotive, Greenwich, Ohio, offers its Adhesive-Backed Heat Barrier, a specialized protective solution designed to shield parts and components from the harmful effects of radiant heat. It offers a range of applications, such as providing defense for painted surfaces, plastic parts and various components that are susceptible to damage caused by radiant heat. Constructed from woven silica with a flexible aluminized finish, this heat barrier possesses exceptional properties that make it highly effective. Its surface boasts a high reflectivity, enabling it to withstand incredibly high radiant temperatures of up to 2,000 degrees. The adhesive backed side of the barrier is engineered to handle direct and continuous temperatures of up to 300 degrees.

thermotec.com





SEWER HOSE KIT

Thetford, Ann Arbor, Michigan, offers its Titan(R) 20-foot Sewer Hose Kit. Titan(R) premium sewer hose kits include two 10-foot Titan extension hoses, one Revolve(R) 5-in-1 sewer adaptor and four end caps.

thetford.com



SURFACE FINISH LAYER PROTECTANT

Trinseo, Wayne, Pennsylvania, presents its InDURO. Manufactured in Florence, Kentucky, InDURO is a new addition to Trinseo's material solutions portfolio resulting from the acquisition of Aristech Surfaces. A highly engineered acrylic structural material, it offers a best-in-class, superior strength solution for a range of applications within the recreational vehicle and mobility markets. Providing superior protection from UV damage and chalking, InDURO offers five times greater surface finish layer qualities over TPO and gel coat. It also holds greater color retention and gloss level surface finish durability.

aristechsurfaces.com



RV TOILET TISSUE

Valterra Products, Mission Hills, California, presents its Softness RV Toilet Tissue. Softness RV Toilet Tissue is specifically designed and tested to rapidly break down to ensure a clog-free RV waste tank. Softness toilet tissue is also safe for use with marine waste tanks, portable toilets and septic tanks. The unscented two-ply toilet tissue is available in a single 250-sheet roll, four-pack 250-sheet/roll and a four-pack 500-sheet/double roll. This item is made in the USA.

valterra.com



PLEATED SHADE RESTRING KITS

United Shade, an Airxcel brand, Elkhart, Indiana, offers its Restring Kits. Repair don't replace damaged pleated shades in your RV with Restring Kits from United Shade. Compatible with most styles of pleated shades with materials to repair up to five shades (directions for two-cord day/night shades, four-cord day/night shades or two-cord night shades included). The easy-to-follow instructions require only a flat-head screwdriver, a Phillips-head screwdriver and scissors. Restring Kits are an economical way to extend the life of existing pleated shades.

unitedshade.com



WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION HITCH

Weigh Safe, Lindon, Utah, offers its new True Tow Middleweight Weight Distribution Hitch a part of the Weigh Safe True Tow family, measuring vehicular tongue weight and providing exact measurement and force needed to accurately redistribute weight across your towing platform. It also boasts the simplest and quickest installation process in the industry and comes in various drop lengths to fit any and all trailers. It also includes a free app to calculate your correct weigh distribution.

weigh-safe.com





BALL MOUNTS

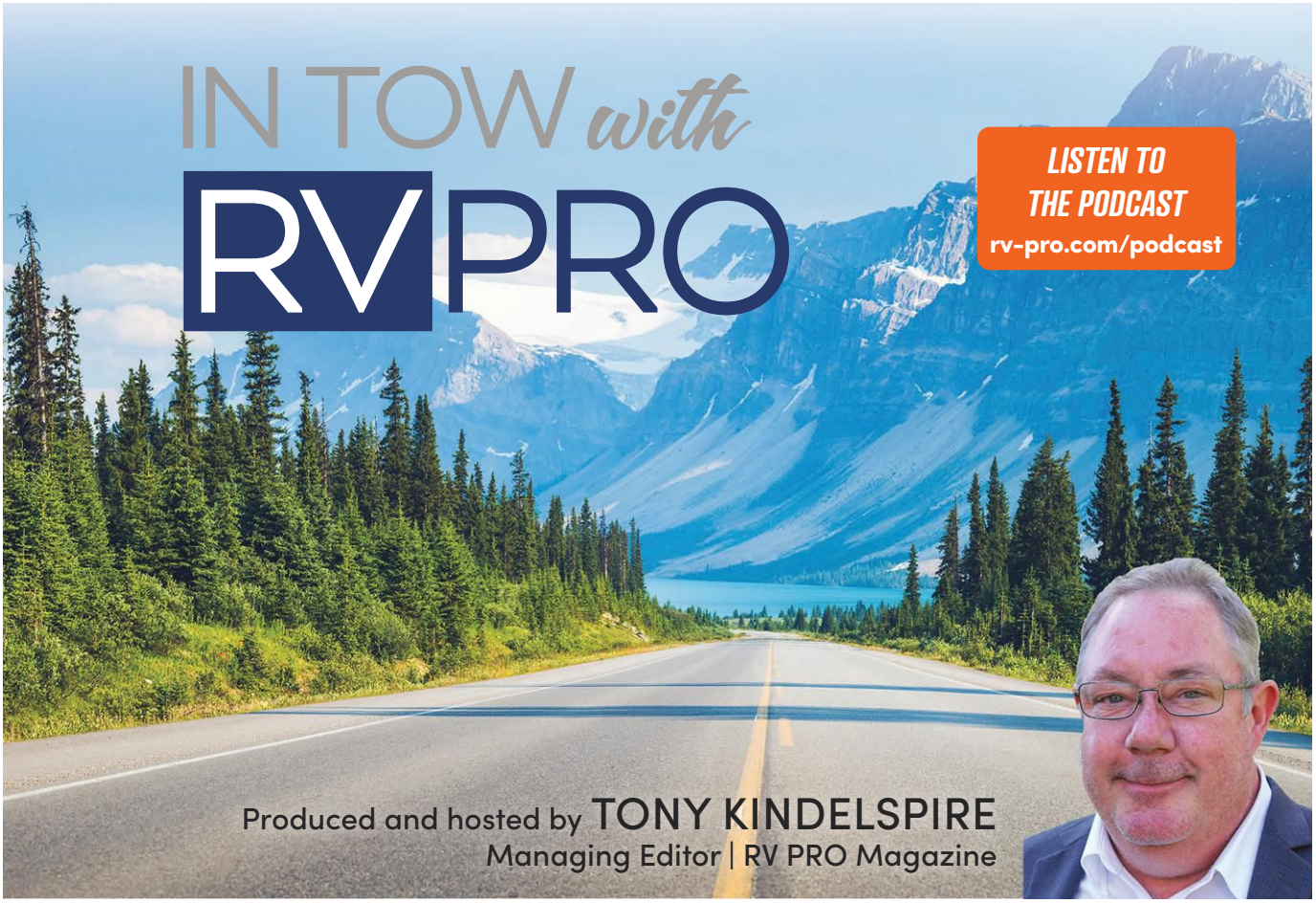
Fastway Trailer Products, Provo, Utah, offers its FLASH Ball Mounts. The aluminum ball mounts are made in America and are the gold standard in quality and durability. Built to last, the FLASH line delivers peace of mind and confidence while towing the heaviest trailers. Engineered for fast and easy adjustments with multiple drops and dual hitch ball options, FLASH ball mounts offer ultimate versatility for any truck and trailer combination.

fastwaytrailer.com

SWAY CONTROL HITCH

Equal-i-zer Hitch, Provo, Utah, presents its original Equal-i-zer Sway Control Hitch that has kept families safe on the road for more than 75 years. Manufactured from 100% American-made steel, it is the only hitch with Integrated 4-Point Sway Control. The result is superior sway control performance, excellent weight distribution, exceptional quality and ease of use. Towing with America's Favorite Hitch gives you confidence, peace of mind and the best protection for your journey.

equalizerhitch.com





Full-Time RVers Spill the Beans: How Dealers Can Do Better

Columnist Linda Cahan asked four road warriors about the good, the bad and the ugly when it comes to dealing with dealerships.



Linda Cahan is the president of Portland, Oregon-based Cahan & Co., a consulting firm that works with retailers of all sizes and categories to improve their bottom line through creative, affordable and appropriate visual merchandising, store design and renovations. For more information, visit lindacahan.com.

Researching this column was very interesting. What was challenging was figuring out how to write truthfully about what each person I spoke with said about RV dealerships. They said that everyone they met on the road talked about how they hated their dealer and that, "once they sell you the RV, they don't want to give you the time of day."

Only you know if that's true for your dealership, but just like high school, your reputations are made or broken by hearsay. Beware: People talk a lot on the road and are highly social media savvy. You are selling far more than an RV unit, you are selling the entire experience and everything that goes with it – which includes whatever goes wrong.

Fair? Considering that each unit is made of thousands of components that are manufactured all over the world, perhaps not. But you are the people who take the blame.

The Story Begins

Mindy E. and Rick W. sold their home in the Pacific Northwest and bought a 2018 40-foot Class A diesel Tiffin. They both work remotely and decided to travel around the United States. Mindy is highly organized and writes rules and manuals for medical device companies. She's the plan-ahead person. Rick grew up on a farm and can fix anything. That has become a very important skill to have as an RV owner on the road. For half of his life, he was an aerospace engineer and the other half, a 3D designer for video games doing art direction and creating content. We spoke for almost two hours about how RV dealers can be more proactive to get customers back to their dealerships.

Bob and Judy are in their late 70s, now living in southern Arizona after being full-time RVers for more than seven years. They stopped their full-time on-the-road life about 4.5 years ago when they found the perfect home. They kept their 40-foot diesel Holiday Rambler for the three to four months they escape the Arizona heat and travel to cooler destinations. They pull a Honda CRV or a Lincoln MKX, depending on where they're heading. According to Judy, having a bath and a half saved their marriage and the pull-outs added to the comfort of traveling together. When they started their travels in 2011, they sold everything they owned and traveled around the U.S. three times, covering over 75,000 miles. They didn't know what they didn't know when they set out but loved the journey and found it to be a lot of fun. They also became very resourceful and developed new skills to deal with issues that arose on the road.

Avoiding a Bad Reputation

I asked each person how an RV dealership could better serve their customers beyond selling units. All four said that "word of mouth" (WOM) is everything to full-time people and that WOM is usually very accurate. So, honesty in all forms from a dealership is highly praised and shared online.

First, Mindy talked about understanding why dealerships have issues with parts shortages. The RV companies basically build a house on top of a chassis. All of the components, as you all know, are made by many different manufacturers. Then the dealer is the one that gets blamed when something goes wrong with a part. I imagine you've experienced that more than a few times.

RVs are homes and when something vital doesn't work, people must rent rooms, which gets expensive. Some people lose an entire summer because their unit is sitting on a dealer's lot waiting for a repair. Also, "Go back to your dealer" doesn't always work if your dealer is far away, Mindy says.

To combat bad WOM: Order parts quickly. Complete all the things on the "fix it" list that you said you'd fix. If you can't, recommend someone local to do the work you can't or don't have time to do.

This is where honesty becomes important. Mindy (among many others) became deeply frustrated when a dealer promised to order a much-needed part and, weeks later, it still wasn't in stock. Both couples talked about how people they ran into called the parts manufacturer to find out when the part was sent and discovered it was never ordered by the dealership. So, they ordered their own parts online and then brought them to a dealer or freelance mechanic to install. Many more experienced full-timers carry



an assortment of components such as spare fuses, wiper blades, hamster wheels for the A/C, an extra water pump, plus a full tool kit.

Rick talked about how helpful RVers are to each other. In a park, if one person pulls out a tool, four other



people will come over with their tools to tell him/her four different ways to fix the problem.

Mindy and Rick had a Freightliner part go bad while traveling. They needed a hookup on a dealers' lot while waiting for a new part, but because of insurance issues, they had to go to a hotel instead. Freightliner, with their Oasis Service Network, now caters to RVs by providing hookups, a barbecue, park benches, a lounge for RV owners and sometimes a dog run. Freightliner also has a specific person to work with RV owners. If you sell a unit with a Freightliner chassis, give the new owner a list of their Oasis locations throughout the U.S. That way, you empower them to get something fixed on the road – and not blame you and your dealership for it going bad.

In Red Bay, Alabama, a cottage industry has developed repairing Tiffin RVs. Many of the mechanics worked for Tiffin and picked up extra part-time work at night and on weekends doing repair work within their specialties such as carpet, cabinets, mechanicals, etc. Some of these employees have started their own businesses. Thanks to WOM, people are finding the right person to work on what's needed. Some rarely trust dealerships to be able to fix the multitude of problems that arise. Full-timers are, for the most part, aware of the difficulty dealerships have faced with parts shortages and the overwhelming quality control issues from the manufacturers thanks to supply/demand issues during the pandemic from 2020-22. The dealers are overwhelmed, and customers know it. But, if you promise something, do it and do it quickly. If you don't, people will talk and word gets around.

According to Mindy and Rick, home manufacturers such as Tiffin have opened an area on their properties for people to hook up while they are waiting for parts and service on their units. These are safe, basic spaces with Wi-Fi, showers, bathrooms, electricity and pets are allowed.

If you have some space, consider doing the same in your lot for customers who have to wait for repairs that keep them off the road. Thanks to WOM, you will start getting appreciative reviews that will be read by thousands of RVers.

Servicing Customers on the Road

When I asked Judy and Bob about an RV dealership offering a barbecue/beer event, Judy came up with some giveaways that would entice full-timers far more than food and drink.

Words of wisdom from Judy:

- When someone is already on the road, trying to upsell a customer who is there for a repair or to buy something in the parts/accessories area is irritating. A hard sell is not welcome.
- If you want to "sweeten the deal" some items that would be very appreciated are a windshield screen, window shades, a complete black and grey tank dump kit, upgraded washer/dryer combo, or a nice tire cover kit to prevent sun damage.
- While men are most often looking at the engines, women are interested in finding out they can keep dishes and accessories from landing on the floor of their rig. This may sound sexist, but it is often true. Show them how to put grippy shelf liner between plates and on the shelves – and give them a set of the rubber liners or sell them. Sell Melamine dishes. Or offer a set for free for purchases over a certain amount.
- Some other things you can carry and/or offer your better customers: cookware, utensils, plates, collapsible storage containers, insulated carriers for the endless potluck dinners at RV parks and potholders. Museum putty is always a welcome addition on your checkout service or parts desk.

Suggestions from both couples relating to the buying experience:

- Once again, be honest. Learn more about the customer/s and what would be best for their specific needs. Even if they seem to have a lot of money, marble floors may not be the lifestyle they are hoping for while on the road.
- Be honest about what units can be pulled by what type of car or truck. Make sure your sales associates know this information cold or give them cheat sheets to refer to when working with customers.
- Make sure you sell them the right trailer for their car or whatever they are towing. Also, make sure the



customers get the correct electrical connections for the rear lights on their rig and towbar. Once again, if a cheat sheet is needed, I'm sure the customer will appreciate the correct advice.

- Give them a list of places where they can park their rig and where they can unhook their trailer and put it once they get to a place. The trailer for their car doesn't always fit in the allotted space for their rig and car.
- Have a list of RV groups printed out that your customers can take on the road with them. Included in that group: Escapees, Boondockers Welcome, Good Sam, Fulltime Families, Girl Camper (for women traveling alone), and Family Motorcoach Association (FMCA).
- Teach them the following:
  - How to hook up their trailer
  - How to tow their car safely and successfully
  - How to take care of the hookups and clean out the tanks
  - How to drive the rig!
  - Offer short instructional videos for every aspect of the RV experience. Make sure whoever is on the video makes it informative, real, short and sweet. No need for a fancy opening and ending. Talk about what can go wrong and what to do about it – especially if you're in the middle of nowhere and going to a dealer or repair shop isn't viable.
- Offer a one- or two-day driver training class to everyone of driving age in the rig. You never know if or when the main driver may become incapacitated. Also, teach how to hook up water, electric, sewer – whatever is needed.
- There are many RV clubs and information sites. Give new RV owners a good list of these as they'll come to rely on information from these sites as they travel. Let them mentally thank you each time they get online help.
- Become their source of information while on the road and if you can't, provide them with a list of resources they can carry with them. Include (if possible) mobile RV tech people in each state along with respected repair shops.

According to WOM, a man in a van lost his heat in Palm Springs. He tried to fix it himself with no luck. He called around and found a licensed mobile RV tech who specialized in heaters. The tech pulled out the heater, put in a $3 part and charged him $300. It was worth it to the van owner. It beat freezing or spending at least that much in a motel or hotel. As the technician specialized only in heaters, he carried lots of parts for all types of vehicles in his truck.

Customers still feel loyalty to their dealers, and they will go to their dealers for parts when possible. But they will definitely go back to their dealer for service – if their initial experience was good and problems were taken care of in a timely and complete manner.

Rick and Mindy schedule an appointment with their dealer nine months in advance, knowing when they'll be back in the Pacific Northwest.

If you are getting complaints, look to your staff and training. Your customers' experience starts with you. RVP





Selling to Different Generations

Dealers need to understand who their customers are and what resonates with them in order to communicate effectively.



Thomas Morin is an author and owner of Unlock Your Career Coaching, a North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, company that coaches salespeople in all industries on how to build rapport and trust that customers must feel to be comfortable buying from them.



Morin's second book, "No Trust, No Sale," will launch this month.

Most of us have heard the saying "opposites attract." This may be true in romantic relationships, but in my experience in working with both salespeople and customers, it's not true at all. For the anxious customer – who has a real (or perceived) fear of working with a salesperson when looking to buy a new RV – the opposite is more accurate.

In meeting and greeting a new customer, it's typical for a salesperson to be so preoccupied with the discussion about what product they are interested in, they don't slow down the process enough to learn about who is standing in front of them. Looking at new RVs is fun and exciting, so it's easy to just rush right out in the lot and start looking at everything a dealership has to sell.

What is often overlooked is for the salesperson to identify the type of customer they're working with and what might be the most comfortable approach to communicate with them in a way that allows comfort, rapport and trust to be built. This is crucial, because no sale will take place until the customer likes and trusts the salesperson.

What adds to this issue is that salespeople also have their own style in how they like to communicate and present product to customers – but what if their style doesn't complement what the customer likes to hear? That alone could be an obstacle in relationship building. Salespeople must realize that even with superior product knowledge, failing to present that information in a way the customer prefers to hear it can ultimately stand in the way of a sale.

Many customers subconsciously decide if they like their salesperson or not in seconds, so making this a priority is a must. But how do they do that? The first step is to listen more and talk less in the early stages of the meet-and-greet. Being an active listener and being perceptive of customer body language cues can help get you started on the road to determine an appropriate method of communication.

Another way to establish a starting point could be to quickly assess what generation your customer is in, which can help to deliver your initial presentation to them. While observing salespeople in the meet-and-greet segment with customers, I have found that each generation tends to give cues on how they prefer to be dealt with. Using this information can help get you started in making quick, early adjustments to get customers to relax and feel comfortable.



Post War *(Born 1928-1945)*
This generation prefers to shop in person rather than online because that's what they grew up with. They tend to trust more easily than others, because they've been raised to do things the right way, with integrity. As a result, they are usually great to work with.

They like information to be short and sweet and prefer an honest and professional delivery. High pressure tactics are widely unaccepted by this group.



Baby Boomers *(Born 1946-1964)*
The largest group of all, they have an interesting crossover of groups before and after them. They prefer to work in-person with their salesperson but are savvy enough to communicate through text, email or social media.

This group has seen it all when it comes to salespeople – both good and bad. They feel they are deserving of both time and respect. It may take a little longer to earn trust with these folks, but it's rock solid once you get there.

They make smart and informed decisions based on research and what they see, so it may take a little longer to make a decision than other groups. Loyalty means a great deal to them, which can lead to many referrals and leads from other customers, so this a group for salespeople to master how to work with.

Gen X *(Born 1965-1979)*
This group is interesting, because although many of them are in the highest earning years of their careers, they tend to be very money conscious. They will always ask what might be on sale, but at the same time will be highly interested in the newest innovations and gadgets.

Digital products are often interesting to them, so try to emphasize technological advances with them, as well as the additional cost associated. They will spend extra



Baby boomers



Generation X



Millennials

> I HAVE FOUND THAT EACH GENERATION TENDS TO GIVE CUES ON HOW THEY PREFER TO BE DEALT WITH.

money on technological advancements if you prove the benefit is worth the extra cost.

If the sale doesn't take place in the initial interaction, this group will want up-to-the-minute updates and follow-up on new technology or cost changes, as their thirst for technology could send them shopping elsewhere.

Millennials *(Born 1980-1996)*
In my experience, it is this group that is more laser-focused on money than any other. They are looking to save money first, even if it means sacrificing quality. This group has buyers' remorse more than any other, eventually regretting that the poor quality they received wasn't worth the money they saved.

With this group, separating the "must do" from the "nice to do" items will be important to help them make the best buying decisions. They tend to be gadget-oriented and visual buyers, so focusing on how gadgets positively impact use of the RV is very important for them.

Gen Z *(Born 1997-present)*
It's still too early to assess the impact of this group, but more information and trends will develop as time goes on.

Most salespeople have a communication style they feel comfortable with as well, which doesn't always match how the customer wants to be spoken to.

Since customers tend to like people who are like them, identifying the type of customer you're working with in the early stages of the meet-and-greet, and making subtle adjustments in how you communicate with them, can help set the stage for comfort, rapport and trust to be built, and help eventually lead to a sale. RVP



Gen Z

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How to Recession-Proof Your Business

Take steps now to stay strong.



Phillip M. Perry is a New York City-based journalist. He publishes widely in the fields of business management and law.

The business world is teetering on the edge of a recession. "We are seeing evidence that the economy is slowing down," says Anirban Basu, Chairman and CEO of Sage Policy Group. "Retail sales and industrial production are falling. Layoffs are occurring at companies such as Microsoft, Peloton, Twitter and Amazon."

Moody's Analytics estimates an increase of only 1.7% in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) when 2022 numbers are finally tallied. That represents a noticeable deceleration from the 5.9% post-pandemic rebound of the previous year. If 2023 brings an actual decline in GDP – the total of all goods and services transacted in the nation – that will represent the first recession since 2008.

The not-so-secret force driving the economic crisis is the Federal Reserve's moves to raise interest rates – a proven cure for inflation that, unfortunately, also dampens business growth.

Recessions tend to gain force quickly once they begin, as commercial enterprises shift from chasing demand to cutting costs. History shows that organizations taking swift remedial action rebound faster once hard times recede.

Take Stock

What are the best managerial moves in the face of a recession? The answers can be tricky. The current recession is more complex than usual, with businesses getting squeezed from two directions. From the revenue side, a decline in receipts means less cash to cover expenses. From the cost side, increasing prices are punching up operating expenses.

"Over the past six months or so we have seen a rise in the cost of materials and delays in construction and customer payments," says Josef Roberts, founder of E Squared Consulting, Atlanta. "Distributors and dealers are buying materials that are much more expensive than before. And delayed receipts are exerting their own pressures. The result is a cash squeeze."

For businesses, this unusual dynamic has created a treacherous operating terrain. "A recession is much more dangerous when it is combined with inflation, since prices are going up at the same time that revenues are coming down," says Oded Koenigsberg, deputy dean at the London Business School.

Turn Inward

Consultants advise one course of action that will almost certainly pay off: Casting a bright light on internal operations. "Now is the time to get under the hood and examine the individual components of a business," says Travis W. Harms, president of Mercer Capital. "Inefficiencies have almost certainly arisen during the post-pandemic boom. When times are good, managers tend to focus externally on generating revenues and delivering on obligations. It's all too easy to let operations get a little bit flabby. Then, when the tide goes out, problems are exposed."

No matter what the current condition of a business, a sharp eye will likely spot one or two internal segments clouding the overall picture. While the knee-jerk reaction to this is to cut costs, that too often hinders future profits. "When the economy turns down and companies lack sufficient cash, they all of a sudden are tempted to let go of core assets they really should hold onto for the long run," Basu says. "The temptation is to cut too deeply."

A better course is to analyze the dynamics of any problem segments, then make adjustments to enhance profitability. Only if they seem unsaveable should they be eliminated.

Collect Receivables

Another important step is to raise operating revenue. "In a time of economic weakening, the key is cash," Basu says. "Cash can get you through anything."

While there are many ways to raise cash, the balance sheet can offer some especially fertile ground. Accelerating the sale of stale inventory and extending accounts payable are proven tactics. Perhaps the most effective step is to accelerate the collection of



"WHILE THERE ARE WAYS TO RAISE CASH, THE BALANCE SHEET CAN OFFER SOME ESPECIALLY FERTILE GROUND."

accounts receivable, Harms notes. "Start calling folks who are past due."

Reaching out to customers can bring a side benefit, notes Sam Brownell, founder of Stratus Wealth Advisors. It helps build better relationships. "You get to know people a little bit better, and maybe you can work something out with them that strengthens your relationship going forward."

One proven tactic is to repackage goods and services into bundles more closely aligned with customer needs. "There are very few products and services that come as is, without being part of a bundle," Koenigsberg says. "When we buy an airline ticket we get not just transportation but also food, baggage handling, and service on the plane and in the terminal." Same goes for your products and services. Can longer lead times be exchanged for lower prices for customers in need of discounts? Or free delivery for long-term purchase agreements?

Not all customers are created equal. Now is the time to assess the profitability of each. "Especially when heading into a recession, it's important to rank your customers in terms of quality factors," Brownell says. "We suggest making a list of customers in an Excel spreadsheet. Then start asking questions about each and rating them in columns."

Brownell suggests asking questions like these:

- Which tie up the least number of resources?
- Which are willing to be flexible if, for example, supply chain disruptions mean they cant get exactly what they need?
- Which are the most loyal and pay on time?
- Which are the most price sensitive?

Rate each customer from 1 to 10 on each factor. Then figure out how to do more business with the customers who get the highest scores.

Cut Expenses

Underperforming fixed assets can be another source of funds. "It's not uncommon for a business to accumulate nonoperating assets during good times," Harms says. Examples include vehicles, inventory, property and equipment such as forklifts. "See if you have some stuff sitting in the back lot tying up capital, along with requiring payments for licensing and insurance and fuel," Harms says. "Maybe it's time to sell it."

While cutting too deeply can harm a company, some attention must be paid to reducing any expenses that have been allowed to grow too high during good times. "It's good to focus not just on the amount of expenses but also the structure of your expense base," Harms says. "Are your costs primarily fixed or variable? If the former, that is supportable when things are going well. But a recession is an opportunity to reconsider. Can you convert some fixed costs into variable ones, reducing your expense base accordingly?"

One example, Harms says, is real estate. "Do you have long-term leases you may not need? Is there a way for you to adapt a more flexible approach where you're not being locked so much into long-term payments?" Renegotiating may mean more expense in the short run, but more management flexibility in the long run.

Retain Top Performers

Brownell suggests taking a holistic look at your employees to make sure you've got the right people in the right places, and you know which are the critical ones to the operations of your business. "Who are your vital cogs? Who could you not get along without? Who are the people who can perform cross discipline tasks in the event of a reduction in force? Those are the people you want to shore up now, and make sure that they feel valued and they know that you're going to stick with them."

It's more important than ever to retain your "A players" in this tight labor market. "Given the talent crunch



Are You Prepared For a Recession?

Is your business well positioned for a recession? Find out by scoring 10 points for every "yes" answer to the following questions. Total your score and check your rating at the bottom of the sidebar.

1. Have you examined internal operations and shored up underperforming business segments?
2. Have you taken a fresh look at accounts receivable and contacted late-paying customers?
3. Have you ranked your customers in terms of qualities such as sales volume, term flexibility and loyalty?
4. Have you rebundled goods and services to better meet the needs of customer segments?
5. Have you identified "lazy capital" in underperforming assets such as inventory, vehicles and property?
6. Have you identified fixed assets that can be converted to variable ones?
7. Have you looked at each variable cost with the idea of reducing its impact on the bottom line?
8. Have you invited your employees to contribute ideas for increasing profits in recessionary times?
9. Have you reached out to your banker to explore more favorable financing terms?
10. Are you monitoring the activity of competitors to spot new market opportunities?

What's your score? **80 or more:** Congratulations. You have gone a long way toward buffering your business against the ravages of a recession. **Between 60 and 80:** It's time to retool your operations to prepare for a downturn. **Below 60:** Your business is at risk. Take action on the suggestions in the accompanying story.

and the changing demographics, it's really important to secure your talent base," Palisin says. "Retention has been an ongoing issue for the last couple of years. You need to make sure you have a stable workforce, and that your company culture helps to retain your best people."

Your top employees can be a source of innovation, of new ways of doing things and even cost savings. "People on the front lines see things that those in the front office don't," Palisin says. "So it's important to solicit their ideas, empower them and make sure they have the opportunity to contribute."

Companies can also increase employee loyalty by being very clear on career paths within the company. Provide opportunities for people to find more value in their work and to move forward. And be honest with the challenges the company now faces. Acknowledge that there may be headwinds, and that there may be the need for some sacrifice, including foregoing bonuses or reigning in the company credit cards. "That kind of forward planning will make you feel more in control of the situation as opposed to just sitting there and getting buffeted by these exogenous economic factors," Harms says.

The prudent company will also identify underperformers who might be let go when revenues decline. "During the post-pandemic recovery period, many firms staffed up massively in their efforts to chase demand," Basu says. "But some of those workers have not been performing as well as one might have wanted. That's the kind of worker that probably could be let go to help raise cash flow today to preserve fiscal health tomorrow."

Consult Bankers

Tough times require a fresh outreach to primary lenders. "Now would be a great time for any business using any type of financing, whether it's longer term debt or a line of credit, to reach out to their banker and have a conversation about what can be done in the event of a downturn," Brownell says.

Some questions to explore: Can interest rates be locked in? Can lines of credit be extended? Can monthly payments be reduced? "The whole idea is to ensure continuing access to capital. You don't want to be surprised by your bank reducing your line of credit because of changes in your P&L," Brownell says.

Take special care that your changing profit picture does not inadvertently violate the terms of any outstanding loan agreements. "Maintaining a dialog with existing lenders is critically important in a recession, because some loan document ratios may be affected," Palisin says. "Bankers need to know where you stand financially and what's going on with your company."

Prudent companies also create a Plan B for funding sources. "Having alternative sources of financing in place can be helpful to facilitate mergers," Palisin says. "But companies need to do their homework. Some of the alternative financing sources can be expensive, especially in a high interest rate environment."

Spot Opportunity

Successful enterprises see economic downturns as opportunities to solidify and increase their market presence. "Businesses need to focus not only on how to get through a recession, but also on how to be stronger coming out of it," Harms says.

A close look at the competition can uncover opportunities that will strengthen a company over the long term, he adds. Is a market sector being abandoned by a competing enterprise?

Finally, strong enterprises can take advantage of opportunities to absorb weaker ones, Palisin says. "For companies with strong cash flows and healthy financial ratios, it can be financially feasible to look into potential mergers and acquisitions."

The key to success is to remain healthy during a recession so you can take advantage of the opportunities that arise when the economy recovers, Roberts says. "The most successful companies in a downturn will be those that execute the best." RVP





Why Hope Is Hurting Your Business

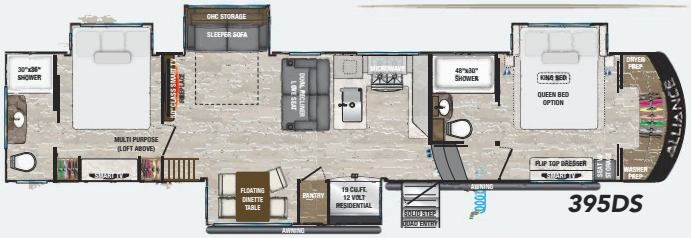
How to overthrow the status quo and bank on better results.



George Hedley, CSP, CPBC, is a professional construction BIZCOACH and industry speaker. He is the bestselling author of "Get Your Construction Business To Always Make A Profit!," available on amazon.com. Email Hedley at gh@hardhatpresentations.com to sign up for his free e-newsletter. Visit hardhatpresentations.com for more information.

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You are 100% accountable for your current situation and the results you're achieving. They are a direct reflection of your leadership. As a leader, you have defined the results your company produces, including the performance, procedures, project types, financial systems and the employees being held accountable to deliver results. The bad news is you have manufactured the current situation at your company. But, if you aren't happy with the status quo, the good news is you can take action to change it.

Hope Is Not a Strategy

Still hoping your situation will magically improve? Stop. The betterment of your company can only be realized through decision, action and innovation – all of which require an investment of time, energy and money. Positive change requires time and dedication to create and implement new systems and strategies. Improvement also requires the owner or president to reshape their role and stop trying to handle it all alone. To accomplish their vision, the head of the company must change their focus to leading, building new customer relationships, winning high margin sales, seeking projects and niches with low competition, developing key talent, creating and enforcing systems, achieving best-in-class results and implementing improvements.

This new focus will cost money, as the company leader will need to hire new talent, implement software, improve the accounting department, build an accurate estimating and cost history system, hold weekly manager meetings with direct reports, implement a customer marketing strategy and focus on moving the company to the next level of success.

What You Need to Improve

Consider the following tasks and what might help to improve their chance of success or completion. Note the items that need improvement.

As you work through the list, consider how many of these are just hopeful ideas, how many are actions still in progress, and how many you can personally take responsibility for.

- ❑ Our company financial reports are almost never produced or updated in a reasonable time frame.
- ❑ Project-cost tracking is not completed often, if ever.
- ❑ Project budget updates with estimated final costs are not up to date.
- ❑ Projects tend to be completed late and not on schedule.
- ❑ We don't have a specialty or niche expertise that sets us apart from the competition.
- ❑ We need to hire more talented people, but we're too busy to get it done.
- ❑ We don't have an ongoing hiring or talent development program to attract and retain great people.
- ❑ We're too busy to implement a training and promotion program.
- ❑ We don't hold regular manager, supervisor, financial or companywide meetings.
- ❑ As the company lead, I don't have much time to dedicate to improvement.
- ❑ I'm too busy to communicate with repeat or new customers on a regular basis.
- ❑ More than five people report directly to me, and I'm responsible for their performance, activity and pay.
- ❑ Problems, issues, deadlines and fire drills seem to overtake my days.
- ❑ Our customers call me on most important issues and problems.
- ❑ I don't have time to meet one-on-one with my direct reports weekly to monitor, mentor or train them.
- ❑ Employees ask me to make decisions for them or tell them what to do.
- ❑ We don't have enough time to update our business plan or develop new ideas and strategies.
- ❑ I make most of the important decisions including contracts, pricing, scheduling, hiring and pay.
- ❑ We need a strong management team accountable to achieve results and run the business.
- ❑ Our business is stuck. It's not getting better or moving to the next level.

What to Improve First

It can be difficult to know which direction to take to start improving your business. Your check marks

from this list indicate your critical areas for improvement. There might also be other areas that need some help, standardization, change or innovation.

So, how do you get started on the right path to improvement?

First, identify areas in your business and roles that need to be standardized, documented, enforced, clarified or improved.

Second, prioritize the areas needing improvement based on which will generate the highest return or improved results. Examples:

- Hire an assistant who will free you from performing many of the busy-work tasks that could be easily delegated.
- Develop an accurate and detailed estimating template with all the required and potential cost codes, line items, tasks, activities, inclusions, exclusions, allowances, potential missed items, general condition costs, supervision, security, temporary requirements, cleanup, mobilizations, delay costs, labor, materials, suppliers, tools and equipment, etc.
- Decrease the time required to make decisions and answer everyone's constant calls by drafting an organizational chart, workflow, chain of command, clearly written job descriptions and levels of authority for all positions.
-

Third, select the improvement item you'll commit to start working on first. Start slowly as it takes dedicated time and money to create strategies, systems, processes and standards.

The key is to not only hope that it happens but to actually do it. Dedicate time to improving your business and make it a priority – do the work required.

Improvement generally requires people to change. But remember: People don't like to change unless they see what's in it for them. Be sure to communicate the reasons for improvement, and then include your team in developing the overall strategy to build a better business that will allow your company to grow, profit and generate opportunities for employees.

Take one step at a time. Don't get frustrated and let the pressure of changing your old ways of doing business slow you down or stop your improvement program. Be sure to assign some of the next improvement items to key managers or supervisors to get their involvement and earn buy-in. As each improvement system is created, have the person in charge of developing it present the new way of doing business to the entire team to gather their input and win their buy-in as well.

Change Is Your Choice

Remember: Improvement is hard work, and it's slow and painful getting people to do things differently. It's not easy to hire the right person and then let go and delegate to them. It's hard to implement a new software program that will improve inventory management. It takes a time commitment you don't have to seek new customers. It's hard to replace poor performers who have been with you a long time but haven't committed themselves to learning the new technologies required. It's difficult to let go of good workers who have bad attitudes, are not team players and are resistant to change.

It's also uncomfortable to invest money and dedicate regular time to making improvements and doing the difficult things you know you need to do.

As the leader of your company, you must take full responsibility for the results you're currently achieving – good or bad. You can choose to do nothing differently and continue to accept subpar results.

Or, you can stop hoping for better and decide to commit and invest in your future success, continuously improve, do business differently, and ultimately raise your business performance to a higher level. RVP



PEOPLE DON'T LIKE CHANGE UNLESS THEY SEE WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM. BE SURE TO COMMUNICATE THE REASONS FOR IMPROVEMENT, AND THEN INCLUDE YOUR TEAM IN DEVELOPING THE OVERALL STRATEGY TO BUILD A BETTER BUSINESS.

8 TIPS TO TAKE YOUR BUSINESS UP A NOTCH

Here's some advice from the Small Business Development Center via Forbes.

1. Reach customers in more ways than one.
After testing a multichannel approach, you will be able to determine how to best spend your marketing dollars based on which channels were most effective.

2. Try using a 60/20/20 approach to time management.
Use 60% of your time to proactively focus on tasks that truly add value to your business or cannot be done by others. The other 40% should be spent on two things: 20% on planning and 20% on strategizing.

3. Dig deep into your numbers.
Include a business plan, a marketing plan to build a loyal customer base, an employee manual, accounting software and IT infrastructures.

4. Create a business toolbox.
Include a business plan, a marketing plan to build a loyal customer base, an employee manual, accounting software and IT infrastructure.

5. Use social media the right way.
Create and document content that provides value to your audience and builds relationships with them. This could be industry insights, tips and tricks, or even entertaining behind-the-scenes videos.

6. Attract the next generation of workers.
Learn about the potential strength and weaknesses of the age group, then rework your interview questions to best highlight the talent you are looking to hire. Learn how to speak to workers in a way they will understand the importance of their responsibilities, tasks and place in your organization.

7. Build in downtime.
This is not a vacation but time away from working in the business to work on the business: to review data; streamline systems; plan for the next day, week, quarter or year. Allow time to strategically plan and have insight into small problems before they become major problems.

8. Ask and share.
Never hesitate to ask questions from other business owners for fear of looking like you're not the expert And be willing to share what you know as well.





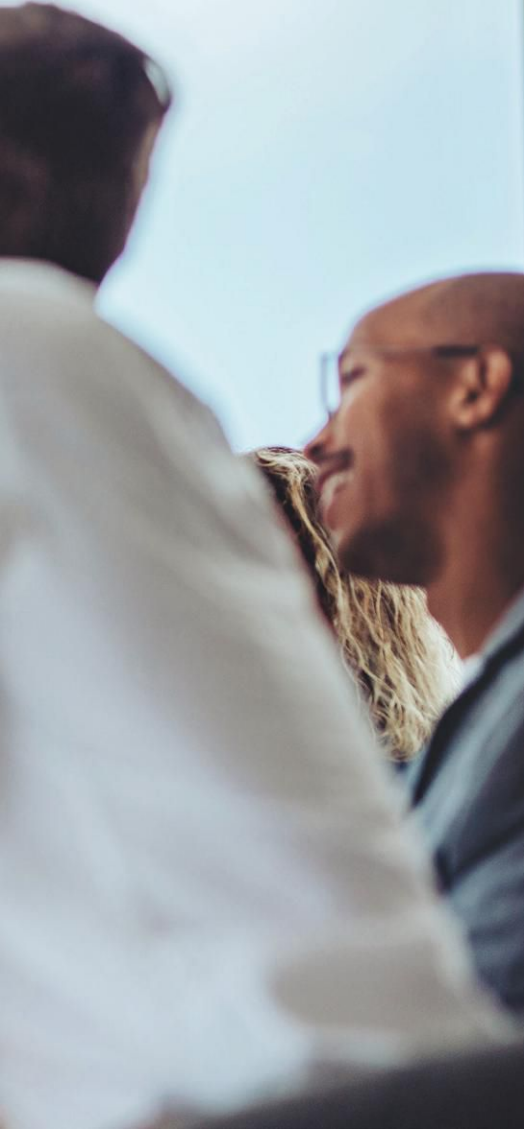


How a 'Chief People Officer' Can Help Your RV Company

Being in tune with what employees want, and ensuring clear communication, are just two of the benefits.



Alison Burgett is the chief people officer at Gray, Gray & Gray, LLP, a business consulting and accounting firm that serves a range of industries. She can be reached at (781) 407-0300 or aburgett@gggllp.com..



If there is anything we have learned from the chaos of the past few years, it is this: Every business is more dependent than ever on skilled and dedicated people doing the work. That fact really hits home if you are among the many businesses struggling to fill open positions from a labor market that continues to be historically squeezed.

Hiring is a concern for many businesses in the RV industry. According to a survey by IDS Software, 21% of RV dealers say hiring and retaining talent is a major challenge in 2023. This makes it more important than ever to take good care of the people in your business – the most valuable assets you have.

But what does it mean to "take good care" of your people? Simply paying a decent wage and providing an adequate benefits package may no longer be enough to keep employees happy and productive. You must work harder to encourage their engagement and support their fulfillment to get their best efforts and earn their loyalty.

As the chief people officer at Gray, Gray & Gray, a business consulting and accounting firm that serves a range of industries, it is my mission to help our team members realize their full potential by guiding and advising them along individual career paths that balance professional success with a sustainable work/life balance.

This is not a simple task, nor are there hard and fast guidelines to follow that will satisfy the expectations of every individual. But here are several frameworks to help encourage teamwork and build satisfaction among team members.

Meet People Where They Are

We all tend to think everybody is like us, thinks like us and wants what we want. But you should never assume all employees are alike. The individuals who make up your team are each unique, have their own stories and face their own challenges every day. Therefore, you should not approach HR issues with an inflexible agenda.

Be willing to view every employee as they wish to be seen, including the language you use, dress code policies, flexible scheduling – whatever you can do (within reason) to make them feel welcome, heard and appreciated.

From a legal – and moral – perspective, it is important to be equitable in your dealings with

"FROM A LEGAL – AND MORAL – PERSPECTIVE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE EQUITABLE IN YOUR DEALINGS WITH EMPLOYEES.

employees. Fair and consistent treatment of employees in the workplace will build trust, improve morale, engender loyalty and help spur productivity. A commitment to fair treatment at work can also be an important tool in recruiting new employees. On the other hand, favoritism can breed animosity and resentment toward the favored individuals and the employer.

Strategies for achieving workplace fairness include clearly embracing and stating the company's expectations of equitable treatment in the form of well-written policies, commitment to equitable practices and unbiased, consistent enforcement of rules.

Creating a fair and inclusive working environment may require commitments such as accessible workstations, gender-neutral restrooms and diverse hiring policies that demonstrate you are treating prospective and current employees fairly.

Ask What Your Employees Want

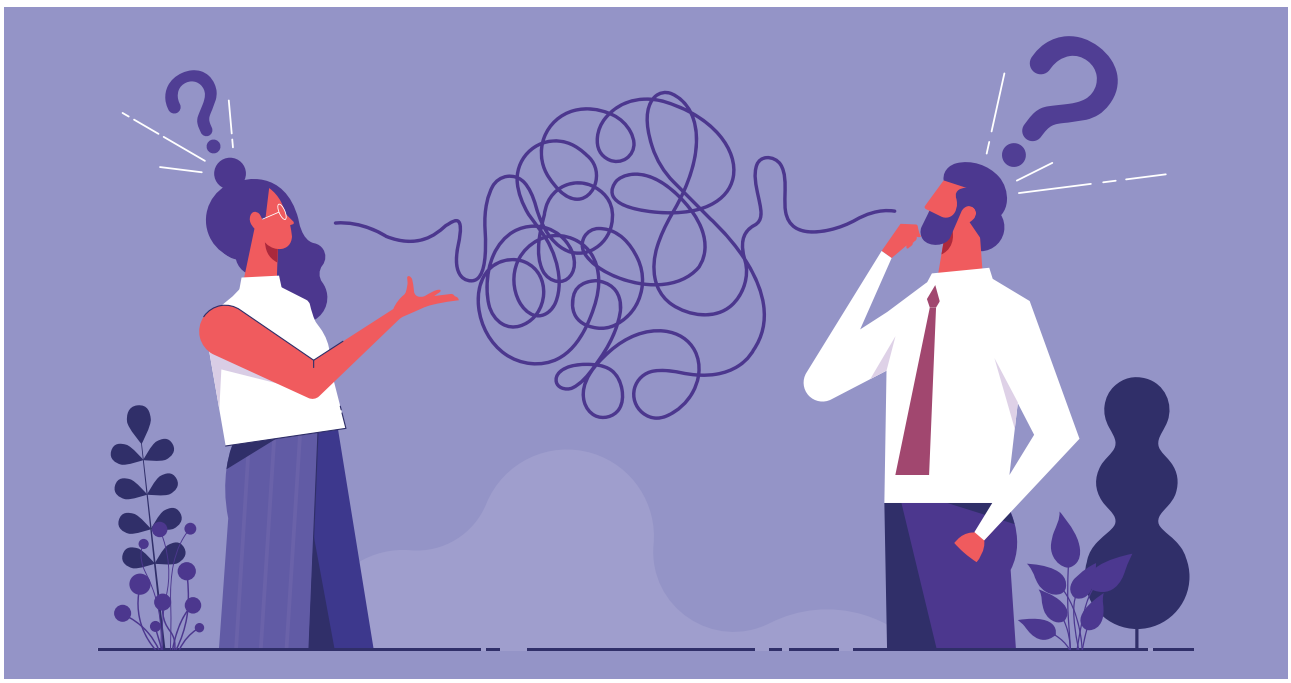
Because everyone is different it is difficult to find one-size-fits-all solutions to HR problems. For example, depending on where an employee is at in their career or life stage, employees might be concerned about their ability to keep up with technology or whether they have saved enough for retirement. They may not be worried about the same things as other workers, who may be more concerned about finding affordable child care, family health insurance coverage or working overtime and missing school pickup.

Do not try to guess what people want – ask them. Then do whatever you can to address their needs and concerns with a flexible set of benefits and policies. You will have happier, more productive workers who know that you have their interests at heart.

Be Clear and Transparent in Communications

Think about all the times when you've been frustrated by not knowing something, and how your reaction to a situation may have been different had you been privy to that information. If you want your employees to act like a cohesive and trusted team, you must treat them that way. You want to be able to trust them to play their parts in the organization, and they need to have confidence you are doing the same.

> "BE OPEN ABOUT THE BUSINESS, SHARING AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE ABOUT OPERATIONS, FINANCES AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.



Be open about the business, sharing as much information as possible about operations, finances and plans for the future. Encourage employees to do the same – no one should be afraid to point out a problem or bring bad news to your attention.

One excellent example of good communication: Do you have a succession plan in place? Share it with your employees so that they understand what will happen to "their" company once you retire or sell. Your openness will be appreciated and reciprocated.

Have Multiple Career Paths

Not everyone wants your job. Be sensitive to the level of interest, talent and ambition exhibited by individual employees. While some may be eager to move up the ladder and assume more responsibilities or move into management positions, others may be perfectly content with the work they do on a lower rung of the career ladder.

It is important, especially for new hires, that people understand that there is a place for them in your organization and that you are willing to support their ambitions with training and additional opportunity. This appeals to their need for acceptance, safety and security.

Bring a Little Fun to the Table

Yes, running an RV company is a day-in-day-out challenge that tests your resolve. And you want your employees to be as serious about their jobs as you are.

But all work and no play are not the way to build an open and collaborative team. Your HR budget should include a range of activities to show your appreciation for the hard work your people perform and to lighten up their days.

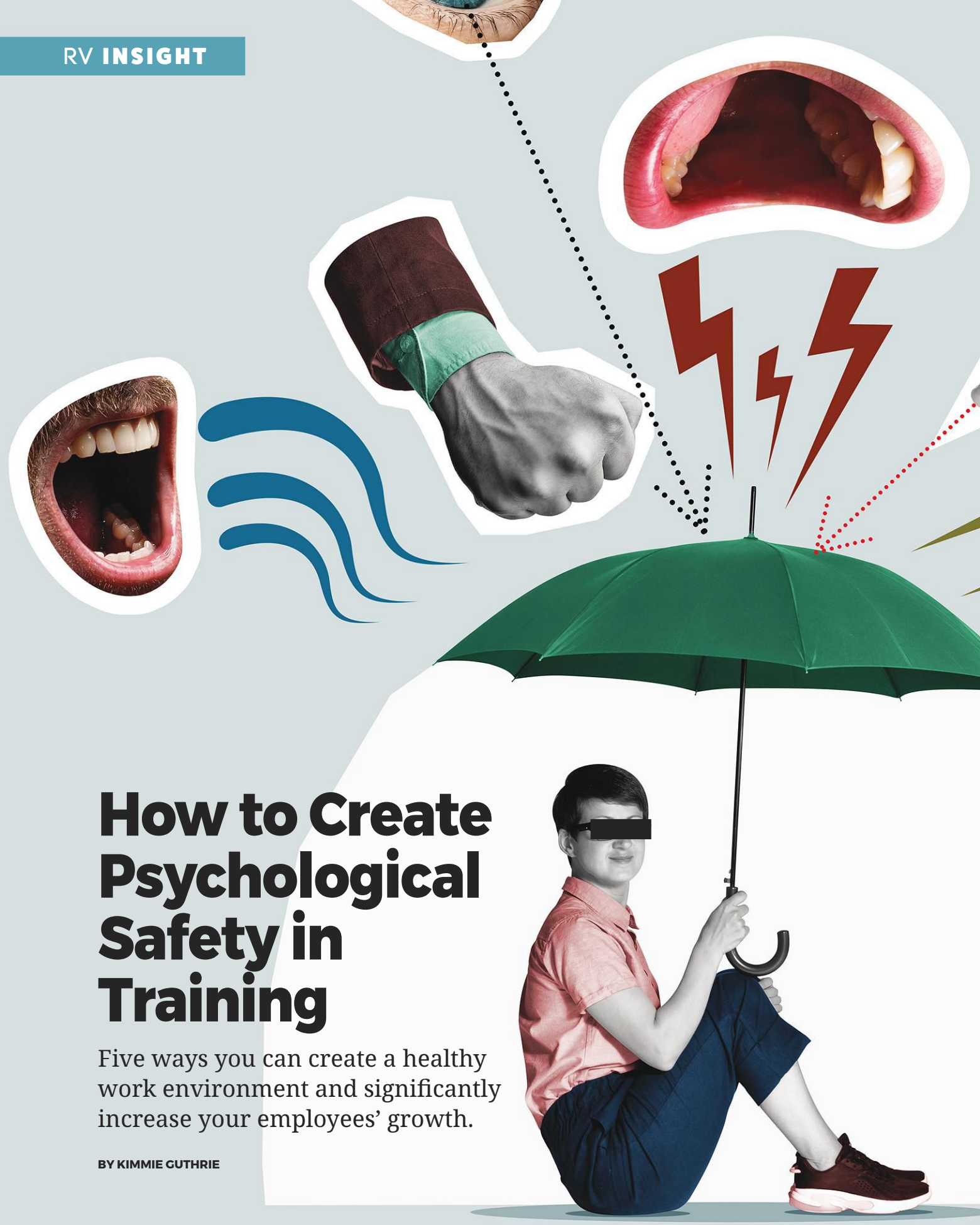
Some proven ideas include family outings, having pizza delivered during busy season, contests and games, or surprise rewards and giveaways. You'll be pleased by how much these efforts are welcomed.

Your role as a leader involves pushing boundaries to grow revenue and profits. But it also includes making sure the people on your team are capable, prepared and willing to support your efforts.

Embracing these ideas and making them part of your company's culture will go a long way toward ensuring that you have a cohesive and cooperative team on your side. RVP







How to Create Psychological Safety in Training

Five ways you can create a healthy work environment and significantly increase your employees' growth.

BY KIMMIE GUTHRIE



We have all had that moment in a training session. We are sitting in a group, learning about a new initiative and a question is asked. The tone or word choice of the response is condescending, and we cringe and sink a bit lower in our chair. Or, perhaps, you are the one sharing, making yourself vulnerable, and someone's response is less than supportive. An idea is shared with exuberance but is met with a defeating response of unacceptance or unwillingness to explore the alternative offered. I am confident each one of us could conjure up a memory like this – moments void of components that create psychological safety.



It has become increasingly important to create safe and positive company cultures for our employees. A recent brief by McKinsey and Co. stated "89% of employees believe that psychological safety in the workplace is essential." Simply put, when we feel safe, we learn and perform at a higher level.

So, what is psychological safety? And, more specifically, what does psychological safety look like in the context of learning and development and how do we as employees, peers and leaders create it?

Training Industry defines psychological safety as "the ability to take risks, speak up, work creatively and innovatively, and generally be able to be authentic in the workplace without fear of reprisal, discrimination or retaliation."

> "EVERYONE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND BUILDING AND MAINTAINING TRUST WITHIN OUR ORGANIZATIONS DAILY.

There are five key areas we can focus on today to create psychological safety for our employees and organizations.

Communicate and Build Trust

Learning groups often have unspoken rules or norms that most people assume and follow. The first step of creating psychological safety is to openly communicate these norms by setting clear ground rules, openly encouraging participants to be open to new ideas and discussing any blind spots that might come up during the training process. Use statements like the following:

- "We aren't in a hurry."
- "Take time to ponder."
- "We might come up with a new and improved process today."
- "No question is a silly one! If you are wondering, chances are someone else is, too."

It is essential to respect others while they are sharing. Be engaged during additional teaching on a skill, even if it is a skill in which you are already confident. When learning independently, keep a running list of questions to review with a peer or leader. Ask for hands-on learning opportunities – repeat, repeat and repeat again until you feel confident in new skills. Once the ground rules are set, agree to hold each other accountable to ensure the trust and integrity of the learning environment remain intact.

Psychological safety begins here, with trust built through holding each other accountable. A simple way to remember it is with this formula: consistency + time = trust. Everyone is responsible for effective communication and building and maintaining trust within our organizations daily.

Learning Opportunities

What is a learning opportunity? Job training manuals, on-the-job training, standard operating procedures (SOPs), virtual and computer-based training? Yes, those are all learning opportunities, but in truth, every day we are presented with opportunities to learn independently and in groups. We are both the instructor and the student.

So, how do we capitalize on these opportunities? First, ask questions. Ask all the questions. If now is not the opportune time, write it down and come back to it. Next, use technology whenever you can. Become familiar with resources like learning management systems, YouTube, podcasts and blogs. The modern age has given us the gift of an abundance of information at our fingertips.

Actively listen to subject matter experts – learn the lingo, the regulations and the best practices that both schooling and years of industry experience have taught them. Cross-train by asking for time to observe other job functions. Gaining knowledge in these ways has an exponential positive impact in both our current roles as well as our careers.

A final thought on this topic: Take the opportunity to challenge your own thinking. Ask questions like, "How could we approach this process a different way?" and, "What might be involved in making this initiative successful?" When we look at learning in this way, we realize that every day is full of learning opportunities and that psychological safety is an ongoing activity, not a one-time event.

Missteps – Now What?

Maintaining psychological safety is required especially in times when we or others make a misstep. Notice I didn't say failure, mistake or blunder. No, we all make missteps both small and not so small, and these situations are incredibly valuable learning opportunities. Reflection and curiosity are the most effective tools to lead with in these situations.

When we make a misstep, it is essential to ask questions and actively listen. Consider self-reflective questions like the following:

- What led me to that decision?
- What can I do differently when faced with this situation again?
- What is the most impactful thing I learned from this situation?
- What skills do I need to revisit based on what I have learned?

Another approach is to ask group-centric questions like:

- Can you walk me through the thought process before the decision?
- What is the most impactful thing you learned from this situation?
- What resources are available to you if this situation arises again?
- What skills can we walk through together to help you feel confident going forward?

The key to turning missteps into safe learning opportunities is leaving the assumptions, emotions and blame at the door. It happened. We would have liked a different outcome, but here we are together. What can we learn as individuals, as leaders and as an organization from this situation?

Gratitude and Recognition

As journalist and philanthropist Germany Kent said, "Gratitude is one of the most powerful human emotions. Once expressed, it changes attitude, brightens outlook and broadens our perspective."

Those three concepts are perfectly in line with creating ongoing psychologically safe learning environments.

How do we make room to express more gratitude and recognition in our learning environments every day? Be specific and tailor the delivery and the recognition to the person receiving it. Thank someone for asking that question, give a high five when a new idea is shared, and write a thank you note for each participant following a training session or to another employee who took time to teach you something new. Give daily awards for participation. Recommend and highlight to others the individuals who helped you learn along the way.

The real value of recognition and gratitude is the far-reaching ripple effect beyond their initial impact in the moment. Gratitude and recognition impact not only the recipient, but also the giver, the team and the organization. Consider today who you can recognize for their impact on your work and life.

Open and Candid Feedback

Feedback – both constructive and supportive – is inevitable. When we have feedback, we must share it. There is no better way for us to grow, improve and have a positive impact on the employees around us than sharing our personal experience.









> EVERY SITUATION IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OTHERS, OURSELVES AND OUR BUSINESS.

When offering feedback, lead with the way you felt: "I felt confident when I was able to complete all the steps correctly. The way this skill was presented really helped me learn it." Avoid "you" statements, such as: "You said this thing and I was upset because..." This approach often makes the recipient of the feedback defensive. When we become defensive, we halt hearing and start building our defense statements in our mind. Consider soliciting feedback by using surveys or even a confidential feedback email or suggestion box.

Feedback – when not shared – is a missed opportunity to improve. With feedback, keep curiosity in mind. Curiosity should be the leading behavior when both offering and receiving feedback. Every situation is an opportunity for us to learn more about others, ourselves and our business.

While my dream is that we can eradicate unsafe moments and environments all together, I know this isn't possible. Even when approaching situations with the best intentions, sometimes we have missteps. But we can commit and take action to create safer environments, one interaction at a time.

With improving communication, taking personal accountability for our growth and development, leading with curiosity and gratitude, and providing candid feedback, we are well on our way to creating the type of culture that supports learning. We want to be heard, seen and assured of the difference we make. Take time to consider what energy you are bringing into a room when you enter, and then be the change you wish to see. RVP

Kimmie Guthrie is the director of training for ThompsonGas. She has 20 years of training and development experience across multiple industries. Guthrie specializes in delivering on strategic employee development initiatives by providing instructional strategies and techniques for learning and defining scope and training objectives. Guthrie also spends time delivering classroom and virtual training to new and current ThompsonGas employees. She is passionate about helping individuals realize their potential. Guthrie has a strong commitment to providing superior service to both internal and external customers and does that through active listening, effective communication and working toward a common goal. Guthrie has served in numerous volunteer organizations, including Women in Propane, United Way of Weld County's Young Leaders Society and in local organizations in Alabama.

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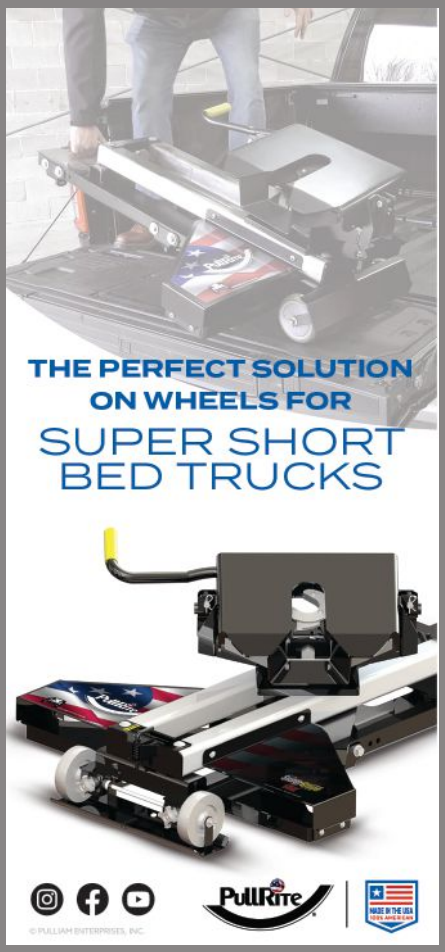
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Pit Stop



America celebrates its birthday every Fourth of July, marking its 247th year in 2023. *Here's a peek at last year's festivity numbers:*

- **$7.7 billion** – Amount Americans planned to spend on Fourth of July food
- **47.9 million** – Number of people who traveled 50+ miles for the holiday
- **150 million** – Number of hot dogs eaten each Fourth
- **$6.9 million** – Value of American flags imported annually
- **$2.4+ billion** – Estimated amount spent on fireworks in 2021

SOURCE: WALLETHUB.COM

APRIL SHIPMENTS

31,216 TOTAL RV SHIPMENTS

45.4% DECREASE compared to April 2022 record (57,192 units)

THROUGH APRIL, SHIPMENTS ARE DOWN **52.1%** with 109,816 units

"With the summer travel season kicking off this week, consumers will find many affordable RV options on dealer lots that are perfect for creating unforgettable memories with family and friends in the great outdoors," said RV Industry Association President and CEO Craig Kirby. "RV ownership remains one of the most economical ways for consumers to travel while also maintaining control over their costs, which is more important than ever for consumers right now."

HOME SWEET HOME



Key findings from RVIA's 2022 RV Industry Profile include:

- **TEXAS** remains the top destination for RV shipments, receiving 9.96% of total RV wholesale shipments, followed by California (6.4%), Florida (6.1%), Ohio (3.6%) and Michigan (3.5%).
- **INDIANA** continues to lead the U.S. in RV production, manufacturing nearly 87% of all RVs in the U.S. and Canada.
- Wholesale RV shipments finished at 493,000 units for the year with a retail value of **$27.06 BILLION.**

SOURCE: RVIA 2022 RV INDUSTRY PROFILE, AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS ONLINE

Eclipse Extravaganza



On April 8, 2024, a total solar eclipse will be visible across the U.S. and Canada. RVshare already reported a **20-time spike in RV rental bookings** compared to any other dates next year. The company saw a **150% increase** in bookings for the last total solar eclipse on Aug. 21, 2017.





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