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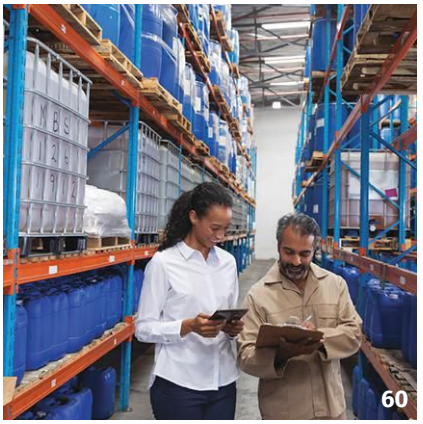
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Sometimes home is a long, long, long way from your house.









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MORE OF WHAT MATTERS

RV PRO



Whether you are a dealer, supplier, manufacturer or other type of professional in the RV industry, you would probably agree on these two points:

1. We need to continue to attract younger RV owners to the lifestyle, and
2. We need to continue to attract younger workers to careers in the industry.

I believe there is one surefire way to help reach both of those goals, and that is to increase diversity both among campers and among industry professionals.

There is evidence to support this. A recent study noted that 46% of workers ages 30 to 39 see a lack of diversity as a barrier to progress. Also, 4 out of every 10 camper households in the United States includes someone of Latino, Black, Asian or other non-white ethnicity, according to Kampgrounds of America (KOA).

As Earl B. Hunter Jr. of Black Folks Camp Too points out, minorities are a growing source of wealth in the U.S. – there are dollars to be spent by people of color, so it makes sense for the industry to become more inclusive.

According to global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company, companies could tap into an estimated $300 billion of value annually among Black consumers in the U.S. In 2019, expenditures by Black households totaled approximately $835 billion, and the combined spending by Black households has increased 5% annually over the past two decades, compared to 3% by white households. Another interesting finding: The median age of Black Americans is 34, while the median age of white Americans is a decade older.

That's not even considering the spending potential of people of other races, too.

RV PRO turned to Hunter a few months ago in preparation for the Diversity & Inclusion section in this issue. He was generous with his time and connections, and we thank him for his input. Hunter connected us with Jil Littlejohn Bostick, Winnebago Industries' vice president of corporate responsibility and inclusion and executive director of its foundation. Read more about Bostick's passion for connecting with people on pg. 34.

Hunter also introduced us to Tim Stanley, owner of Blackout EZ Window Covers, to hear his inspiring story as an inventor and business owner. Read more about Stanley and his online business on pg. 38.

In this issue, Linda Cahan's column addresses how to make sure the retail store at your dealership is welcoming to all customers, and Mel Selway discusses diversifying your parts and accessories inventory. Those columns appear on pgs. 57 and 60, respectively.

If there's anyone you know who is working to diversify the workforce at a company and/or connect with a diverse population of RVers, we'd like to know about it! Be sure to email me at jdking@cahabamedia.com.

We'd like to thank Hunter, Black Folks Camp Too and all organizations and companies in the outdoor space working to increase diversity among their workforce and in campgrounds. Enjoyment of the outdoors is truly for everyone, and working in and enjoying that lifestyle has benefits for us all.

As always, thanks for reading!

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Tin Can Tourists to Boost Crowd for HOF Induction Ceremony

An annual highlight on the RV calendar is the induction dinner and ceremony for the year's new RV/MH Hall of Fame class in Elkhart, Indiana. This year's ceremony is Monday, Aug. 21, with cocktails kicking off the festivities at 5:30 p.m. ET.

Now in its 51st year, this year's class is another "who's who" of the RV industry. Inductees will be Ron Breymier, executive director for the Indiana Manufactured Housing Association-Recreation Vehicle Indiana Council; Tom Manning Jr., manufacturer's representative for the RV industry who has worked for Tom Manning & Associates, a firm founded by his father in 1985; Karen Redfern, chief marketing officer and senior vice president at Go RVing; and Tim Vuerink, president at Veurink's RV Center, a family-owned and -operated dealership that opened in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1954. Vuerink has been with the dealership since 1971.

Last but not least are Forrest and Jeri Bone, former leaders of Tin Can Tourists, which purports to be the oldest RV club in the world, founded in 1919. The Bones headed up the organization for 21 years.

"The Tin Can Tourists were so appreciative that they're actually coming to hold a rally a couple days before (the induction)," said Darryl Searer, president of the RV/MH Hall of Fame.

Searer said he expects to sell about 100 extra dinner tickets because of that, and now expects around 400 to 450 people to watch this year's induction.

Inductees on the manufactured housing side and their respective categories are Paula Reeves, Alabama, finance; Knute Chauncey, Georgia, supplier; Marc Lifset, New York, supplier/association; Don Sharp, Indiana, finance; and Darlene Gardener, Nebraska, retailer.

To purchase a ticket to this year's event, go to rvmhhalloffame.org and click on "HOF/Dinner" at the top of the page.

Lightship to Open Colorado Manufacturing Facility

Lightship, which claims to be America's first all-electric RV company, signed a lease agreement for a 32,000-square-foot facility at a business park in Broomfield, Colorado. The space will house the company's pilot manufacturing operations for the Lightship L1, an aerodynamic, solar and battery-powered travel trailer that launched in March.

Lightship is expected to move in and begin operations in 2024. The company projects it will add more than 100 area jobs in high-tech manufacturing and clean technology over the next few years.

"Colorado is the ideal location for our first production facility," said Toby Kraus, Lightship co-founder and CEO. "This is a big milestone for Lightship and a stepping stone to ultimately producing thousands of units in the future and helping to introduce electrification to a pastime enjoyed by millions of American families. I grew up in Colorado and am thrilled for Lightship to set up its first production facility and contribute to the growing ecosystem of climate tech and hardware manufacturing in my home state."

Lightship was co-founded by Ben Parker and Kraus, both former employees of Tesla, who said they saw room for innovation in the RV industry just as Tesla had caused disruption to the car market when it launched.

The company said its Broomfield location allows it to pull from a strong labor pool that includes Denver, Boulder and surrounding areas. The new site will expand Lightship's Colorado and California operations and represents a key indicator of the company's projected growth as it ramps up large-scale production.

Lightship plans to showcase its L1 all-electric RV at various events in Colorado throughout the year, including the Overland Expo Mountain West in Loveland, Colorado on Aug. 25-27.

Survey: Nearly a Quarter of Campers On the Job

Camping information and booking website The Dyrt found in a survey that 23.8% of campers say they worked remotely while camping in 2022.

That statistic was identical to the work-from-campsite stat from the previous year.

"With return-to-the-office efforts across the country, one might have expected the work-from-campsite rate to decrease, but it stayed level," said Kevin Long, CEO of The Dyrt. "Work from campsite is here to stay. You can't put the toothpaste back in the tube, and you can't put a productive working camper back in the cubicle."

Of the thousands of respondents who took part in the survey, 13.4% are categorized as avid campers, meaning they took more than 10 camping trips in 2022. That group was found to be nearly two times more likely to have worked from a campsite last year than other campers.

Van-lifers are one of the main groups of people who take their work on the road and, in fact, Long and founder Sarah Smith ran The Dyrt from their camper van for six months in the latter half of 2021 while crisscrossing the country.

"Remote work doesn't have to be work from home," Smith said. "As the leading resource and community for campers, we love it when a member of our fully remote team works from a campsite. It adds energy to our meetings when someone logs on from the side of a lake or the base of a mountain."

Recent technological advances have made the work-from-campsite lifestyle even easier to attain, the company noted, citing SpaceX's satellite-based Starlink, which recently announced it can provide high-speed internet while a vehicle is in motion.

Becker, Ingrassia and Brunoforte Receive Industry Honors



During RVs Move America Week in June in Washington, D.C., three awards were presented to members of the RV industry. The RV Industry Association (RVIA) each year honors outstanding contributions to the industry specifically in the areas of RV standards, education and government affairs.

Mike Becker

The first award to be presented was the Distinguished Achievement in RV Standards, which recognizes an individual who has contributed to the enhancement of RV standards in the industry. Mike Becker, the

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head of compliance at Forest River, was the recipient.

"Mike has been a key member of our technical subcommittees for many years and has contributed considerable expertise and guidance to the group," said RVIA Chair Kevin McArt. "He has served as an ambassador for the outreach and training for the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards recall reporting and responsibilities, and currently chairs the Regulatory and Safety Subcommittee.

In addition, Becker has served on and provided technical input for the Standards Steering Committee and RV-C Committee, while also serving as his chair's alternate for the National Fire Protection Agency 1192 Standard. His commitment to improving safety by serving and assisting in the development of standards, enforcement positions and policies has greatly assisted the standards department and is respected by his colleagues in the RV industry.

Phil Ingrassia

The next award was the National Education Service Award, which recognizes an individual who has been instrumental in the development of educational programs in the RV industry.

"The award this year goes to Phil Ingrassia, president of the RV Dealers Association," McArt said. "Phil has championed industry education programs and technician training throughout his entire career. Most recently, he was a driving force in the creation and execution of the RV Technical Institute.

"As one of the organization's original board members, he aided in the success of the RV Technical Institute's 2022 recruitment goals by assisting with strategic planning, attending recruiting events, promoting the institute through RV Dealers Association channels and events, and always working to advance technician training and certification," McArt added.

Debbie Brunoforte

The third award, the David J. Humphreys RV Industry Unity Award, was presented to Debbie Brunoforte, president of Little Dealer, Little Prices. The award recognizes an individual who continuously strives to encourage the multiple constituencies of the RV industry to work collectively for the growth and betterment of the industry.

"Debbie personifies the spirit of the Unity Award through her work as the longtime president of Little Dealer, Little Prices, now a Campers Inn company, and in her volunteer service on many industry organizations," McArt said. "She has always championed the belief that the RV industry is strongest when it works together."

Brunoforte is also a past RVDA chairman of the board and was recognized with that organization's highest honor, the James B. Summers Award, in 2014. In addition, she is a longtime member of the Go RVing Coalition and played an instrumental role in forming the Arizona RV Dealers Association. In 2014, Brunoforte was inducted in the RV/MH Hall of Fame and was the inaugural recipient of the RV Women's Alliance RV Trailblazer Award for lifetime achievement earlier this year. She continues to work on the industry's behalf through her continuing service as a member of the RV Dealers Association Board of Delegates as a participating past chairman.

Keystone RV Program Seeks to Help Neurodiverse Employees

Keystone RV has developed a new program that it said will aid its neurodiverse employees. Responding to increasing rates of autism in the United States and to further its efforts to be truly inclusive in its workforce, the Keystone RV customer service group has developed a strategy to build a work environment that supports employees with various abilities to thrive and reach their highest potential.

Keystone's Suzi Swinehart, an expert in behavior intervention and coaching, explained why the initiative is so important.

"The CDC published a study in March that estimates 1 in 36 8-year-olds are affected by autism spectrum disorder," Swinehart said. "Sadly, we know that today 85% of people with neurodiversity are unemployed. That's unacceptable and we can do something about it. We have the opportunity to develop a supportive and safe work environment so these individuals can enjoy the social benefits of a work community and the security of a paycheck."

The company said the roots of Keystone's Community Alliance Program were planted in 2017 when the company hired an employee's son to work in their parts department. Since then, the company has invested in resources to expand the program, adding training for all employees and an expert in behavior intervention and coaching to the team.

The company launched profiling the program and its impact.

Keystone works with Bristol, Indiana-based ADEC and Goodwill of Indiana to identify opportunities for their clients with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are now employed throughout its customer service team.

Inspired by the work that Randy Lewis did in Walgreen's distribution centers, Keystone hopes that their program will educate and encourage other organizations to open their doors to employees with different abilities.

Ironhorse Funding Expands Into RV Financing, Refinancing

Massachusetts-based Ironhorse Funding, a provider of financing solutions to motorcycle and powersports enthusiasts and dealers, said it will be expanding its lending programs to include RVs.

Effective immediately, RVers with loans on their motorized or towable RVs can apply to refinance to lower their monthly payments through Ironhorse's online refinance application. Consumers looking to finance a new or used RV purchase can apply through Ironhorse Funding's finance application.

Ironhorse Funding is also working with select agents and originators to help RV dealers in 45 states offer their customers competitive financing rates and flexible terms backed by Ironhorse Funding's 5-star customer service, it said.

This marks the second program expansion in 2023 for Ironhorse Funding. With the addition of RVs, riders and adventurers can now finance or refinance motorcycles, ATVs, side-by-sides, personal watercraft, motorhomes, towable RVs and more.

"We've been anticipating the addition of RVs to our dealer and direct-to-consumer lending programs for a while," said CEO Jon Krumdick. "We waited until we were ready to enter the market with a very competitive program as well as the technology updates and staff to fully support the launch." RVP

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High marks for Jayco's 2024 Class Cs

Jayco updates its Greyhawk and Seneca XT to meet customer demands for greater connectivity, reliability and comfort.

BY RONNIE WENDT

A grade C in school signifies an average student, but a Class C in the RV world is anything but ordinary. Comfort, consistency and class are embodied in a Class C motorhome constructed with a cutaway chassis.

The appeal of Class C RVs, which offer both luxury and reliability, has led to a steady rise in ownership, says Cory Weatherton, Jayco's senior director of product development for motorized RVs.

Weatherton, in charge of Class C, Class B and gas Class A Jayco and Entegra motorized products' development, notes the popularity of Class C motorhomes has soared as more people seek an RV that offers home-like amenities on the road.

He cites two key reasons for the popularity of Class Cs: fuel economy and drivability. Class C motorhomes are built on a van or truck chassis, making them lighter weight and more aerodynamic, which improves fuel economy. This design also makes them easier to drive and park compared to their larger Class A counterparts.

"Though gas prices seem to have topped out, they are still consistently at $3.75 or more a gallon. A Class C has better fuel economy than a Class A," he says. "Drivability is also a factor. Driving a Class C feels similar to driving the vehicle you have at home."

Class Cs are motorized, eliminating worries about attaching the RV to the towing vehicle. At the same time, these motorhomes offer tow capacities that enable towing additional vehicles or trailers behind them. Travelers can bring along their recreational equipment such as boats, ATVs or motorcycles.

Class Cs also offer plenty of room for furniture, the amenities of home and storage. The accommodations include comfortable sleeping areas, spacious living areas with the electronic amenities of home, ample kitchens with residential appliances and cozy fireplaces.

All these things add up to a versatile RV that appeals to many demographics of consumers, Weatherton adds. "A hasty generalization is that Class Cs appeal to empty nesters and retirees who tour U.S. campgrounds a week at a time," he says. "But Jayco offers Class Cs that target every demographic."

JAYCO HISTORY IN CLASS Cs

Jayco wasn't always in the Class C business. In fact, the 55-year-old company got its start in 1968, when founders Lloyd and Bertha Bontrager built a camping trailer.

In 1977, Jayco entered the Class C motorhome market with the JayMini motorhome series. By 2015, the company had opened a new manufacturing plant for Entegra Coach, which created manufacturing space for Class C and Class A motorhomes. Today the company has an expanse of product, with 10 Class C motorhomes to fit every segment of buyer.

"We build all 10 series for a specific reason," Weatherton says.

And even as high interest rates and inflation leads to a slowdown across the RV industry, Weatherton notes sales of Class Cs remain strong. "Jayco's dealer base has a manageable amount of product; we are not overproducing and customer interest in Class Cs remains high," he says.



JAYCO CLASS C OVERVIEW

Redhawk, Greyhawk, Melbourne and Seneca are four brand names that embody all that Jayco offers the Class C marketplace. The Redhawk represents the company's entry-level Class C, while the Seneca is the Cadillac of Jayco's Class Cs.

No matter the model level or price point, Jayco promises to offer "the best ride in the industry" among Class Cs. Weatherton says they accomplish this mission with JRide, a Jayco exclusive ride and handling package designed to deliver the ultimate RV driving experience.

This system offers shock absorbers that react to bumps and holes in the road, and excessive sway and bouncing, for a smoother ride and handling experience. The system also includes Hellwig helper springs that prevent the chassis from sagging under weight, rubber isolation mounts that minimize noise and vibration, sway bars and balanced drive shafts.

"Someone new to the RVing experience will not struggle to drive our Class Cs because of the JRide system," he says. "An RV that doesn't handle well will affect their entire experience. We engineer the ultimate driving experience in an RV to offer the best ride in the industry."

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2024

Jayco has a lot going on in 2024, including new models and floorplans, a focus on 12-volt and residential appliances, solar power and connectivity.

Greyhawk Updates



The Greyhawk is not a new Class C for the company. But it is completely updated for 2024 to offer the most room and safety features of Jayco's Class Cs. One thing that Jayco will never abandon is their ride and handling packages, Weatherton says. The



The Seneca XT is built on a Ford F600 4x4 chassis.



The Greyhawk has been updated for 2024.

JRide Plus ride and handling package is Jayco's top-of-the-line package, which includes:

- A computer-balanced driveshaft
- Koni FSD Shocks
- A heavy-duty rear stabilizer bar
- A standard front stabilizer bar
- Hellwig helper springs
- Rubber isolation mounts for a smooth, safe ride

With the JRide Plus handling package, the RV "handles better than anything out there," he says. "The high-end Koni shocks are dual valve shocks that add to comfort and stability. The Hellwig stabilizer bar increases stability by 65% while the Hellwig helper springs provide greater left-to-right stability."

The new model year ushers in new exterior graphics, stainless steel appliances, new flooring, new wallboard and more. Jayco has moved away from gas-electric, two-way refrigerators in the Greyhawk line, favoring a 12-volt fridge that cools down more quickly and offers the same or more cubic area.

The Greyhawk's one-piece, seamless front cap resists wear and tear like fading or moisture damage, while its automotive-bonded panoramic window with a power shade lets in plenty of natural light but resists leakage.

The impressive front cap with panoramic window is not new – it has been offered since 2016. "It has been a hit with customers," Weatherton says. "Customers love the panoramic window, because it lets the great outdoors into their RVs."

But it is the only front cap like it in the industry, he adds. "Other designs have a seam, which is a common leak spot," Weatherton explains. "We've been building the front cap with an automotive-bonded window since 2016 and have had zero warranty claims about water infiltration."

The rig also offers a 7,500-pound tow capacity and 750-pound tongue capacity. Weatherton explains tow capacity is the maximum amount of weight the RV can tow safely, while tongue weight is the portion of the load that rests on the hitch. The recommended ratio is to have a tongue weight rating that is 10% of the tow capacity rating.

"We are the only manufacturer who sticks to this 10% ratio," he says. "Most manufacturers have a 500-pound tongue capacity with a 7,500-pound tow capacity."

The 2024 Greyhawk also offers power theater seats. "We used to have manual seats, but we got into a price point where people expect to have power seats," he says.

The Greyhawk's overhead bunk also boasts a weight capacity







The Seneca XT offers an electric fireplace, a residential-size refrigerator and now comes in two new floorplans.

of 750 pounds, which is 300 pounds more than the industry standard. Here, owners can sleep with two full-sized adults or store extra gear while traveling.

The unit also offers solar power to reduce the cost and load of electrical use in the motorhome. A standard 200-watt solar panel with a dual controller will monitor and charge the house and chassis' batteries simultaneously, Weatherton says.

Seneca XT



Jayco debuted the Seneca XT in Hershey, Pennsylvania, in 2022. Built on a Ford F600 4x4 chassis, with a 6.7-liter, power stroke, V8 turbo diesel engine, the new motorhome met a niche of buyers, especially in Canada, Weatherton says.



"When the Seneca XT was built on a Freightliner chassis, our Canadian customers needed an endorsement on their driver's license," he says. "By putting it on a F600 chassis, our Canadian customers no longer need that endorsement on their driver's license."

Jayco added the JRide Premium ride and handling package to ready the Seneca XT for the roughest of roads. The rugged, all-terrain motorhome is available in six striking paint schemes and offers integrated front and rear auxiliary lighting, a 2-inch BDS radius arm suspension lift and all-terrain tires.

"Our goal was to provide a 4WD unit that handled well in remote areas," he says.

Jayco introduced two new Seneca XT floorplans, the 32U, which is 34 feet, 3 inches long and can sleep up to four, and the 35L, which is 37 feet, 4 inches long and can sleep five.

"Our new shorter floorplan is a small compact unit with a lot of pass-through storage, which is a rare floorplan for Class Cs," he says. "It offers room for bikes and kayaks and has a large lounge in the rear with a panoramic window. We know that people with Class Cs prefer the view."

As of 2024, the Seneca XT is available with the Starlink satellite Internet system. "Starlink is incredible in terms of speed and reliability," Weatherton says. "It comes with a hefty price tag, but we have taken that step to give customers reliable connectivity. If constant connectivity isn't important, we offer Wi-Fi range extenders with 4G hotspots and even analog units."

"For larger units like the Seneca XT or the Seneca Prestige, we offer a residential fridge that is 18 to 22 cubic feet with ice and water in the door," Weatherton says. "Customers with larger units often take two- to four-week trips, where a residential refrigerator really makes sense."

Units also come with convection ovens, which use a method of heat transfer known as convection to circulate heat evenly throughout the unit. "Now baked items will cook more evenly than a traditional oven and use less propane, which changes the game in how consumers use this unit," he says.

Electric fireplaces are also available, which Weatherton says are "great for ambiance and heating. You can heat up the camper on a cool fall morning and even supplement propane heat with heat from the fireplace to conserve propane on board."

Solar power comes standard on many Jayco Class Cs. Two hundred watts of solar power is standard but can be expanded to 350 watts by adding more solar panels on the roof or on the side. "With the Seneca XT, we are developing a lithium battery package to offer up to 1,400 watts of solar power," he says. "There is a lot of real estate on the roof for that. Most RVers desire at least some solar power, but some users want enough solar power to power everything."

For 2024, Jayco has taken its Class Cs to an even higher level of comfort, consistency and class, which will likely earn high marks from consumers. RVP

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SMALLER, LIGHTER, MORE MOBILE

— THE NEXT STEP IN MOTORHOMES

Sunseeker and Forester bring a new Class C and chassis to Forest River's lineup to tap into the ever-growing 'van life' market.

BY ROB MERWIN



The Forester TS is built on the Ford Transit Series and is more of a "B+" than a traditional Class C.

There's going to be a new player among Forest River's Sunseeker and Forester Class Cs – the PM Series. Built on the Dodge Ram ProMaster chassis – new for the product line – it is outfitted to be smaller, lighter and more mobile, targeting the growing trend and customer demographic for off-grid adventuring that's largely become associated with the burgeoning "van life" RVing lifestyle.

"Customers can get out, travel and be active – that's the next step in smaller motorhomes," says Kary Katzenberger, Sunseeker and Forester product manager/sales manager, who also oversees new product development and teams with Forest River's engineering and production, as well as purchasing and marketing. "We're attacking that 'van lifestyle' to give the end consumer more maneuverability to go where they want to go for less money with more options and features."

To better understand the PM, it's helpful to first understand the segments of other Sunseeker and Forester products, which, as Katzeberger explains, are essentially sister products.

Within the lines, they are broken down into different segments: LE, built on the Ford E-450, E-350 and Chevy 3500 cutaways, the three chassis that represent 75% of Sunseeker and Forester RVs (the LE is the entry-level price point); Classics, built on the E-450 series due to its larger size, which come with more options such as full-body paint and more standard features like Wi-Fi Gateway; MBS, built on the Mercedes-Benz cutaway, which has a maximum length of 24 feet and is marketed more toward couples, rather than families; and the TS, built on the Ford Transit Series.

"We're trying to expand our TS business," Katzenberger says. "The last few years have been tough for us to get the Ford Transits – Ford was building the van bodies, but not really the cutaways. And we're looking at new floorplans for the Transit, which can be built on the all-wheel-drive platform so that moving forward we can make more of an adventure package and people can go off grid."

The TS is a smaller unit at 24 feet long (the LE and Classic range from 25 feet to 32 feet) and are more of a "B+" versus a true Class C, the difference being that the overhead bunk area that is built on traditional Class Cs is not available on the Transit, but features a shallow cap to raise it up to give the appearance of a van body and provides aerodynamic benefits, as well as additional interior height.



WHAT'S NEW: SMALLER, LIGHTER & MOBILE

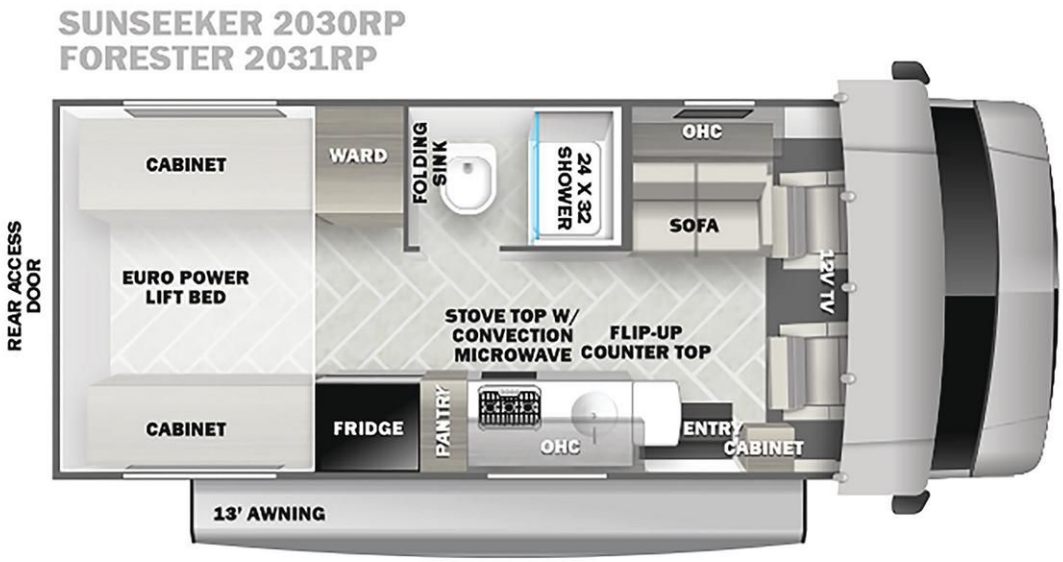
While Forest River is continually developing new floorplans and designs for the Sunseeker and Forester, the manufacturer is introducing the PM Series. While the ProMaster cutaway is similar to the MBS and Transit chassis in length at 24 feet, it will provide Forest River the platform to introduce new construction materials that are lighter and stronger.

"Dodge only allows us to build on the unloaded vehicle weight, which is approximately 7,400 pounds, so it has to be a very light unit," Katzenberger explains.

As a result, Forest River is using new technologies in the PM, and once they are fully developed, they will also migrate to the Ford Transit and Mercedes-Benz products to also lighten unit weights. "It will allow us to build more on the units due to the restrictions of weight," he says.

As new technologies are introduced, the Sunseeker and Forester products will be moving away from traditional, standard builds, as the new lightweight materials are allowing Forest River to do more with the coach than previously possible. A polypropylene composite material, TransCore, provided by vendor Ridge Corp., is presently being used in heavy-duty fleet vehicles and semi-trailers for lightweighting.

> **"We're taking out a lot of the materials to save weight, but without sacrificing strength."**



The new Dodge ProMaster Series Sunseeker 2030RP/Forester 2031RP floorplan.

Now it's being adopted by Forest River.

According to Ridge Corp., TransCore is a lightweight, abrasion and puncture resistant, engineered thermoplastic composite sandwich panel. The panel is engineered with thermoplastic high glass content skins that are thermally fused to a resilient thermoplastic core, which provides an optimized structure for durability and stiffness at the lowest weight possible. The 1-PC seamless structural weather resistant composite panel is hydrophobic and resists corrosion, mildew and degradation.

Additional benefits include being 100% waterproof, impact resistant, UV and weather resistant, 100% recyclable, insect resistant; it also has an increased trade-in value.

"Not only will the units be super light, they will be super strong with high screw retentions," Katzenberger says. "There won't be any concerns about screwing into it and having material separations. There are a lot of lightweight materials out there, but without screw retention, they won't work in our industry. The fastening ability of what we're using is actually stronger than wood, which we now won't be using, or much aluminum.

"We're taking out a lot of the materials to save weight, but without sacrificing strength – we're really excited about it."

Cabinets are also being reimagined with new, lighter-weight "European-like" construction, as opposed to the standard home construction-type cabinets that the RV industry has typically relied on. "We're removing unnecessary material while not compromising the strength and integrity of the structure."

Using the Dodge chassis, Katzenberger says, is a win-win. It encourages the use of new technologies while also satisfying new customer demand for lighter-weight units. "We're finding that our customers want smaller, lighter units – it's where everything is trending. They want to be mobile as possible and get out and adventure, which is why we're working with the ProMaster."

CLASS Cs MEET THE VAN LIFE

The PM is a front-drive unit, allowing for easy handling and the ability to travel over most terrain. It will also be a lithium-based product without a generator and fully operational off grid. The coach features a 12-volt system with the exception of some 110-volt outlets, though those have inverters so they can run 12-volt systems, including the air conditioner.

"It also has a tremendous amount of storage space inside with a Euro-lift bed that, once raised, can be used to accommodate bikes and whatever toys they can fit in the rear garage area," Katzenberger notes.

Newer customers want to be more nimble while having a smaller footprint. And as that segment continues to grow, Katzenberger says Forest River is primed to give customers what they want as the demographic and its needs evolve.

The PM is completely designed and, at the time of this writing, was on the production launch pad for the end of July for model year 2024. It will be introduced at the Hershey RV Show and Forest River's dealer open house.

"Our end consumers don't seek the big TVs or bigger kitchens. They want to be outside, explore, sit by the campfire and do their cooking. But they do want bigger bathrooms, which we now have – fully enclosed as opposed to a wet bath. Our features will continue to develop in order to give consumers the best possible product for what they want to do.

"The B van market is just exploding, and we plan to be there for our customers – for today and into the future." RVP

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UNDER THE BIG SKY

Expanding to Billings, Montana, **Midway Auto & RV** strives to continue to meet customer demands and offer excellent service.

BY STEPHANIE PATRICK



Keith Grant Jr. and his wife, Brook, took ownership of Midway Auto & RV's first three locations in 2019. A fourth store in Billings, Montana, opened in July.

Midway Auto & RV launched its Billings, Montana, store in mid-July with an open house of pre-owned vehicles and a couple hundred new and used RVs, including a large selection of both Jayco and Keystone towables. Plans are to offer as many as 450 RVs soon to meet the demand in the Big Sky State's large metro area and regional hub in the mountain west.

The new location boasts a 32,000-square-foot building on more than 8 acres, and it's considered by Midway to be a huge step toward growth for the entire Cody, Wyoming-based company.

"The Wyoming/Montana area is very outdoorsy, but we have a short summer season...," says Matthew Lengfelder, Midway's marketing director. "Billings is the largest population base within a six-hour drive, and the closest city with more than 100,000 people in it."

Keith Grant Jr., Midway's owner, says the store will allow the entire company to more consistently compete against the large chain dealerships by offering more brands and dedicated service bays in the greater-Billings area.

The expansion is just the latest move by Midway. The dealership's roots date back to the late-1960s when Keith Grant Sr. was fixing cars for Midway Motors, then based in Lovell, Wyoming; he later purchased the business. His son, Ken Grant, bought Midway in 1997 and started a dealership in Lovell with seven used automobiles.

Keith, Ken's brother, became general manager of the Cody showroom in June 2003. Then, responding to customers' requests, the brothers began accepting used trailers as trade-ins around 2010 and started selling new RVs from Heartland, Keystone and Forest River in 2014. The dealership became one of five dealerships in the country to be an exclusive Keystone dealership.

Midway offers Keystone, Jayco, Dutchmen and Crossroads brands among others now. Ken and Keith added dealerships in Worland, Wyoming, in 2006 and Laurel, Montana, in 2016. Keith and his wife, Brook, took ownership of both Wyoming stores and the Laurel operation in 2019.



Midway Auto & RV's Billings location

Ken continues to run Midway Marine in Lovell, the family's boat dealership. Keith Sr. retired many years ago.

"Our dad instilled a strong work ethic for me and my brother," Keith says. "We were able to grow the business as demand increased.

"There was never a grand plan, just keep doing good work and keep up with community demand," he adds. "Midway has been blessed with hard-working, intelligent team members over the years. Combined with a community that has rewarded our hard work with continued support over several decades. That has been Midway's formula for success."

Midway is one of Wyoming's largest RV dealerships now with annual revenue in excess of $25 million. That includes increasing revenue each year since 2016, Lengfelder says.

Midway's expansion into southern Montana in 2016 led the way to enter the Billings market. The Laurel store's sales grew exponentially over seven years, offering towables ranging from both Dutchmen Kodiaks and Astorias to Crossroads Zingers and KZ Sportsmens.

"We outgrew our real estate back in 2019," Keith says. "I started looking at potential expansion, but then the pandemic hit and everything was turned upside down.

"Our industry thrived over those 18 months, which allowed the business to naturally grow into Billings," he adds.

Plans are to move Laurel's inventory and operations to the Billings location – about 20 miles away – soon. How Midway will use the Laurel store in the future has yet to be determined, Lengfelder says.

The Billings store will employ more than 20 people when fully staffed, bringing Midway's roster to more than 65 employees by fall. That includes several family members.

> **"We were able to grow the business as demand increased... There was never a grand plan, just keep doing good work and keep up with community demand."**

Keith says expansion into Billings makes sense because both Cody and Worland are smaller markets within Wyoming, making it more difficult to add new customers. However, Cody is at the east entrance of Yellowstone National Park, which provides tourist traffic and an opportunity for them to shop campers at Midway.



Midway Auto & RV staff picnic

The Cody store tends to pick up a dozen or more sales each season from cross-country travelers, Lengfelder says.

"We don't have much competition until you go about 250 miles down to Casper, (Wyoming), which is in the central part of the state," Lengfelder says. Before the Billings store opened, Midway carried more than 340 RVs between the three stores; its typical RV sales period is April through November, when RVs account for about 70% of Midway's inventory.

Thanks to increased digital marketing and the ability of Wyoming dealers to often offer lower prices due to lower cost of business in Wyoming than, say, the northern Colorado RV dealerships, Midway attracts many out-of-state



customers looking for specific makes and models.

"The brands we carry are highly sought after and meet the demands of our area," says Keith, who favors Keystone and Jayco products because of the manufacturer's quality and ease in dealing with warranty claims. "We have a lot of mountains, so you are not going to want to take on big, heavy stuff. Keystone and Jayco have a nice mix of travel trailers and fifth wheels that work in our neck of the woods."

However, servicing campers other than Midway's inventory and those of its customers is difficult because of both space constraints and staffing woes. Lengfelder estimates sales account for about 90% of Midway's annual revenue.

The Billings store includes four service bays for vehicles and four dedicated to campers, which should lessen the demand on the Cody store. Cody has a total of four bays for cars and campers and a small parts store.

Whether Midway and the rest of the RV industry continues to grow depends on what happens both economically and politically in the next few years, Keith says.

"The influx of new residents in (both) Montana and Wyoming have tended to be on the higher-income levels, pushing up property values and increasing property taxes," he says. "For some longer-term residents, this eats into their discretionary money that gets used for outdoor toys like side-by-sides and campers."

He adds, "We have not seen a slowdown in our business, though. Again, our goal is to meet customer demands with quality products and outstanding service." RVP



LIVING LEGACIES

MORryde International's humble beginnings, innovative solutions and historical values make it an industry leader, especially on the rough roads.

BY JORDAN BENSCHOP



The year is 1966, and the RV industry is flourishing in Elkhart, Indiana, the growing heart of the market's manufacturing division. With opportunities heavy in the air, a local U.S. Army veteran, Bob Moore Sr. – whose small team computerized the military payroll system – decides to leave his family's dry cleaning business to pursue a need in the booming market. The question: How do RVs drive safely on rough roads?

"He purchased the rights to a rubber shear spring patent," says Jack Enfield, sales and marketing manager of Moore's then-to-be company, MORryde International. The new founder began manufacturing suspension systems for trailers that towed RVs.

By the 1980s, Moore's rubber springs formed a successful business to serve motorhomes and towables. Over the years, his products even caught the eye of school buses, transit buses and specialty vehicle markets. It wasn't long before customers were asking the company to help fill needs in metal fabrication, and according to MORryde's website, a "willingness to try anything compelled us to give it a shot." The company purchased a few machines secondhand.

"In the 1990s, MORryde expanded into metal fabrication and chassis upfitting," Enfield says – a big step for the business. "And in 2009, it expanded into the aftermarket, with the development and marketing of many aftermarket RV and Jeep products."

Hard work, ingenuity and a can-do attitude have always been at MORryde's core, the company says – ideals that made the company an industry leader in protecting and providing durability for RVers on rough roads.





EYES ON SAFETY

MORryde has grown from humble beginnings to a multi-plant facility with more than 900,000 square feet and 1,000-plus on staff. Moore served as the company's





president until he retired in 1985. Even as leadership was passed to his sons – Rodney and Bob Jr. – the company has stayed open to possibilities in business and product innovation, from its landmark rubber springs to its newest suspension product, coined All Trek 4000.

"The All Trek 4000 is a rubber equalizer that is easily installed on travel trailers and fifth wheels, with leaf spring suspension systems. It replaces the center equalizer and uses rubber to cushion and absorb shock," Enfield says.

The product has 40% more rubber and a unique travel slot that allows up to 4 inches of combined suspension travel, which creates smoother towing and better protects the trailer's components from road shock damage, Enfield says.

MORryde also recently debuted its Safe T Rail – a residential-style handrail with 54 inches of continuous rail surface – and its Latch Extender for additional leverage and stability, which the company says are especially great for kids and seniors entering and exiting the RV.

"We will be introducing a line of sliding trays for griddles in the near future, as well," Enfield says.




Safe-T-Rail

LIVING LEGACIES

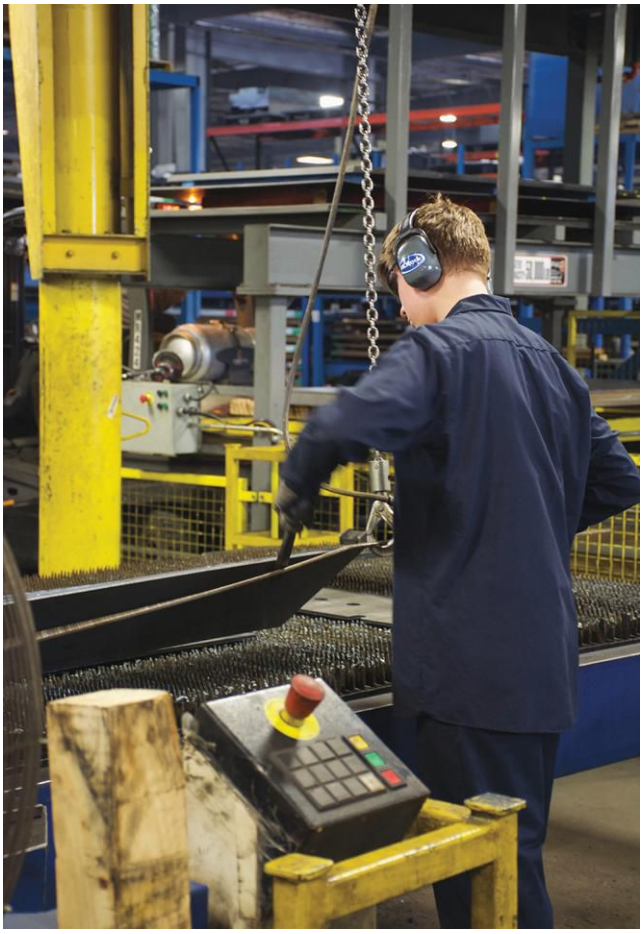
The company says its mindset on customers was and continues to be, "What else can we do for you?" – a nod to Moore's attitude from the inception of MORryde. The company's past president died February 2021 at 83 in his Elkhart hometown, with a legacy that lives on through his family and company's continued success.

Today, with more interest, new demographics and niche offerings saturating the RV industry in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, safety solutions and ride control offerings continue to evolve. Bringing consumers up to speed is essential. Dealers should educate consumers on what products to use while driving on rough roads that can take a toll on even the best-built trailers, Enfield says.

"MORryde has products to help protect the trailer from rough roads and provide a more durable foundation for their house on wheels," he says of the company's mission. "Each of the MORryde running gear products is designed to have a bolt-on installation without modification."

Beyond its innovation and hard work to supply the RV industry with safety solutions, Moore's passion and purpose with MORryde International was to use the business to support mission outreach around the world, says his obituary from the Hartzler-Gutermuth-Inman Funeral Home.

"He served on numerous boards, including World Missionary Press, Word of Life Fellowship, Baugo Schools, First Nazarene Church, First Baptist Church of Elkhart, River Oaks Community Church, Bethel Brethren, Church, People to People, MORryde International and Bank One," the obituary says. RVP





The new All Trek 4000 is a rubber equalizer for fifth wheels and travel trailers.



Latch Extender

THE COMPANY SAYS ITS MINDSET ON CUSTOMERS WAS AND CONTINUES TO BE "WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO FOR YOU?" – A NOD TO MOORE'S ATTITUDE FROM THE INCEPTION OF MORRYDE.

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RAISING THE BAR

B&W's Continuum addresses several pain points common to weight distribution hitches.

BY MIKE HARBOUR

"Be the first or be the biggest" has been a saying in business for a while, but B&W is striving to be the best when it comes to weight distribution hitches for travel trailers.

After all, practically every one of the Humboldt, Kansas-based company's competitors had already introduced a WD hitch by the time B&W rolled out the Continuum earlier this year. B&W first did a lot of homework.

"I'd say maybe seven years ago is when we first started buying weight distribution hitches and testing them to figure how they work," says Tyler Jelinek, B+W's structural engineer on the Continuum team.

The team's first goal, he says, was to examine all aspects of each competitor. Besides being tested on the road and in a lab, the hitches were disassembled and thoroughly examined before the team even began working on its own hitch, a product that would have to meet the vision of B&W co-founder Joe Works.

"Joe wanted something innovative, first and foremost, so we came up with designs that would probably look like what you see out there now, but he didn't want a 'me too' product," according to Jelinek, noting efforts on the Continuum ramped up about two years ago. "He wanted something that truly made the user experience better and solved some issues that all weight distribution hitches have right now.



We identified setting it up and getting the proper amount of weight distributed to the front axle as an important thing for a weight distribution hitch to be able to do, and so we wanted to make that as easy as possible and also make it variable because your weight can change on your trailer."

To handle that task, the Continuum team leaned on the modern farmer's friend and used hydraulics to tension the hitch's pair of spring bars, something other designs require sheer muscle and special tools to do so properly. In contrast, B&W's version requires simple pumping, like that of an automobile floor jack, for proper adjustment.

"We knew we wanted some novel way to load the bars, so we tried manual jack actuators that you'd stick a cordless drill on, but the forces are so high, it gets to the point where hydraulics is the best answer. In engineering terms, that's just the best actuator for that type of force and that type of stroke requirements to have everything in a nice, neat package," Jelenik says.

The system, which features a zero-leak check valve created by a Minnesota supplier, is what makes the Continuum stand out.

"We could vary how much preload we're putting on those springs and have a reliable way to measure what that preload is," Jelinek says. "Because we have that hydraulic system in there, it takes all that danger away from the act of load and unloading the bars."

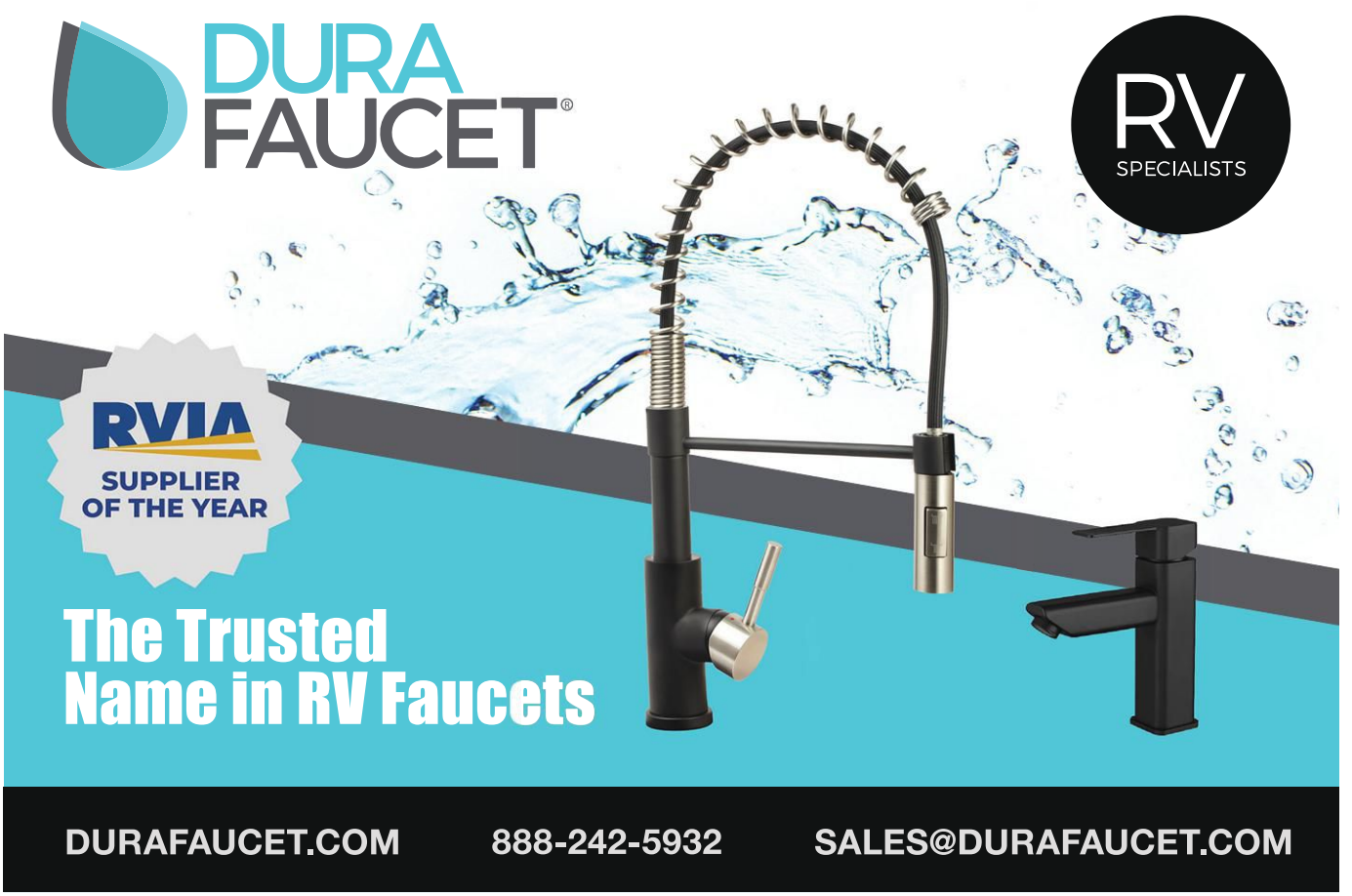
Those bars, which are shorter and lighter than others on the market, are the other main ingredient in the Continuum's



successful design. B&W doesn't rely on heavy bar steel to distribute weight to both axles of the tow vehicle.

"To get this form factor, you really need the flexibility that composite material offers, so we use Liteflex technology by Hendrickson USA. It's a huge company that makes undercarriage suspension components for heavy-duty trucks, commercial vans and lots of products for the automotive industry. We partnered with them to develop this exact spring design here to work with our application," Jelinek says. "We went through what size we wanted and what loads it needed to withstand, and they were able to work with us and get a composite spring design that would one, fit in this form factor; two, have the strength required to accommodate that wide range of tongue weights the Continuum works with; and three, have the flexibility to give a good ride and provide that setup flexibility."

The Continuum team also considered another factor in WD



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hitch use, according to Jelinek, and that's storage.

"A big part of the savings for the user is the fact the hydraulic system and the spring bar assembly is going to stay with the trailer, so you don't have to take it off and carry it around or store it somewhere," he says.

Other units require near-total disassembly when the tow vehicle needs to be unhooked. The Continuum's hydraulic pump and cylinder, which is in turn connected to the bars, bolt onto the travel trailer's tongue in the space between the propane tanks and coupler. Once installed, users only will need access to the pump handle; stepping to the other side of the tongue is not required.

Other goals for the Continuum were lightweight and simplicity.

"For the head unit, we tried to make it as light as possible and still be able to withstand the loads," says Jelinek, who worked as a consultant for B&W before coming aboard as an employee in 2015. "That's also part of why we went with a pin connection in the head instead of bolts. We wanted that to be easy so you can take it apart in two pieces."

Older designs, where the shank and head are bolted together, aren't as maneuverable as the Continuum's two-piece design. Additionally, for B&W customers who already own the company's successful Tow & Stow adjustable ball mount, separating the two pieces will be second nature due to a similar pin-and-hole construction.

Another pain point B&W sought to solve is the common complaint among WD owners about noise.

"That was the first thing that we noticed when we started testing weight distribution hitches," Jelinek says. "There's really only one part that creates a lot of friction in this whole system and we've got grease zerks there to help lower that noise. It also helps us with having one point of that sway control friction."

He's also proud of how the team was able to provide more instantaneous sway control, an issue many WD hitches claim to provide in some degree or another.

"A lot of it is how we're isolating that rotation. We've got one pivot point where the ball and the spindle underneath the ball that the spring bars are attached to," Jelinek says. "When the truck and trailer change angles relative to each other, all that spins as one unit, so you have all that friction concentrated in one interface. That's really what makes that force rise really quickly compared to the other brands."

B+W made certain to address the proper head angle.

"On most designs, that is a very critical setup procedure to get that right. If you don't, you're not going to have enough adjustment in your brackets or your bars are going to be pitched way up high or way down low," Jelinek says of the preset head angle. "You don't know if you have that right until you've got it all set up and you're done. You may realize, 'Oh, I've got to take the whole thing apart and add a couple of washers or whatever, put it back together and then check it again.'"

The Continuum, sold direct and through B&W dealers, is available for both half-ton and heavy-duty trucks in either normal or underslung couplers. RVP



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CONNECTING MORE PEOPLE TO THE OUTDOORS

Jil Littlejohn Bostick, vice president of corporate responsibility and inclusion at Winnebago Industries, uses her calling to open doors for more diversity in RVing and camping.

BY JENNIFER KING

You often hear people say that the United States is a "melting pot."

However, Jil Littlejohn Bostick, vice president of corporate responsibility and inclusion at Winnebago Industries, prefers to think of the country as a salad.

"Some people say melting pot – it means it all blends together," says Bostick, who is also the executive director of the Winnebago Industries Foundation. "But if you have a salad, you have different pieces that individually and uniquely make the salad great."

Bostick, who lives in Greenville, South Carolina, with her husband Dejr Bostick, grew up in Atlanta. Living in the city where civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lived and fought for equality was inspiring to her from a young age.

"I went to a number of different schools and moved around quite a bit, which always exposed me to different people from different cultures," she says.

Bostick earned a Bachelor of Arts from Wofford College and a Master's of Business Administration from Webster University. Starting her career as a plant accountant and controller for Milliken & Co., she spent a lot of time talking to people on the manufacturing floor.

"When you're doing inventory and trying to account for the different goods, you're still talking to people and you're building relationships to understand the flow of goods that came through the building," she says.

Being connected to people was always in her heart.

"I knew I wanted to be more on the people side from the very beginning. But I believe my financial background has been super helpful throughout my career and in my current role. The RV and marine industry revolves around profit and I am able to apply the financial lens. I have the people aspect, but I also understand the financial side."

With the understanding that her calling and purpose in life was to connect to people, Bostick made her next career move to the YWCA in Greenville, where she became executive director.



Jil Littlejohn Bostick started working at Winnebago Industries in 2021.



"Their mission was eliminating racism and empowering women," she says. "It was a perfect fit."

It was an interesting time at the nonprofit because they had recently changed their name to the YWCA, instead of Young Women's Christian Association, and Bostick says people were skeptical.

"What does that mean? How do we make that happen? I was trying to, as a nonprofit, raise funds to make the organization move forward. I started looking at corporations that support the YWCA and connecting the dots to their return on investment," she says. "At the time, a lot of companies didn't have full-time DE&I [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion] team members or teams. I was able to offer, as a member of the YWCA, a general DE&I analysis and baseline. That allowed me to dig in and learn more about DE&I, learn about the issues and the challenges that organizations were dealing with, come up with solutions and frameworks and help chart a path to begin to move the needle."

Following the YWCA, in 2015, Bostick moved the needle in a big way by becoming the first female president and CEO of the Urban League of the Upstate.

"I was able to continue the work and show an example of what it looks like to provide opportunities for people," she says. "Because I was the first African American female to lead the YWCA, I was also the first African American female to lead the Urban League of the Upstate. It was saying, 'We're providing a pathway for organizations to show what it looks like to open doors and opening the doors for other people to come afterwards.' Through both of those positions, I was able to work with Fortune 1000 companies and large private organizations to understand the inner workings of DE&I in the workplace."

Launching a New Role & Initiative

Bostick's role at Winnebago Industries is a brand-new role in terms of having a full-time, person-lead DE&I strategy.

"The executive leadership team started doing the work in terms of having an analysis done, figuring out where they stood, and trying to understand the direction they needed to move in. Their initial work led to creating a full-time position to lead the work," Bostick says. "I tell people that Winnebago Industries was an unexpected gift."

When Winnebago came knocking on her door, Bostick says she was pleased to find the understanding and commitment from the different corners of the company – from Winnebago,



Grand Design and Newmar, to Chris-Craft and Barletta.

"I didn't blindly come into this role thinking that we're going to change things overnight. I didn't come into this role as a figurehead and to only check the box. I came into this role to understand the RV and marine industry, understand what currently exists, what's being done, what some of the pain points are, how people feel, what people want to know more about, what people are afraid to talk about…Now that we know and understand where we are, how do we begin to A, move forward internally, and B, move forward externally and connect the dots."

"We're all connected in one way or another. So, when one RV company does well, all RV companies do well. It's the industry as a whole. We have goals around what we do internally, but we

also have goals around how we influence inclusion across the industry. That's something that we're really dedicated to – committed to."

Traditionally, the RV industry overall has skewed more male and more white, Bostick says.

"Across the board, if you look at the different reports that the RVIA [RV Industry Association] releases, that's what you see. What I have found is a group of people who understand the industry and the traditional demographic and want to have the best people and know to have the best people, we need diverse people, women and people of color in the industry.

"We've seen a slight increase in people of color, and a slight increase in women from our 2021 to 2022 Corporate Responsibility report. I think the more we talk about and highlight different people that are already in these spaces doing the work, the more people will see themselves in the industry. I always tell people it's hard to be what you can't see. It's a challenge across the industry. But I will say, within Winnebago Industries and our brands, we are working really hard to show people the different opportunities that exist. And we're seeing more people enter into the industry. I think that some of our competitors are working to make the industry more inclusive as well."

Making the Outdoors Inclusive

At Winnebago Industries, Bostick says the company's four pillars that they focus on to move the needle are rooted in inclusion, diversity, equity and action. The goal is to "expand the talent pipeline," she says, bringing in more women and more people of color into open roles – and advancing, developing and retaining the current talent ensures employees see a future with the organization. She says it's important to examine how the company can enrich the employee experience and create a sense of belonging, and then influence that across the industry.

One way they do that is to work with different organizations such as Latino Outdoors, RV Women's Alliance, Black Folks Camp Too and more.

Winnebago Industries also partnered with Camber Outdoors to expand the internship pipeline. Last year, there were about 15 interns across the program, and this year Bostick says they're on track to have up to 30 at Winnebago Industries and other outdoor industry companies.

"Our goal is to continue to grow that program, to provide spaces to show people [what's possible]," she says. "I started my career through an internship program, and I really think that that helped change my trajectory."

Another organization that Winnebago Industries works with is called No Boundaries, which focuses on people with disabilities.

"We've been able to highlight some of our accessibility-enhanced camper vans and Class A RVs that are specifically for people with disabilities," she says. "We are trying to focus on doing the work that is sustainable and long term and not just, checking the box."

Everyone is welcome in the outdoors, Bostick says.

Becoming Personally Invested

Bostick says when she joined Winnebago







Bostick says it's important to her to "walk the walk" in the RVing lifestyle and enjoy the outdoors with her family.

Industries, it was important for her to not just "talk the talk, but walk the walk." Recently, she and her husband purchased a Grand Design Imagine AIM and their goal is to take it out a few times a year and enjoy living the RVing lifestyle.

"We can't wait to get out on the road," she says.

After her first experience camping in an RV, Bostick says she knew RV life was more for her than tent camping.

"This is a house on wheels. I can have all the conveniences that I get at home, and step outdoors and look at the beautiful sky or mountains or water," she says. "It was never really explained to me this way."

Bostick says now that she posts about it on social media, she gets a lot of questions about RVing.

"The more we can show and share, it's like show and tell, adult style."

This July, Bostick hit her two-year anniversary with Winnebago Industries, two years that she says have been focused on exploration and understanding.

"I see us moving into deeper implementation as we move forward," she says. "I tell people sometimes it's OK to go slow to go fast. This industry has been around for a long time, it's sustainable and there's some great work being done and as we invite people into the space as employees or RV owners or renters, we want to make sure we're being authentic and really connected, because at the end of the day, people want to enjoy life and be great outdoors." RVP



Bostick and her husband, Dejr, recently purchased a Grand Design Imagine AIM and are excited for the road trips that lie ahead.

HELPING RVERS GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

How an engineer found a solution that blocks light and grew from a garage startup to a multimillion-dollar business.

BY JENNIFER KING

Tim Stanley, CEO of Blackout EZ Window Covers, knows what it's like when too much light interrupts a good night's sleep.

When his three daughters were young, Stanley worked the third shift as a nighttime delivery driver. Trying to sleep during the day was tough.

"I covered my windows up with stuff that wouldn't work," he says. "The thing about tape and duct tape and cardboard is you can't take it down. You have to recreate it every time."

That's when Stanley came up with his idea for a product that would Velcro onto his home's windows, that he could easily put up and take off.

"It took me about 10 years. I messed around with it and then I actually launched it back in 2007," he says.

While Blackout EZ Window Covers started as a product for homes, Stanley says he has sold it to churches, the military and to many RV owners.

Stanley says a customer once told him that being in an RV at an RV park often feels like you're in an aquarium due to the number of windows.

Blackout EZ Window Covers work for all types of RVs because they are custom-made. As an aftermarket product, RVers can go onto the company's website (blackoutez.com) and learn how to measure the windows in their unit, order off the website and the covers will be shipped out.

"We've got a template to show you how to measure your windows and then we ship it out – everything is custom. On RVs, there are so many different window sizes and window configurations," he says.

While Stanley launched Blackout EZ Window Covers officially in 2007, it wasn't until 2011 that he was able to retire from his position as an engineer for Thomas Built Buses and focus full time at his own burgeoning business. He now employs 10 people in this multimillion-







(left to right) Symone, Sydney, Jacqueline and Tim Stanley at a campground near the Saco River in New Hampshire.

dollar business with two locations where he lives with his wife, Jacqueline, in Greensboro, North Carolina.

"We have equipment and stuff that makes it real easy. So, it doesn't take a lot of skill to do what we do – we have machines to do that," Stanley says.

Some of his employees have been with him for up to 10 years, but he says finding good employees can be a challenge in a small business.

"A lot of people don't want to work for a small business, because with a small business, you can't hide," he says. "Everybody has to contribute. Everybody has to work…There's no hiding in a small business. Everybody has to produce and everything's visible."

Growing the Business & Going 'All-In'

Stanley learned to make his business visible with social media marketing, using YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, as well as pay-per-click ads on Google. On YouTube, search Blackout EZ Window Covers for videos on how to measure and install the window covers and more.

Stanley says knew he needed to shoot demonstration videos and pictures for his website, where all of his business takes place, so he and his wife purchased an RV. Now his products are available on Amazon as well.

"She was against the whole idea," Stanley says with a chuckle about buying an RV. "But we fell in love with RVing. It's crazy – now I can't keep my wife out of it."

Even though his three daughters, Whitney, Sydney and Symone, are adults and living on their own, they still plan vacations around RVing. Stanley says in June they went on a trip to the Kansas City BBQ Festival at which his daughters were going to fly in and join them to stay in the RV.

"They'll meet us and go on trips and plan trips around the RV. They'll fly into



a city and meet up halfway and ride with us," he says.

The family's favorite place to travel to is New England – they've been to Salem, Massachusetts, and Burlington, Vermont, as well as the White Mountains in New Hampshire and more.

"I like to be outside. I can be outside working in my yard until I pass out. I like the physical aspect of it. I like the sunshine," he says. "My wife, she's an outdoor person as well."

It was during one of their RV trips that Stanley and his wife discovered they needed a Blackout cover for the unit's air vents, too.

"The problem is, the sun is beaming in there and wakes you up," he says. "My wife fussed at me for about six months. You know the saying, 'The cobbler's son has no shoes?'"

Stanley produces covers for the entry door and the skylights in the bathroom as well. All of the covers are a three-ply vinyl with a fabric mesh that attach to Velcro installed around the window or door. The product is designed to match the trim ring around the window, so the Velcro strip that's applied isn't noticeable when you remove the cover in the daytime.



"One of the big concerns in the RV is weight, so what these covers do as well is they insulate the window. You can have a lot of heat loss and heat gained through that window," he says. "So when you put these covers up, it adds another layer of insulation."

Another new option that Stanley offers allows RVers to show their American pride from the outside of the unit through the windows, with covers that have an American flag and say "American vet." He also has an option with a United States map that can be colored in to show which states an owner has traveled to.

Everything needed to install the window covers is sent in a kit, but Stanley says some customers would still prefer someone else install the covers. He intends to start working with dealerships across the U.S. to train people on how to install them, so users can order the covers and have them installed nearby during their travels if they don't wish to do it themselves.

"This is a really slick product and I just really like making it," he says. "I'm solving a problem and people love it. When you get reviews like that, it kind of validates that you're going in the right direction – you are in the right space – and it just gives you momentum." RVP



RACE IN THE WORKPLACE

How to create an inclusive environment.

BY PHILLIP M. PERRY



Systemic racism has become a topic of primary interest around the nation. As headlines blare news about racial disparities in society at large, businesses everywhere are asking themselves an important question: What inequities exist in our own organization and how can we rectify them?

"This is a good time to deal with racial equality in the workplace because recent news events have made the topic uppermost in our minds," says David Campt, founder of The Dialogue Company, a diversity and inclusion consulting firm in Eden, North Carolina (thedialoguecompany.com). "We're seeing something that might be a real tipping point in the nation, and that will be talked about 30, 40 or 50 years from now. When something important is happening in society we don't want to let discomfort keep us from discussing what's obviously on peoples' minds."

Good for Business

Reducing the business world's racial disparities is a matter not only of social justice but also of profitability, Campt says. "One of the things we've learned over the years is that diversity within teams produces a diversity of thought that can lead to better outcomes if it is handled well."

Organizations with good reputations can attract more top performers, and fair treatment can keep them from leaving. "People very often leave companies because they feel they are simply being tolerated rather than included," says Bob Gregg, co-chair of the Employment Practice Law Group at Boardman and Clark in Madison, Wisconsin (boardmanclark.com). "A toxic environment can lead to constant hiring and retraining of replacements for people who leave."

Then there is the potential for litigation. "Discrimination or harassment in the workplace can spark lawsuits that result in money judgments not only against the company but also against individual supervisors," says Yvette V. Gatling, a shareholder in the Tyson's Corner, Virginia, office of San Francisco-based Littler, the world's largest employment law practice representing management (littler.com).

And litigation is indeed starting to pile up. "People are more prone than ever before to rush to a lawyer if they feel like their workplace is a hostile environment," says James J. McDonald Jr., managing partner at the Irvine, California, office of Fisher & Phillips (fisherphillips.com). "More companies are starting to be called out for being insensitive or not taking equality seriously."

The resulting media publicity, he adds, can be as damaging as the direct financial penalties. "Employers today have to be concerned about the costs of lawsuits in terms not only of money and time but also of reputation," McDonald says.

Let's Talk

In creating a workplace of inclusion, the first step is to realize that discrimination is generally unintentional. "The most important mental shift we can make is to reconceptualize the problem of racial bias," Campt says. "Rather than a crime against the social contract done only by evil people, bias is more like a glitch in thinking that everybody is subject to. We are biased not because we are bad people but because our brains are inherently that way."

That collective unconscious mindset sparks real world discriminatory acts. "Most people are not racists or bigots, but they can make judgments based on stereotypes they have learned from the surrounding culture," McDonald says. "As a result, they make decisions based on race or other protected categories without even realizing it." Such decisions can include hiring, mentoring, promoting and the assigning of work duties.

A business looking to upgrade its workplace environment needs to start by addressing any organizational disparities. And one way to do so is to talk about it.

"It's a good idea to have what some companies call a 'town hall meeting' to discuss the topic of race relations," Gatling says. "During this meeting, higher levels of management can discuss current events and company policies. For remote workers, the event may take place over the Internet on Zoom or Webex."

The meeting is a tool for improving operations, not just a vehicle for paying lip service to equality. "Management needs to completely own the process," says Dr. Kenneth Kaye, a



Chicago-based workplace psychologist (kaye.com). "There should not be the slightest nod to any statement similar to, 'Sorry about this. We have to check this box because some people have complained.'"

Instead, says Kaye, the person leading the meeting might explain its purpose in these terms:

"We need to talk about how – not whether – we can become a comfortably diverse organization. We are going to be that way for three reasons. No. 1, it's the kind of organization or department that I want to lead. No. 2, it's the best way to be productive. And No. 3, it's the law. Let's start by discussing any of the ways we have failed up to the present time to be a group where racial differences have no effect on anyone's collaboration, productivity or evaluation. And then we'll talk about the obstacles and some ideas to fix that.'"

If a structured conversation is a good idea, or even a necessity, it's also true that careful planning is required to pull it off. One size does not fit all.

"Your business might benefit from a meeting to discuss race relations," McDonald says. "But you have to know your workforce. Are people upset? Are they talking about racial matters to such an extent that you feel a meeting might be cathartic? Then I think having an open discussion and letting people be heard might be worthwhile. But you need someone to lead it who will require respect on the part of attendees. And bear in mind that in some cases a meeting might lead to more tension and make matters worse."

Break the Ice

It's possible for a staff meeting to backfire, and it's for that very reason that many businesses will be fearful of taking the plunge. "Managers of any color may be uncomfortable talking about workplace race relations," Kaye says. "And they may fear that employees who are also uncomfortable with the topic will wind up offending one another."

Campt says management can help overcome the discomfort surrounding discussions about race, and set the right tone, by leading with a degree of vulnerability. "By owning up to bias and establishing a determination to work on it, the manager makes it much harder for people to say they are immune from it and much easier for everyone to discuss it."

He suggests leading with words like: "Bias is something we are all subject to. I am not a perfect person either. I am a human being subject to thoughts that are sometimes problematic."

Still got cold feet? Sometimes obtaining professional help is wise.

"Skill at this level of communication is not widespread," Campt says. "A good diversity and inclusion professional can often provide conversational tools to help a culture navigate the topic. There is value in engaging people who know how to be facilitators around these issues, and who are not doing it for the first time."

When an organization does undergo this shift in thinking, people can discuss workplace bias in a more enlightened way. "We can start to look at how pervasive bias against women and people of color – not just in our company, but in our society – might be affecting our business decisions," Campt says. "And we can look in a different light at our recruitment practices, vendor choices, and hiring and promotion decisions."

Retool Business Systems

The forward-looking company will take steps to re-engineer any policies and practices riddled with hidden biases. "The most important thing for every business is to establish anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies," Gatling says. "They should cover all aspects of employment including hiring, evaluations, promotions and raises."

Written policies should also:

- **Prohibit insensitive statements**

"People need to understand they have a duty to avoid making racially charged jokes or comments," Gregg says. "And if they see a coworker doing either, they must speak up and say, 'Hey, look, that is not appropriate for our workplace.'"

Such language must be prohibited even if the individual using it belongs to a protected group. "Many people will use loaded terms among themselves, making

jokes that would be highly offensive if done by someone else," Gregg says. "People need to understand if it is not appropriate for one person, it is not appropriate for anyone."

- **Outlaw bullying**

"Courts have said repeatedly that bullying is the glide path to harassment under the law," Gregg says. "While it may not at first mention race or sex, as bullying continues people will start to pick up on the fact that it's happening to individuals who belong to certain groups."

- **Require reporting**

Employees should understand that they are required to report anything they experience (or see) in the workplace that may relate to harassment or discrimination. "The reporting mechanism should include some individuals who are outside the victim's chain of command because the one committing the discrimination or harassment may be that person's supervisor," Gatling says. "It's also a good idea to provide for anonymous reporting by setting up a hotline."

- **Require response to reports**

"Ignoring a report of harassment or discrimination can put your business in legal jeopardy," Gatling says. "You should do a thorough investigation, which means talking to every witness possible. Then you should take action on the results. You also should keep good documentation on how you investigated, and to get back to the victim to let them know what has transpired."

- **Prohibit retaliation**

"People need to know there will be no consequences if they come forward with a report about harassment or discrimination," Gatling says. "While the law prohibits retaliation, it's always helpful to remind people and supervisors of that fact and of your organization's policy prohibiting it."

Make sure everyone realizes the policies exist to ensure fairness and profitability. "Employees need to know that the purpose of good company policies is to have an effective workplace, not to simply comply with the law," Gregg says. "The organization is paying attention to this topic because racial inequality and discrimination can harm the company."

Communication

While having the right diversity and inclusion policies is vital, they also must be communicated adequately to the staff. Including them in the employee handbook and on the company intranet is a good start. In addition, employees should sign statements that they have read the policies as opposed to just receiving a gloss about them during orientation. "Very often in court cases, people will deny they ever saw their employer's policies," Gregg says.

Managers and supervisors need to buy into the policies and understand how to implement them. And they need to set the right example, avoiding remarks about modern-day societal events that might on the surface seem innocent but that can spark misunderstandings. "Managers have to be careful not to say things in the workplace that subordinates might take as evidence of bias," McDonald says. "Comments about contemporary politics and culture can be especially risky. What the manager feels is freedom of speech an employee may take a different way."

McDonald gives the example of a supervisor who says something like this: "The immigration laws are too lax, and I wish Trump would build that wall." Making that statement in itself is not unlawful, McDonald says. However, the words might lead a Hispanic subordinate to feel the manager is biased against Hispanic people. If something negative should happen down the road to that employee, she might conclude it was the result of discrimination.

Managers and employees alike need to understand the harm that can be contained in unthoughtful comments. "Sometimes people will say hurtful things without realizing they are hurtful," Campt says. "And then very often they feel that because they did not intend to hurt anyone, no one should feel that way. So, part of what can be inculcated in a culture is an awareness that both intent and impact matter. Embracing that fact can be a useful conflict resolution tool." RVP



SAFETY SOLUTIONS AND RIDE CONTROL



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Arcon, Exeter, Pennsylvania, presents its Surge Protectors. Arcon Surge Protectors protect your downstream electronics and RV appliances from voltage spikes and surges. Arcon 30A or 50A surge protectors can absorb and divert high voltage and improper wiring conditions. Equipped with multi-lightning strike protection, these products quickly divert the strike energy to the ground. The 50A model can handle up to 7,200 joules of power suppression and offers four different modes of protection. Keep valuables and equipment safe using Arcon Surge Protectors.

arconelectrical.com

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Camco, Greensboro, North Carolina, presents its Eaz-Lift Elite-S Hitch. Experience safer, easier trailer towing with the Eaz-Lift Elite-S. This weight distribution hitch features a no-chain design with permanent, built-in sway control. Two points of steel-on-steel bracket friction stop/correct trailer sway. The hookup brackets allow you to enjoy installation flexibility – you no longer have to worry about battery boxes, gas tanks and other obstructions getting in the way. Compared to other hitches, the Elite-S allows faster installation on both top-mount and bottom-mount coupler-style trailers. Enhance your towing experience today.

camco.net





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Dexter, Elkhart, Indiana, presents its Dexter Tow Assist, a revolutionary system that includes an automotive-based ECU and axles with integrated wheel speed sensors, featuring Anti-Lock Braking, Sway Mitigation and Towable Odometer, providing drivers with the best trailer safety features on the market. Tow Assist helps create a safer trailer towing experience for all skill levels, assisting with evasive maneuvers and avoiding critical towing errors. Contact your Dexter account manager for more information.

dexteraxle.com



TIRE CAPS

CLC International, Leesburg, Indiana, offers its EZ Read Tire Caps. Stainless steel tire caps that continuously monitor and check your tire pressure.

clcinternationalinc.com

GOT NEWS? Do you have a new product to tell us about? Product submissions for RV PRO magazine are accepted via form. Please email hstrickland@cahabamedia.com for the link and more information.





WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION HITCH

Blue Ox, Pender, Nebraska, offers its SwayPro Weight Distributing Hitch. The Blue Ox SwayPro is the company's premium weight distributing hitch, preventing sway in all weather conditions, including rain and snow. Caster built into the adjustment-free hitch head works with the sway bars to constantly push the trailer to the center of the tow vehicle. SwayPro provides sway prevention without friction for a noise-free towing experience. SwayPro is available in multiple tongue weights starting at 350 pounds up to 2,000 pounds. Spring bars are interchangeable for use with trailers of differing tongue weights.

blueox.com



SURGE PROTECTORS

Dicor Products, Elkhart, Indiana, offers its Dicor Surge Protectors. Protect your RV from dangerous voltage levels and power surges caused by faulty hookups or weather-related events with surge protectors from Dicor Power Products. Available in weather resistant 30-amp plug, 30-amp pigtail and 50-amp pigtail – pigtails feature metal locking ring. Each surge protector is equipped with automatic shut off/on, easily visible surge indicator and diagnostic lights, incorrect wiring fault indicators and a limited lifetime warranty.

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fastwaytrailer.com



BATTERY POWERED SMOKE ALARM

First Alert by Resideo, Aurora, Illinois, offers its RV-approved Battery Powered Smoke Alarm. Model FG250RV is a single-station smoke alarm specifically designed for RVs and other residential and institutional applications. It features an 85dB alarm and is powered by a replaceable 9-volt battery. The product is sold with a limited 10-year warranty.

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Exterior Filter System, Single Housing with Carbon Block Cartridge, Wall Bracket & Wrench

	GAC/KDF Ext. In-line	GAC/KDF Int. In-line	Sediment Pre-Filter	Carbon Block	Cyst / Sediment Filter	Adv. Carbon Block
Part #	A01-1131VP	A01-1133	A01-1137	A01-1136	A01-1135	A01-1134
Filtration (in Microns)	20	20	10	5	1	0.05
Capacity*	3,000 gal./ 6 months	500 gal./ 6 months	As Needed	500 gal./ 6 months	500 gal./ 6 months	1200 gal./ 6 months
Operating Pressure	20-100 psi	20-100 psi	20-100 psi	20-100 psi	20-100 psi	20-100 psi
Filters reduce the following contaminents:						
Rust	√	√	√	√	√	√
Sediment	√	√	√	√	√	√
Cysts (Crypto/Giardia)					√	√
Chlorine (taste & odor)	√	√		√		√
VOC's (Volatile Organic Chemicals)	√	√		√		√
Mercury	√	√				√
Lead	√	√				
Copper	√	√				

* Results depend on quality of water. Replace when an undesirable taste or odor appears or if water flow decreases significantly.

CAUTION: Do not use with water that is microbiologically unsafe or of unknown quality without adequate disinfection before or after the system.

CARTRIDGES

Exterior Advanced Carbon Block Cartridge



Exterior Carbon Block Cartridge



Cyst and Sediment Cartridge



Sediment Pre-Filter Cartridges



INLINE FILTERS

Interior Inline GAC/KDF Water Filter, 1/2" Threaded Fittings



Exterior Inline Kit w/Hose Saver, Garden Hose Fittings



Exterior Inline Replacement Filters, Garden Hose Fittings, 2-pack



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REPLACEMENT RV SHOCK ABSORBERS

Gabriel Ride Control, Farmington Hills, Michigan, presents its Premium and OE Replacement RV Shock Absorbers. Have you ever checked or replaced your RV's shocks? Shock absorbers wear out over time, so be sure to check them at least once every season; before you hit the road is best. Replace worn shocks with Gabriel, the best quality choice to restore a smooth ride and better braking performance, so you can hit the road safely on your next adventure. Also, be sure to change your shocks when you invest in new RV tires, to maximize tire life.

gabriel.com

FRICTION SWAY WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

Husky Towing, Exeter, Pennsylvania, offers its Center Line FS. The Center Line Friction Sway Two-Point Weight Distribution System provides effective two-point sway control with fewer components and faster installation time. A pair of spring bars are connected to the trailer frame using heavy-duty, adjustable support brackets that hold the spring bars in place laterally and vertically. The included, longer shank accommodates taller vehicles, and the head comes with the trailer ball pre-installed and torqued. A durable, powder-coated finish ensures corrosion resistance for years of worry-free use.

huskytow.com





ALUMINUM WHEEL TIRE

Kenda Americana Tire & Wheel, Reynoldsburg, Ohio, presents its Kenda Loadstar Karrier KR35 with AM03 Aluminum Wheel. This high-quality Kenda trailer tire provides exceptional stability and handling in all-season applications for confidence across weather conditions. Mounted to the stylish AM03 black machined aluminum wheel, this combo keeps optimal contact with road surfaces and supports even wear across its tread footprint for extended miles.

americanatire.com



RV CAMERA SYSTEM

Magnadyne, Compton, California, offers its MobileVision MV-BC1 | 2.4Ghz Wireless Camera and 5-inch Portable Monitor. The MV-BC1, your partner for an advanced, easy-to-install RV camera system. Whether you're installing from scratch or replacing a factory pre-wired system, the MV-BC1 offers a seamless integration process that ensures your RV is equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance capability. The MV-BC1 serves multiple functions – from monitoring your towed vehicle to assisting you while backing up and acting as a rearview mirror. It provides an extra layer of security and confidence, ensuring you have full visibility around your RV.

magnadyne.com



DUAL CO/LP ALARM

MTI Industries, Destin, Florida, presents its 85-741-WT-TR – Safe-T-Alerts new dual CO/LP alarm, showcasing the company's new "Trim Ring" that covers previous installation cutouts. This alarm is universal and will fit or replace any unit we have. Available in white or black.

mtiindustries.com







BRAKING SYSTEM

RVi, Castle Rock, Colorado, offers its RVibrake Shadow Installed Braking System. When flat towing a car, your customer needs a braking system that works to get them on the road quickly and allows them to focus on their family and the memories they're making. RVibrake Shadow installed braking system for flat towing features two- to three-hour installation, Tow-Mode Detection, built-in battery charger and terrain sensing technology that provides the same braking experience whether in the mountains or flat roads. Help your customers ride with confidence.

rvidealer.com

ELECTRIC TRAILER BRAKE CONTROLLER

REDARC, Adelaide, South Australia, offers its Tow-Pro Liberty Electric Trailer Brake Controller. REDARC's Tow-Pro Liberty electric trailer brake controller provides ultimate safety for any load. Featuring an easy-to-use, in-dash mount remote head, the Liberty makes for quick installation. With the main unit installed behind the dash, this ensures your customers won't be knocking their knees and overcomes the potential interference with lower air bags in newer vehicles. Designed for everyday towing and built to last a lifetime. Vehicle specific install accessories available.

redarcelectronics.com





STEERING STABILIZERS

Roadmaster, Vancouver, Washington, presents its Reflex Steering Stabilizers (RSSA & RSSC). A tried-and-true favorite, the Reflex steering stabilizer provides front tire blowout protection while greatly reducing driver fatigue. Poor handling characteristics are the unfortunate norm in the RV industry. Reflex greatly improves the drive by compensating for oversteer caused by potholes, rut tracks and other unfavorable road conditions, as well as crosswinds and passing 18-wheelers. Because Reflex is on the job 24/7, it greatly reduces stressful, white knuckle driving while putting the recreation back in RVing.

roadmasterinc.com



ASSIST RAIL

Stromberg Carlson, Traverse City, Michigan, presents its Lend-A-Hand. Stromberg presents its Lend-A-Hand Assist Rail, which provides RVers with support to go up and down the stairs. It folds and locks in either direction and has a foam grip for easier handling. Available in three lengths (22-inch, 27-inch and 37-inch). No tools required for securing the rail in open or closed positions. The Lend-A-Hand is designed to maintain balance but will not break a fall. Made in the USA.

strombergcarlson.com



SUSPENSION ENHANCEMENT SYSTEM

Timbren Industries, Whitby, Ontario, Canada, offers its GMRS15 - Timbren SES Suspension Enhancement System. Whether you're towing a trailer with your GMC Sierra across the country or hauling hay with your Chevrolet Silverado down the highway, the GMRS15 SES kit will level your load, making for a safe, controlled ride so smooth, you might forget you're towing or hauling altogether. The GMRS15 delivers a progressive spring rate. As load increases, the rubber spring pushes back harder, eliminating squat, sway and roll. After installation, there should be a 1/2-inch to 1 1/2-inch gap between the rubber spring and vehicle's frame – meaning you'll enjoy a comfortable unloaded ride, too. Unlike air bags, Timbren kits require zero post-installation maintenance. And unlike other systems, you can install and haul in under 30 minutes, right from your driveway.

timbren.com





COLOR TOUCH SCREEN KITS

Truck System Technologies, San Antonio, Texas, presents its new 770 Color Touch Screen Kits. TST's newest 770 model Color Touch Screen TPMS kit offering is available in Flow-thru and Cap sensor configurations. The new touch-screen display makes programming a breeze. It is compatible with recent 507 Series legacy TST products, offering expansion opportunities of up to five trailers plus a power unit to customers who would like to expand their system. Flow-thru, RV Cap, Hybrid and Internal Sensors are in stock and ready to integrate. The new display includes a GPS giving drivers current direction, speed, altitude and resettable trip odometer.

tsttruck.com





WATER REGULATOR

Valterra Products, Mission Hills, California, offers its Hi-Flow 90˚ Water Regulator. Save space and money with two essential items in one: water regulator and hose saver. All while keeping a high-flow for better showers with an outlet pressure of 50 to 55 pounds per square inch (psi) (not recommended for older RVs). Even if the inlet pressure is below 50 psi, your pressure won't reduce. Screened washer keeps debris out of your tank. Stainless steel internal spring. Gripper end makes it easy to install, no tools required. Fits all standard water hoses. Lead-free.

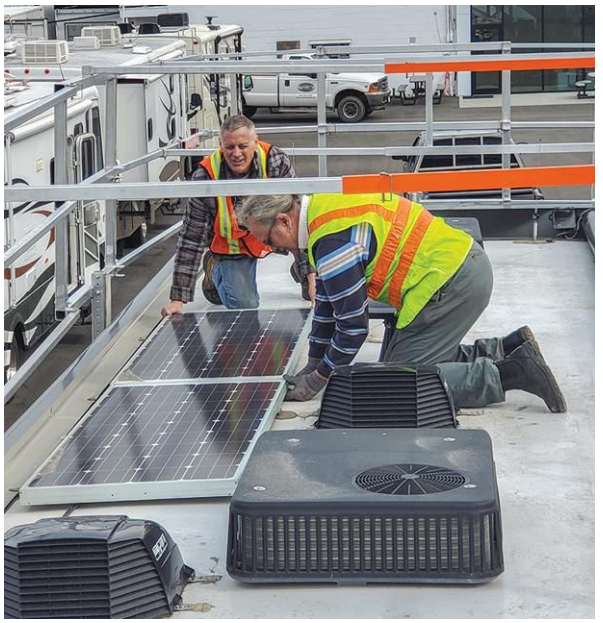
valterra.com

WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION HITCH

Weigh Safe, Lindon, Utah, presents its True Tow Weight Distribution Hitch – Middleweight. Along with the original Heavyweight version, the all-new Weigh Safe True Tow Weight Distribution Hitch – Middleweight is a part of the 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.

weigh-safe.com





ROOFTOP WORKER PROTECTION SYSTEMS

Easy Access Industrial Design, Peachland, British Columbia, offers its rooftop worker protection systems. Surround RV rooftop railing and combined anti-slip work platform systems are now available from EA Industrial Design. Foldable full outer roof edge located railings and wrap-around sidewall work platform systems are width and length adjustable. Choose from fixed or adjustable height platforms. Access RV Rooftops with secure ladder approach or Stack Deck mobile height adjustable tower. Added to the company's Powered Confined Area RV Containment Systems, it assists the RV industry to "Stop Falls Before They Happen."

scissordeck.com



SWAY CONTROL

Tuson RV Brakes, Vernon Hills, Illinois, presents the Tuson Sway Control (TSC) as the only asymmetric electronic trailer sway control system on the market. The patented asymmetric system (independent left and right-side braking) continuously monitors trailer yaw, rapidly identifies a trailer sway condition and applies braking force on one side of the trailer, directly counteracting trailer sway with minimal speed loss and greater stability control. Each TSC comes with a wired red/green LED light to show the functional status of the unit with different flashing modes for diagnostic troubleshooting and is designed to be mounted on the trailer in an easy-to-see location from your tow vehicle mirrors. The TSC is wired directly into the trailer braking system and automatically adjusts to improve braking effectiveness, and even detect off-road towing conditions.

tusonrvbrakes.com

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The Faster, Easier, Better Way to Service Profitability

RV service sales are dependent on these three interconnected, incredibly dynamic conditions.



Leonard Buchholz is the sales and marketing manager for DealerPRO Training. His background includes fixed operations, professional workshops and seminars, and communications. He has worked with brands like Audi of America and Mazda facilitating Service Performance Groups, and fixed operations training in-person and online. He has completed hundreds of on-site, in-depth fixed operation evaluations in automotive and RV dealerships across the country.

The following three components are of utmost importance in contributing to the profitability of an RV service department:

1. The ability of the service advisor to complete a thorough write-up, including a walkaround, a menu presentation with a value statement, a multipoint inspection, a complete description and review of the customer's concerns, and dedication to the repair order process combined with the consistency to do this with every single customer.

2. The speed and skill level of the technicians to accurately triage the rig and prepare a complete estimate to service and repair it in a timely manner.

3. The availability of the repair facility (aka, your dealership) to schedule appropriately to meet customer demand while balancing shop load.

Oh, and wouldn't it be nice to make a profit while doing it?

These three components – advisor service sales skills, immediate triage and proper scheduling – are the cornerstone of profitability. And when we go into a dealership, typically there are several clues when it's not being done properly.

Tell me if this sounds familiar:

- There are multiple rigs being stored on your lot until you have a chance to get to them. Multiple.
- Customers are calling you angry because "my trailer has been there for four weeks, and nobody has called me."
- Customers are calling you angry that they "can't get in for four weeks."
- Technicians are being pulled from one job to the next to help put out the heat and everything is taking longer than you thought it would.
- Your SOP (standard operating procedure) storage is not a few shelves in parts anymore. It now occupies a full work bay because you've run out of room in parts.

These are just a few of the out-of-line conditions we typically see when we enter a dealership (that is struggling to make a profit), for the very first time.

One solution is to apply what I like to call the "FEB Principle" (Faster, Easier, Better) to the previous three components and see if we can change the outcome for some of the conditions you may be experiencing right now, especially in the busy season.

If we were better at write-up, would we be faster at repair? The faster part of this principle comes in the form of the advisor-service-sales process and the initial customer contact.

First, ask yourself, do you have a write-up process? In many stores, we find that while there might be a process, it isn't the one you thought it was. When was the last time you observed a write-up?

If you have a write-up process, is it being followed? Are the advisors taking the time to complete a thorough write-up including a walkaround, a maintenance menu presentation and an explanation of the multipoint inspection? Are the advisors guiding the customer through the repair order cycle or just telling them "We'll call you later"?

The key to making the repair cycle faster is a proper write-up followed by immediate dispatch for triage, so the advisor can contact the customer quickly and deliver the results.

In the write-up, it is imperative that the advisor set expectations and describe the repair order process to the customer so there are no misunderstandings. When the advisor tells the customer "I'm going to get my triage technician on this and get an answer back to you right away," it's a commitment to get this RV through the shop faster.

Who is the triage technician and how soon is "right away"?

The triage tech is typically a senior technician or any technician with advanced skill sets in the trades and can inspect, diagnose and recommend a repair in short order.

> **"ACTION IS BETTER THAN THE ALTERNATIVE, WHICH IS HOPING THINGS WILL CHANGE."**

What is short order you ask? Twenty-four hours.

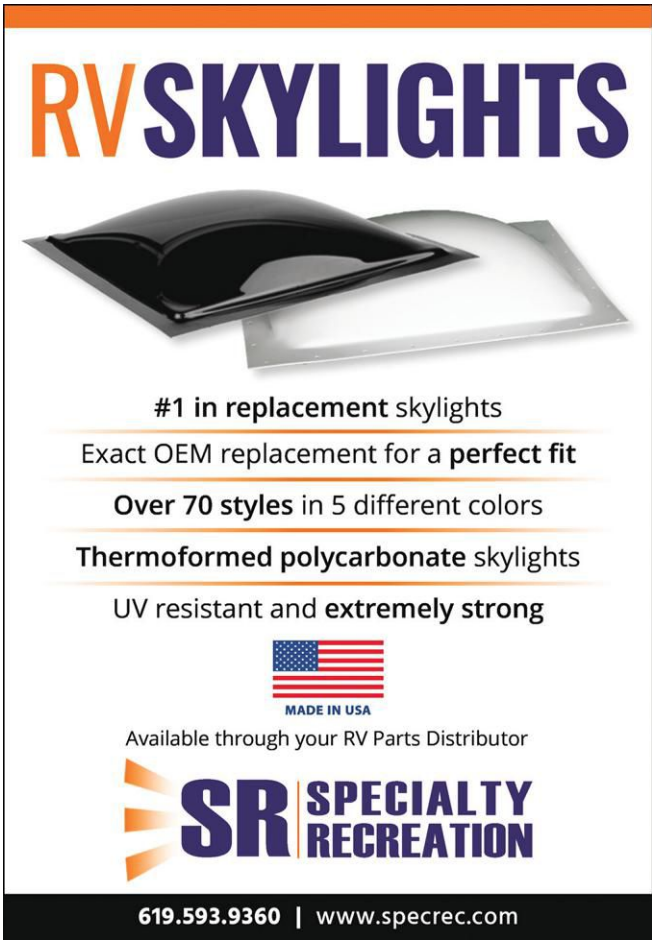
If you can get your team in the habit of inspecting, diagnosing and recommending repairs as fast as possible (24 hours), you won't have rigs waiting at your shop for three or four weeks (or longer) taking up space, and you'll be fielding less phone calls from angry or upset customers. Wouldn't this make the repair order cycle easier?

Remember the write-up process? It's critical to train the advisor to provide the customer with a reasonable timeline and manage their expectations to give you enough time to inspect the rig and recommend repairs.

If I want the customer to have a faster and easier repair event experience, you need to make sure that the write-up process is implemented and being used and that you have structured your shop so that you have a designated triage technician who can inspect the rig and diagnose it quickly.

Possible conditions affecting implementation of the triage tech process are: you might be a smaller





store, or there is a lack of trained technicians; maybe your personnel lacks ongoing training (advisor and technician); possibly a poor or nonexisting write-up process; lack of special tools required to diagnose concerns; missing or misused scheduling tool; poor communication skills; and lack of awareness.

All these conditions can be corrected. First, you must identify the out-of-line condition, observe the process being used and develop an action plan. Then train, coach and monitor your team for results and follow up on your expectations.

Finally, we have the last element of the FEB, scheduling. Better scheduling leads to happier customers and profitable shops. The first rule of scheduling: The schedule belongs to the shop and not the customer.

In stores that have scheduling issues, typically there are multiple people answering the phone who have not been trained (just because you own a phone does not mean you know how to use it in a business environment), and that means everyone makes appointments.

Many times, this leads to appointments without consideration of the schedule or the shop load and will lead to unpleasant or difficult conversations with the customer. When people are trained to answer the phone and load the schedule, there are very few "hard" conversations.

No one wants an angry or disappointed customer. To correct this condition, we need to go all the way back to the sale and work forward from there. Here are three things you can do to correct scheduling problems.

1. Train the customer from the point of sale on how your service department works and introduce them to service (otherwise known as a handoff). When the customer understands how scheduling works in your store, they will be easier to work with (in most cases).
2. Get out of the habit of "Store to Inspect" and get into the habit of "Triage and Order." It's much easier to continue working on rigs in the shop that have parts ready for installation and space allocated for the repair.
3. Train everyone who answers the phone how to use the phone, how to read the schedule and how to maximize availability. Phone training is the No. 1 training activity we complete whenever we go into a store because it affects everything else. The schedule is a shop management tool not a customer managed tool.

If we manage the schedule properly, we will be working on rigs that are ready and not bouncing from RO to RO (repair order) because we are dealing with heat all day. Which sounds better? Firefighter or fire preventer? We can all agree that it's much better to be the fire preventer.

These are the three ways to start delivering the FEB Principles to your customers. Action is better than the alternative, which is hoping things will change. Identify the condition preventing you from achieving your goals, use the FEB Principles to decide which fits your situation, implement change as necessary, and then train, coach and monitor for results. RVP



You Are Welcome Here

How to make people of all races, ages, religions, sexualities, sizes and abilities feel like valued customers.

When a potential customer sees your ads or your store, how comfortable do they feel coming in to shop? How are you saying you are welcome here to people of all races, ages, religions, sexualities, sizes and abilities?

People of color may feel less than welcome in what they perceive as a "white" store. As a visual merchandiser, I know the power of photos. Several people of color that I spoke with said that if they see a photo with a Black/Hispanic/Asian/Muslim person in the store window or on a visible wall from the street, they are more likely to shop at the store as they know they will be



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.



welcome. From the logical point of view, having a photo (or many photos) with each race or religion represented can begin to look overcrowded and like you are playing up to each race/religion for sales reasons.

If you choose to use photos, they need to be big – really big – at least 3 feet by 4 feet and simply framed. Ideally, you'll have yourself a winner if you can find or produce a photo with two couples having an outdoor dinner in front of an RV – one white, one Black, Hispanic or Asian – or mixed couples. But that may not be easy to organize and shoot.

Another idea was equally agreed upon as giving the same message. A door sign can simply say "We Welcome Everyone" or "All Are Welcome Here." This is easier than spelling out who you welcome because you're bound to leave off someone from the list. Or, you can say, "No Sexism, No Racism, No Ableism, No Ageism, No Homophobia, No Fatphobia, No Transphobia, No Hate." The only problem with this is that there are so many "no's" that the negativity can visually be stronger than the message.

I've seen door signs that say, "Hate Has No Home Here." Unfortunately, the word that stands out is hate. Leaving out any negativity is worth working toward. If you like lists, a more positive door sign may say: WELCOME – all sizes, all colors, all ages, all cultures, all sexes, all beliefs, all religions, all types, all people – YOU ARE SAFE HERE.

People with limited mobility often feel less than welcome in a retail store especially when the aisles won't accommodate a wheelchair or walker or there's no handicap access. That's a problem with many existing buildings that have walk-ups to get into the store and then a second floor with no ramps. Revamping older buildings is costly, and in some cases, very challenging architecturally. An outside ramp is sometimes less expensive than reworking the inside of your store. If you can get people into the store who need a ramp, perhaps have a table and chairs (or area for them to stay in their own chair at a desk) so you can present different options using a tablet, laptop, brochure or catalog without having to go upstairs.

Older customers often have specific needs in order to feel comfortable in your store. Besides the obvious potential issue of floor level changes, often chairs are unwelcoming to older people. To buy the correct seating for seniors (which will work perfectly well for younger people), close your eyes and imagine that your knees hurt when you bend them, your back throbs with pain when you lean forward and your balance is a little off due to arthritis in your feet. Now, with all that in mind, imagine the only seating in the store is an Adirondack chair. Not an appealing thought or particularly doable for anyone with sore joints. Plus, you'd need someone to pull you up and out of it.

The ideal chairs for people of all ages have sturdy arms, are of normal height (18 inches) and a slightly wider seat. They should be rated to hold up to at least 250 to 300 pounds. Sturdier is better. The chair need not be upholstered; it can be wood or metal, but adding an upholstered seat will make it more welcoming and comfortable. Try to buy a chair with a seat you can remove to recover as needed. Also – and this huge – don't buy a chair you haven't sat in yourself. Buying chairs online based on reviews often gets you chairs that only work for the reviewer, not the multitude of different body types you have coming into your stores.

Dark, dramatic showrooms that just light up RVs can look fabulous and intriguing. Just remember to also light the signage. People over 45 or so have a much more difficult time reading if the light is dim. Since there can be a lot of visual information offered for each RV, it makes sense to add an LED spotlight to the signage. If there are any floor level changes, those should be extremely well-lit even if the rest of the aisles are softly lit.

In the restrooms, make sure you

> **A smile and hello are a powerful way to help people who otherwise may feel anxious, defensive or uncomfortable sense that they are desirable customers.”**

install grab bars next to each toilet. They can make a huge difference to someone of any age living with pain.

Balance often becomes an issue due to pain or other health problems. The stairs for each RV on your lot and in the showroom should also have handrails.

Environmental hypersensitivity is very real and can have customers walking in – and walking out of your showroom very quickly. Scent is usually No. 1 on the hit list. Mold, mildew and overly strong chemicals (some cleaning agents) can cause allergic reactions in many people. There is a local Rite-Aid that I can't spend more than three minutes in without getting a headache. I've been told the "scent" (stench in my mind) is the wax they use on their floors. I avoid this close-by store because of that odor. Please ask customers who don't come in often if your store has any odor.

For some, perfume allergies are very real. If you are promoting a line of scents for your RVs, consider citrusy scents as they rarely annoy scent-sensitive people. You may want customers with scent concerns to look at The Motorized Home's website and search for "how to make your RV smell good," which gives excellent advice that works for your showrooms as well.

Loud music or flashing lights can trigger panic reactions in some people. Unless your only customers are tweens, neither make sense in an RV showroom or parts store. Music works best when it's soft enough to hear but not so loud that it makes conversations difficult.

The most important way to welcome people into your store is to look up from whatever you're doing or whomever you are speaking with, smile and say "Hi." That smile and hello are a powerful way to help people who otherwise may feel anxious, defensive or uncomfortable sense that they are desirable customers. It is worth more than all the signs and photos on Earth. RVP







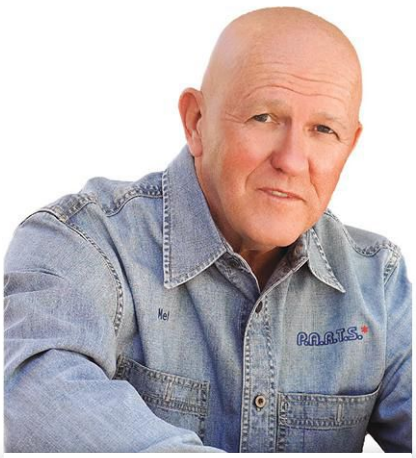
How Diverse & Inclusive Is Your P&A Inventory?

Evaluate if you are meeting your customers' needs.

Diversity and inclusivity: How do these apply to your parts and accessory inventories?

Since the theme of this month's issue of RV PRO is diversity and inclusivity in your workforce and in your customer base, I thought that reviewing the diversity and inclusivity of your parts and accessory inventories could be a worthwhile topic for my column.

Just as your workforce could benefit from a diverse set of skills and initiatives possessed by your associates, and your sales opportunities would be enhanced by considering customers with a variety of needs and wants for their RVing experiences – your parts and accessories inventories should be evaluated to determine if you are meeting your customers' needs.



Mel Selway is the president of P.A.R.T.S. Inc., a Sahuarita, Arizona-based firm providing business management analysis and training to retailers. He can be reached by phone at 520-336-8606 or via e-mail at melselway@aol.com.

What Could You Include?

Let's commence with answering this question on the inclusivity of your parts and accessories inventories. There are several factors that could be used to determine if an item should be included in your inventories. We will look at just four of these factors, which are:

1. demand for the item in your market
2. supplier(s) for the product
3. size of the item
4. what brand(s), years, models of RVs could it fit?

The assumption is that you don't currently stock the item that you are considering for inclusion in your parts and accessories inventories.

1. Demand for the item in your market could be easy to determine, or not! If you record every Lost Sale, then you might already have recorded some customer interest. This is a big if because many inventory managers don't require the recording of Lost Sales. In my experience, the more Lost Sales that you record (and evaluate), the fewer Lost Sales you could incur.

How else could you determine if there is sufficient demand to include this item? How many Special Orders have been processed for this item? If the total number of Lost Sales and Special Orders exceeds three within three consecutive months, then there is a substantial possibility that this item will incur additional demands.

Since the decision to include an item often applies to a product that is new to the RV market, and if this is a high-cost product, then factor in the input of your parts associates and managers of other departments. By soliciting the input of other associates, you increase the chances that this item will sell, because these other associates and managers are the ones who are interacting with customers.

Assuming your cohorts agree that this product should be included in your stocked inventory, then you could develop a show-and-tell training session that highlights the features and benefits of the item to enhance your RV customers' experiences.

2. What supplier(s) offer this product? If you have a relationship with at least one of these suppliers, then you might justify stocking this product if the supplier has a flexible return policy.

Perhaps this is a high-cost product that requires several days to install on the RV and your supplier has an ample supply of this product that can be delivered to your RV business within one or two days. Maybe you can limit the stocking quantity of this product to one or two.

3. The size of the item could impact where it could be actively merchandized within the dealership. Is it small enough to display in your retail store? Does the supplier or manufacturer of the product offer a point-of-sale display?

Would it "show" better if installed on an RV that your major unit sales manager feels would enhance the sale of that RV? If this form of merchandising is selected, how will your customers be made aware of it? Your P&A manager should be interested in selling as many of these items as possible and not limit the sales to the one sold with the RV on which it is installed. I suggest that by applying "suggestive selling" at the P&A workstations, your parts associates have a better opportunity to determine if a customer might be interested in learning about the features and benefits of this product by seeing it in use.

4. The fourth factor is RV application. Does this product fit a brand (or brands) of RVs that are sold at your business? Is this product a general use item that fits a variety of brands, models and years? The greater the number of RVs within your market area that could be eligible for this item, the easier your decision for inclusion.

But What About Diversity?

Diversity may require additional factors. I assume that there is an amount that has been budgeted for the value of the parts and accessories inventories. If your parts and accessories manager has implemented policies and procedures to:

- enable sufficient Gross Turns to her inventories;
- account for the seasonality of those inventories;
- develop satisfactory working relationships with her primary suppliers; and,
- train her parts associates in the techniques of suggestive selling,

then she probably has the capability to add new items without exceeding her budgeted inventory value.

I state this because an efficiently managed inventory will change with the seasons with respect to the types of goods that are stocked and the amount of each item that is stocked.

Three of these seasonal factors:

- the location of your RV business and the volume of RVs that belong to residents or transients;
- the type of service business – PDIs, maintenance, accessory upgrades and/or repairs that are heaviest at various times of the year; and,
- are you heading into a peak selling season or a slower time?

Depending on the seasonality of the inventory, your parts and accessories manager can choose when best to add new items to diversify her inclusive inventories.

DEMAND FOR THE ITEM IN YOUR MARKET COULD BE EASY TO DETERMINE - OR NOT!

That's All Folks!

Not all of the concepts, techniques and tools for efficiently managing your parts and accessories inventories have been included in this column, so look for my column in the September issue for some additional diversification options. RVP

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Pit Stop



5 Advocacy Day Impacts

This year's RVs Move America Week saw more then 120 RVIA members participate in 111 meetings with federal policymakers. Here are the legislative impacts from the event's Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C.:

- **Support for the Travel Trailer and Camper Tax Parity Act –** would resolve an error in the federal tax code's definition of "motor vehicle"
- **More RV industry advocates –** more than 1/3 of RVIA advocates on Capitol Hill participated for the first time
- **Stronger administration relationships –** including meetings with the U.S. Forest Service to talk campground modernization
- **Economic impact –** advocates shared specific impacts of the RV industry with each state's congressional district members
- **e-RV tech and infrastructure –** Airstream and Winnebago showcased their electric RV prototypes on the Hill for Congress members and their staff

MAY SHIPMENTS

30,919 TOTAL RV SHIPMENTS

38.8% DECREASE compared to May 2022 record (50,529 units)

To Date, RV SHIPMENTS ARE DOWN **49.7%** compared to same point last year

*"**Summer is officially here** and people across the country are using their RVs to create lasting memories with family and friends," said RV Industry Association President and CEO Craig Kirby. "RVing continues to be one of the most economical ways to travel and for those looking to take an incredible vacation while also controlling their travel costs, RV dealerships nationwide have many affordable options to meet the demand."*



- **Campers are adopting artificial intelligence (AI) faster than other leisure travelers.**
- **Currently, 32% of campers say they have used AI for trip planning, while another 22% plan to use it in the future.**
- **Campers who use AI for trip planning are most likely relying on it for information gathering such as reviews (55%), trip research (57%), building an itinerary (48%) or compiling resources about destinations (36%). Comparatively, only 7% of non-campers have planned a trip with AI.**

Source: Kampgrounds of America June Research Report

6 Tips for Cool RVs in the Summer Heat

- Go with the flow - orient your rig with the wind, which generally moves west to east in the U.S. Keep windows open and use screens to feel the breeze.
- Protect windows - insulated window covers used in the winter work just as well to block heat. Cover any big spans of glass.
- Cook al fresco - ditch the indoor kitchen on hot days and cook outdoors to avoid heat buildup.



- Power off - keep electronics turned off during hot days.
- Use LED lights - LEDs give off less heat than regular bulbs. Keep lights off during the day.



- Clean fridge vents frequently - RV fridges dump significant amounts of heat to keep food cool. Clean fridge vents as often as possible to allow proper heat output.



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