

February 2022

# RV PRO

RV-PRO.COM

## Empire Dealer

*New York-based Meyer's RV Superstores – with nine retail stores across three states – prospers by pursuing an independent course.*

### Also in this Issue:

- Tops in Trailers: Cherokee & Jay Flight
- Lippert's Windows to the World
- Northern Wholesale Marks 'Best-Ever' Show
- New for 2022 Aftermarket Products

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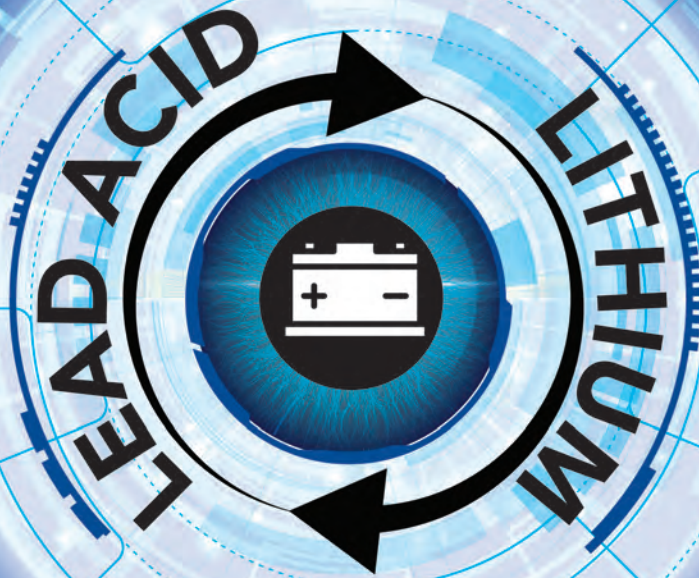
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**ABOUT THE COVER:**  
Meyer's RV Superstores President Mark Meyer (right) and business partner Mark Calzone are pictured at the dealership's store in Churchville, N.Y., one of nine retail stores the company owns across three states: New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

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## A New Golden Age for RVs?



**Bradley  
Worrell**

EDITOR

brad@nbm.com

It's the year 2022, and much like you, this morning I emerged from my cryo-sleep pod feeling refreshed, jumped into the holo-shower for a waterless cleansing and was then dressed in seconds by my robot butler. Next, I gobbled down a few breakfast pellets and jumped into my flying car, headed off to my company's offices high in the clouds.

At least, that's what I envisioned my life in 2022 would be like based upon all of those Saturday morning cartoons, most notably *The Jetsons*, that I dutifully watched as a young tyke. In retrospect, I wish I had a dollar for every grand idea that I was exposed to as a child watching cartoons that were quashed by reality. My house? Still firmly attached to the ground. My car? Does not fly. My dog? Definitely is not a robot.

In real life, it's not always clear in the moment which technologies will prove revolutionary and which ones will become passing fads (I'm talking about you, 8-track tapes).

With that in mind, I'd like to prognosticate just a bit, and say that we may be on the verge of a new golden age for RVs and RVing.

I will say upfront that it seems uncertain whether we'll be seeing electric-powered motorhomes in any great numbers anytime soon. While RV makers are making some progress on this front – with Winnebago's Advanced Technology Group revealing an all-electric motorhome concept at the recent Tampa RV SuperShow – issues seemingly remain regarding the range of those vehicles and the infrastructure to support them.

However, electric-powered trailers that can work in tandem with electric cars and trucks to travel farther distances and tackle challenging climbing conditions would seem to be on the near horizon, based upon technology being developed by both Lippert and also by THOR Industries in concert with German auto supplier ZF.

In the case of ZF's technology, called the eTrailer System, it is designed to have a high-capacity battery and electric drive motor in the trailer to provide traction power on the road, which removes the burden created by pulling a trailer and thus allows an electric towing vehicle (or traditional gas-powered one) to travel farther.

Granted, RVers have not necessarily been at the forefront of adopting electric vehicles thus far, but that's likely to change moving forward, given that electric vehicles are expected represent about a third of the total U.S. passenger car market by 2030, according to data from LMC Automotive Forecast.

Meanwhile, on the RV aftermarket side of things, companies are developing awnings that can be effective solar power collectors and devices that can collect water from the air – two developments that could represent big steps forward for boondocking. Meanwhile, companies like Pace International and KING are already making connectivity a reality at even the most remote locations.

In short, there are a lot of new technologies to be excited about. If even just a few of these end up being widely adopted, I think we could be entering a new golden age for RVs.

Speaking of new products, be sure to read our coverage of the Northern Wholesale Super-show starting on page 40 and check out our extensive New for 2022 Aftermarket Products section beginning on page 46 for details on a wide variety of products that will be available for stocking in your dealership sometime soon. Whatever else you might say about these products, they are a heck of a lot more exciting than breakfast pellets.

As always, thanks for reading.

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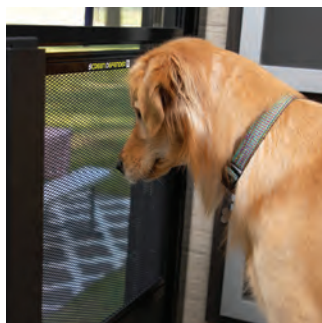
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# Leaders of the Pack

By Rob Merwin

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FOREST RIVER AND JAYCO

**Forest River's Cherokee and Jayco's Jay Flight rank No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, in the highly competitive travel trailer segment. They have prospered even amidst extra challenges in 2021 associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**B**y its nature, the RV OEM market is competitive. And likely no other market segment in the industry is as competitive as the travel trailer market, simply because nearly every OEM competes in that arena.

So, standing out in the crowded field is no small task. However, to their credit, Forest River's Cherokee and Jayco's Jay Flight have consistently been in the Top 5 rankings in the United States year in and year out.

For the 12-month period of September 2020 to October 2021 (most recent data available), Statistical Surveys identifies Cherokee as the No.-1 selling travel trailer brand and Jayco's Jay Flight as the No. 2-selling travel trailer brand. (See Figure 1 on page 11 for the Top 5 players by market share.)

Ranking so high on the leaderboard was particularly impressive in 2021, amidst a challenging environment associated with shortages of parts, supply chain issues and workforce issues related to lingering after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For perspective on how Jay Flight and Cherokee have managed to maintain their status as leaders of the pack in the highly competitive travel trailer segment, *RV PRO* spoke with executives for both companies to gain insights.

## Forest River's Cherokee

"There are a lot of reasons why we've been so successful, but one is that we've gone the extra mile for parts," says John

Quake, general manager of Forest River's Cherokee, Sabre and Rogue divisions. In particular, he credits the purchasing department, run by Phil Taylor, with turning over every stone possible to secure parts from the company's partners and select outside sources.

"Also, we have the best plant managers and workers in the industry," Quake says, giving special credit to Director of Service Mike Ham and the service department for taking care of customers on the back end.



Members of the Cherokee team are pictured in front of the company's exhibit at an RV show about a year ago. Pictured here from left to right are: John Quake, Mike Mack, John Boot, George Schmidt, Ashley Boot, Heather Evenson, Dan Berger, Sean Ryan, Matthew Boot, Sharon Spickler, Christian M. Ellis and Collin Spickler. (Not pictured: Norm Murphy)

*Forest River's Cherokee and Jayco's Jay Flight have consistently been in the Top 5 rankings in the United States year in and year out.*



Cherokee's 274AK is new for 2022. It has a spacious feel in the galley thanks to the open concept and good-sized slide-out on the driver's side.

"That's definitely a key to our success," he adds. "If we weren't taking care of units on the back end, we would have a front end."

In so far as features, design and overall Cherokee travel trailer offerings, Quake says he and his team rely on ingenuity and innovation.

"We're always looking outside the box to identify what dealers and consumers need," he says. "We don't look at what our competitors are designing and then copying them – that's not how we operate."

Those "out-of-the-box" ideas often germinate from a number of sources – not all necessarily tied to the industry, including car shows, boat shows, home and garden shows, or ideas found in households.

One of those ideas that came to fruition is Cherokee's "Zebra Shade," as Quake terms it, which was developed after his wife decided to replace their home's wood-slatted window blinds with ones sourced from her interior designer.

"Our small kids couldn't pull the previous shades up or down, which required 40 pounds of exertion, so my wife found these unbelievably neat alternatives," he says.

Cherokee began designing its own Zebra Shades for its campers with one of its vendor partners, and Quake says he believes Cherokee is the only one in the industry that uses them. He explains that due to its design, the blinds can allow light to filter through the travel trailer.

"You can see through the blinds, but you really can't see in from the outside," he says. "They can also be adjusted to go into full blackout mode or placed all the way up, as if there was no shade at all."

Another innovation added to the 2021 Cherokee is flexibility to its Juice Pack Solar package, which allows an RVer to add solar panels as their needs grow.

"If a consumer is going to be plugged in most of the time, then the 50-amp solar panel is great. But if someone is going to do some more extended camping, then they can add more panels as their needs grow," says Cherokee Product Manager Collin Spickler.

Quake adds that the solar package's expanded feature was born out of the marine industry.



## Top 5 Models in U.S. Travel Trailer Sales

Figure 1

Market Share Percentage*	Model/Division
7.98%	Model: Cherokee Division: Forest River
5.32%	Model: Jay Flight Division: Jayco
4.44%	Model: Salem Division: Forest River
4.42%	Model: Imagine Division: Grand Design
4.40%	Model: Wildwood Division: Forest River

\* Market share 12 months rolling (October 2020 to September 2021)

Data courtesy of Statistical Surveys



While Cherokee travel trailers are offered in a variety of towing weights, trailer lengths and floorplans, Forest River representatives say what unites the various offerings is the combination of comfort, style and value in one nice package.



New for 2022, the Limited 294KM is notable in part for its triple bunk beds (thanks to a flip-up bunk sofa) at the rear of the coach, as well as its large outside kitchen with side-by-side refrigerator and freezer, plus its pull-out cooktop.

“Powered boat lifts have a little solar panel to power its batteries, which otherwise can be drained if the lift isn’t used for a period of time. It’s the same with RV ownership – every year when consumers first take their camper out, they face the possibility that it’s dead: slides won’t work or they have to move the unit and figure out how to recharge the batteries if they are still operable. With the Juice Pack, they can be assured that everything will work, and the panels are expandable to more than 500 watts for additional muscle for longer camping.”

Also new for 2021 is a third brakelight for the Cherokee, added for safety, that’s located above the spare tire for increased visibility. Quake points out that this feature was gleaned from the automotive industry.

Marketing has become increasingly more important to the Cherokee’s sales success in recent years, too.

“Joe Mehl and his marketing team are so talented and really connected to today’s consumers in ways that I never imagined,” says Spickler. “Over the last couple of years, they’ve developed customer engagement that we didn’t think was possible. And we’re getting massive amounts of feedback from those consumers so that we’re able to build those ideas into some of our units.”

Before Mehl and his team became involved, Cherokee’s social media presence was largely limited to a company Facebook page that featured product photos and requests for feedback. “That was pretty much it,” Quake says, “and now we’re off the rails with TikTok and Instagram – we’re everywhere now.”

While Facebook’s general audience is typically older, TikTok’s age demographic is substantially younger, Mehl explains.

“The No. 1 growing audience on TikTok are 25 to 35 year olds – the platform has surpassed all other social media in terms of downloads for the past nine months, as well as both the Apple Store and the Google Play Store. We get feedback all the time.

“I posted a TikTok the other day for the Cherokee and it received 40,000 views in less than an hour,” he says. “It’s often overlooked, but Cherokee is the only brand featuring a hand-sanitization station that also doubles as a soap dispenser, which has been very well-received. We’ve really been honing in on the features that people want to see, and Collin and John receive the feedback and run with it in our product design.”

Spickler adds, “Dealer feedback is also huge. We bounce ideas around with them, either ones they’ve come up with or ideas that we’re considering. If a dealer comes through and helps us develop a floorplan (56 plans are available), then I’ll often name it after the dealer.”

Cherokee also provides its dealer partners with marketing content for their own dealership marketing departments.

“While we have our own brand channels and social media handles, we also offer our dealers content directly through ForestRiverMedia.com, where they have access to photos, videos and everything they need for their own promotions,” Spickler says.

“We don’t want to try a new idea or feature and just hope it’s going to stick in the market – we have our ways to get it out there and see what people think about it,” Quake says. “It’s a big reason for our success.”

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**Members of Jayco's Jay Flight team are pictured in front of a trailer. Pictured from left to right are: Dave Patrick, Matt Fisher, Stacy Stewart, Rick Gallmeyer, Kathy Echterling, Josh Owen, Maynard Miller, Todd Janes and Jeremy Pires.**



### **Jayco's Jay Flight**

The Jay Flight is presently in its 2022 model year, which represents its 20th year in production. "It didn't take long to gain success, as we were the top-selling travel trailer back in 2007," says Product Director Matt Fisher, who arrived at Jayco 15 years ago with a background as a school teacher, and uses that experience in communicating, teamwork and leadership.

As supply chain woes have made sourcing parts and products challenging, Jayco has adapted and circled the wagons to get Jay Flights to dealers and into the hands of consumers, including a close look at its lineup and production plans to increase efficiency.

There are six different Jay Flight assembly lines, and Jayco has concentrated on its top-selling floorplans, for which it has streamlined production so it can deliver inventory on a more regular basis. Some floorplans that were placed on the backburner are already beginning to be reintroduced.

"Our purchasing managers have spent countless hours talking with suppliers – and even driving to big-box stores such as Lowes and Menards – to do everything they can to make sure we have parts on the shelf to build units," Fisher says. "We worked with non-traditional suppliers, and all of those

parts go through Jayco product testing. One of the key features of the Jay Flight is that it has a two-year manufacturer warranty that is unique in the industry – we've never jeopardized construction, how we build units and the parts we use just to be able to ship an RV. When we meet with suppliers, one of the first questions we ask is what kind of warranty they offer. If they don't say two years, then they have to go back and come up with something better. There's no compromise."

All said, he adds that there's a healthy backlog of orders as retail demand remains strong.

"There are three basic reasons why there's that demand for the Jay Flight: people, product and price. When it comes to



**The 34RLOK is a 37-foot, 10-inch trailer weighing 9,165 pounds. It is equipped with three slide-outs, sleeps four and contains many residential touches.**

**The 34RLOK has an outside kitchen complete with a refrigerator sink and stovetop.**



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**The Jay Flight STX packs a lot into a small package, with a tow weight of less than 3,500 pounds. It features a queen bed at the front of the trailer, a nicely equipped kitchen and features a modern farmhouse décor.**



people, it revolves around our dealer partners. Jayco dealers throughout North America, some of whom we've done business with for 40-plus years, build a history and partnership that is unmatched in the industry," Fisher says.

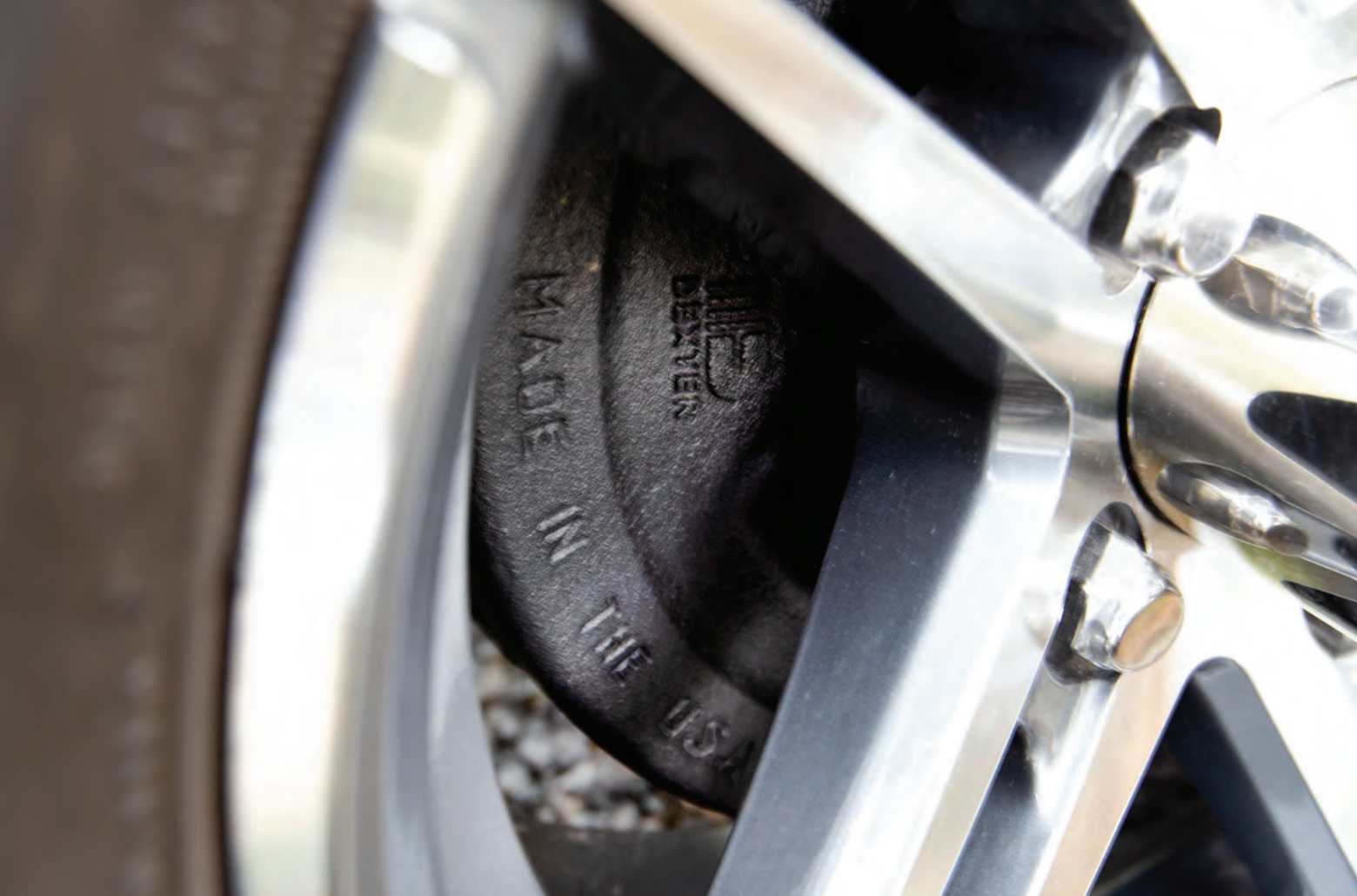
The Jay Flight team has become a culture of family, from production managers and purchasing to parts and more.

"Many people have been here since Day One of our first production and bring a wealth of experience," he says. "In regard to product, we highlight our benefits and features that we offer, including the top materials we use that justify our warranty."

Those "top materials" include Goodyear tires and plywood for roofs and tongue-and-groove floors, as opposed to OSB (oriented strand board) wood, which uses more glue and chemicals than plywood. Jay Flight frames are designed in-house by Jayco engineers – all floorplans feature an integrated A-frame, which Fisher says provides a stronger foundation, and wheel wells of galvanized steel.

"Our Goodyear tires have an 87-mph speed rating, which is higher than competitors, and provides confidence when customers need to pass a semi-truck on highway travel, for example," he says. "Tire blowouts can also create a lot of damage along trailer skirting, floors and sidewalls. The galvanized steel that surrounds our wheel wells offers added protection in addition to our premium tires."





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Jay Flight floorplans range from 15 feet up to 40 feet.

“For the travel trailer buyer, we have something to offer everyone depending on their needs and interests at different price points and sizes,” Fisher says. “We also mainstream our features to target what our customers are looking for by paying attention to consumer surveys and feedback.

“We know where we want to land at certain price segments and make sure we have attractive floorplans at each price point,” he adds. “People want space. It’s very important, whether it’s living space or storage, especially for families, which is why we have different sizes and shapes in floorplans for all buyers.”

The Jay Flight also has its own interior designer, Stacy Stewart, who brings a wealth of knowledge, according to Fisher.

“She’s always watching what’s happening in home décor and how people are performing their own RV renovations for new design trends and colors,” he says.

Jay Flight introduced a “Modern Farmhouse” décor in 2021, which was sparked by the housing industry using all white cabinetry at a time when the majority of RV manufacturers focused on variations of brown throughout their floorplans. In 2022, the

*“People want space. It’s very important.”*

**– Matt Fisher,  
Jayco Product  
Director**

Modern Farmhouse was extended into the entire Jay Flight line up.

“Stacy and our team created the décor, which now offers two packages: Modern Farmhouse or ‘Classic Cottage,’ with grayish-brown cabinets. It’s become a huge selling point for the Jay Flight, and to my knowledge there’s no other brand doing our volume that offers two décor packages,” Fisher says.

He adds that the Jay Flight also experienced a “hefty” change in the 2022 model year with an all-new exterior metal color and design, which features white as the primary color, compared to the gray and charcoal hues of 2021. The forthcoming 2023 model to launch in July will likely have fewer changes, however.

“We’re really focused on having the parts and pieces that we need, and we’re trying to lock down (supply) decisions early this year. The more advanced notice we can give our suppliers and the more we can minimize supply chain disruption, the better,” Fisher says.

He adds, “We find a way – from our suppliers to production to our dealers – because we’re nimble and more proactive than ever. With every hurdle and obstacle, it’s just going to make us stronger in the end.” **RVP**





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# WINDOWS to the World

By K. Schipper

**Lippert's windows business has doubled in the past five years, and with the introduction of acrylic windows to the U.S. from its European Polyplastic subsidiary, the company's growth in the segment is only expected to increase.**

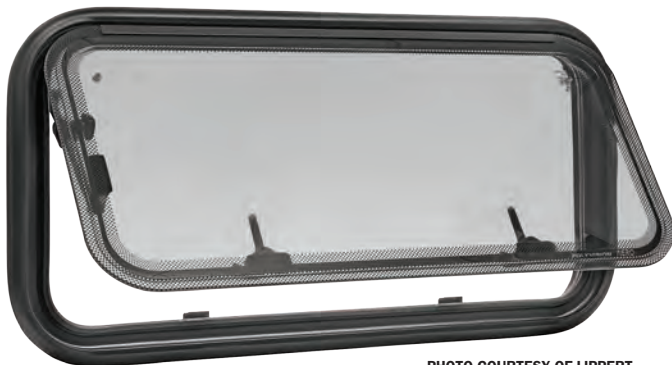


PHOTO COURTESY OF LIPPERT

**T**hese days, even computer spell-checkers often think the word "windows" is capitalized and followed by a registered trademark, thanks to the business acumen of Microsoft founder Bill Gates.

However, in the RV industry, OEMs are thinking along different lines. There, the word "windows" is strongly associated with Lippert and its European windows division, Polyplastic.

While windows are just one of the broad array of RV components manufactured by the company, they are a greatly expanding one. The reasons for that include canny acquisitions of competitors both in the U.S. and abroad, as well as a commitment to putting out the best product possible in a range of prices.

Lippert executives recognize they will never put windows in every RV unit built, but they certainly want to have a product available to meet every need.

## **Offering Consistency, Quality**

For more than 20 years now, Lippert has been building and selling windows to the RV industry, as well as other markets,



Robots and automation are an integral part of Lippert's state-of-the-art windows operation in Elkhart.



From left to right, Lippert's Donny Klotz, Wayne Wyatt and Caleb Denney are pictured with just a few of the windows that the company manufactures, which include awning windows, bonded windows and slide windows.

PHOTOS BY STEVE TOEPP / MIDWEST PHOTOGRAPHICS UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED



including manufactured homes, mass transit and marine. The recent boom in the market hasn't fazed the company one bit.

"Our business in the RV windows market has grown exponentially over the years," says Toby Crowley, a regional operations manager for windows at Lippert. "Within the last five years, we've more than doubled the quantity we build per day."

To put that in specific numbers, the company is currently producing an average of 23,000 windows a day from five plants around the U.S. employing 1,500 team members, according to Crowley. The reasons behind such a substantial number are many, he adds.

"Certainly, the market has grown," he says. "Also, we acquired (Los Angeles-based competitor) Hehr International in 2017. That helped improve our efficiencies.

"However, a lot of it is simply our dedication to innovating and adding automation to our process," he adds. "We're able to build and ship windows on time, and then we stand behind our products."

While any window does more than just plug up a hole in the sidewall – whether it's adding strength, reducing weight, improving

energy efficiency, or contributing to the aesthetics of a given unit – Crowley says there's still another attribute that's often the one most OEMs look for when choosing Lippert to provide the windows for a given model.

"First and foremost, the manufacturers want consistency, and they want quality," Crowley says. "There are other things that are becoming more important, like weight and tinted glass, but above everything else, they like our quality."

Nor does it hurt that Lippert manufactures about every style of windows an OEM could want, whether it's framed or frameless, tinted, or transparent glass, or – its newest product – lightweight acrylic windows from Netherlands-based subsidiary Polyplastic, which Lippert acquired in late 2019.

Crowley calls the addition an exciting one for Lippert's windows operation.

"They provide an excellent product," he says. "It's definitely a higher-end product for higher-end units."



**Window assembler Adolfa Martinez assembles a heavy-duty window specifically designed for the RV market. The company also makes windows for the manufactured home, marine and mass transit markets.**



**Multi-Punch Operator Angelica Navarrete works on the production line. The company has been in the windows business for about 20 years, but has greatly stepped up its production in recent years.**



*"Windows for the U.S. are mainly glass, but Polyplastic has a wide variety of models that are single- or double-thermoformed PMMA (polymethyl methacrylate) solutions. It's a matter of design, it's a matter of transparency and it's a matter of different shapes that can be achieved with PMMA."*

**– Lorenzo Manni,  
Lippert's vice president of sales  
for RV Europe**

### **Acrylic Windows Offer Many Benefits**

Lorenzo Manni, Lippert's vice president of sales for RV Europe, says cost may be limiting the market for the new windows. For now, at least, acrylic windows are a higher-end item.

"It will probably have a good runway into the mid high-level market, Manni says. "But I'm quite sure that quickly we'll see it shift into certain mainstream, and even entry-level units."

Manni has been actively involved with Lippert's acquisition of Polyplastic – which he describes as one of the three big European window suppliers – beginning with the initial research. He describes RV windows as "always a pretty interesting and strategic product," and explains that what Polyplastic brings to the U.S. RV windows market is technology.

"Polyplastic is an expert on acrylic and transparent plastic solutions for windows," Manni says. "Windows for the U.S. are mainly glass, but Polyplastic has a wide variety of models that are single- or double-thermoformed PMMA (polymethyl methacrylate) solutions. It's a matter of design, it's a matter of transparency and it's a matter of different shapes that can be achieved with PMMA."

The biggest advantage, he adds, is the lighter weight of a PMMA unit. It weighs much less than glass, whether the design is single- or double-paned. However, the windows also do offer a slight advantage in thermal performance and in noise reduction, especially with the double-glazed units, which again goes back to the material's weight advantage.

"You can double the amount of glass in a unit and still see a savings in weight going with the PMMA," Manni says. "It's just another opportunity for Lippert to apply its experience designing special windows to provide custom design solutions for the RV industry."

Not surprisingly, Polyplastic's windows are a key component for European caravan builders because the higher cost of gasoline makes fuel efficiency a big selling topic for both dealers and OEMs there. And Manni notes, there also is a 3.5-ton limit on the most common driving licenses as well.

While the jury is still out on whether vehicle owners in this country are genuinely concerned with fuel efficiency, Manni says that for U.S. OEMs, he sees the Polyplastic windows inviting Lippert into early discussions of the design process, and even inspiring innovative designs.

"We can help an OEM in the early stage of the process to give direction to a unit and make sure the design of the window matches the desired outcome," he says. "We like to say that we fill the holes in the caravan and shape the light. That's our mission."

Still, as a high-end product, will that mean the PMMA windows are limited to the living room slide-out or the front of a towable?

Not necessarily, Manni predicts. Because of its ability to support distinctive designs, he says the Polyplastic windows will give the units using them a unique type of visibility. That – coupled with their light weight – will make them highly attractive to the OEMs.

"This is going to be a strong development for our market," he says. "In the beginning they will limit the usage, but that will change over time. That's my expectation."

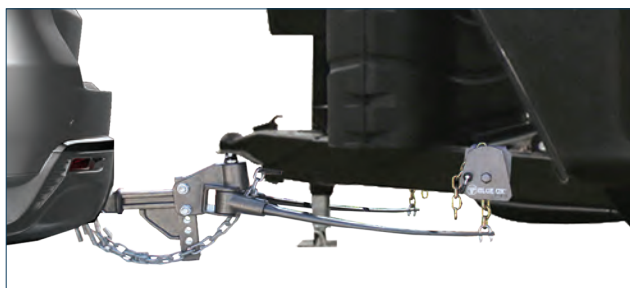


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**Lippert's production floor is abuzz with activity. The company currently manufactures an average of 23,000 windows a day from five plants around the U.S. employing 1,500 team members.**

**Shipping Specialist Elena Rodriguez moves finished windows from the production line to the warehouse where they can be shipped out to manufacturers.**



Lippert is already moving ahead strongly with offering the Polyplastic windows in this country. Manni says the windows began arriving in the late summer of 2020, and the first full program started in January 2021.

"There are some OEMs already in mass production with this product, and we're in the process of bringing others along," Manni says. "We expect this to soon be a booming market for us."

### **Selling Innovation**

Of course, Lippert has a solid reputation for working with OEMs, built on years of experience and – when it comes to windows – the company's breadth of product. Crowley says the manufacturers begin with information on the standard sizes the company offers with its different series.

"Once we know if they want dual-pane or single-pane, whether they want the frameless or the framed look, we can then steer them into the correct series and offer a quote based on the sizes they're requesting," he says.

And once a model begins production, Lippert has a team present to help during the initial installations.

"We'll have service techs, an onsite quality manager, even an operations leader that will be onsite to ensure that everything goes smoothly," Crowley adds. "If there are any issues, we want to be able to correct them immediately to make sure we're providing the best service possible to our customers. We believe in standing behind our products and delivering on time."

These days, with the supply chain snarled, delivering on time can be a challenge, regardless of the product. However, Crowley calls the procurement team for the window division "amazing" and says it has done an excellent job staying ahead of short-term material shortages.

"Fortunately, none of those have affected our customer base," he says. "We've been able to figure out solutions before they've affected any deliveries."

Although Polyplastic windows are coming from Europe, Manni says the company has had success in delivering its products to the U.S. market thanks to good logistics coordination and good communication.

"We've resolved a lot of that by just extending the lead times," Manni says. "With some uncertainty of international freight and the availability of containers, we've just given ourselves a little more time to make sure our customers aren't running out of products."

The Polyplastic windows may be the glamour product of the moment in Lippert's line, but the company certainly isn't resting on its laurels with its other window models.

One model that's a little more expensive is the company's frameless-style window. Crowley himself is surprised that Lippert sells around 3,500 frameless windows every day – a number that has remained fairly stable over time.

"People like the looks of it," Crowley says of the frameless design. "It is more expensive than a framed window, but those who have been using it like it, and they know it's quality built and a very nice-looking window."



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Polyplastic's acrylic windows have found favor in Europe because they weigh less than glass windows and they are very durable. (Photo courtesy of Lippert)



Lippert's windows operation employs state-of-the-art assembly lines and automation in order to help keep up with the increasing demand for the company's windows.



Lippert acquired Polyplastic in 2019. The company is a longtime supplier of acrylic windows to the European RV market. (Photo courtesy of Lippert)

He adds that the company is looking at adding some innovations to its frameless line for the first time since the design was introduced eight years ago.

Meanwhile, already in the process of being upgraded is the company's line of framed windows, which Crowley says will become apparent in 2022. He describes the changes as offering a window that's both better-functioning and more aesthetically pleasing.

Among its new features will be an improved latch system and a marine glaze.

He describes the latter as utilizing a rubber gasket around the glass, rather than the current method of gluing the glass into the frame. The advantages to that change are a better aesthetic, longer life, and better water management, Crowley explains.

### More Innovations Forthcoming

Lippert also will soon begin offering an accessory valance or trim kit for the interior of its framed windows.

"It will look similar to a valance the OEMs currently build and then wrap with some sort of fabric to cover the trim ring of the window on the inside," Crowley says. "We're going to offer the valance as a kit with multiple colors and styles. It will be able to snap right into the trim ring so there are less holes the OEM has to screw into the sidewall and easier installation."

The valance product is also an item that Crowley believes will play a part in giving Lippert a stronger presence in the window aftermarket. He mentions other items such as trim kits and replacement screens as possible aftermarket products.

"That's a segment we would like to keep putting more attention toward, possibly even offering complete window upgrade kits," he says. "That would be where we can provide the windows, the seals, the screws and everything, but that's part of future discussions."

It's a sure bet those future discussions will take place, too. Both Crowley and Manni say that if there's one thing Lippert is selling along with its windows, it's innovation. Crowley notes the company is establishing an innovation center in one of its facilities to do more research and development to bring the newest and best developments in windows to its customers.

"Of course, we're going to continue to build a quality product and ship it on time, but the big focus is on innovation," says Crowley. "We're going to continue to bring to the market new and improved designs, and we're going to exponentially innovate."

Manni says the addition of Polyplastic and PMMA windows is a great example of that.

"To a non-expert eye, a product like a window is just a commodity," Manni says. "It's in our DNA to look at that commodity product and ask ourselves how we can improve it and make it unique. In this case, we have an opportunity to bring European style and technology to the U.S. market, and that really gives us a strong leverage to reinforce our leadership position." **RV**

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# Empire Dealer

By Mike Harbour

New York-based Meyer's RV Superstores – with nine retail stores in the Empire State, Ohio and Pennsylvania – prospers by pursuing an independent course.



Meyer's RV Superstore President Mark Meyer (right) and business partner Mark Calzone are pictured in the dealership's large indoor showroom in Churchville, N.Y. The two men have grown the dealership into a tri-state operation since Meyer reentered the RV market in 2015.

Side hustles – those extra sources of income outside one's main source of employment – often have the potential to become something great or disappear altogether.

Thankfully for the employees and customers of Meyer's RV Superstores, Mark Meyer's dad chose a side hustle that grew into a regional powerhouse.

"My father, Michael, started off as a body and fender repair guy, a collision expert, and of course, he tinkered with used cars and whatnot," says Meyer, president of the New York-based namesake dealership. "He ended up getting some campers dropped off one day and we rented them. Renting turned into selling them and we just moved on from there."

Since that fateful day in 1967, when the first trailers showed up at the Meyer's home in a Caledonia, N.Y., cornfield southwest of Rochester, the business has grown into a nine retail store chain, spread across three states in the Northeast and Midwest. The dealership group sold a combined 4,700 units in 2021.

Yet it wouldn't be until 1973, when Meyer was 13, that the fledgling store would really get its footing.

"There was a dealer that (previously) had Coachmen down the road from us," he says. "Somehow, my father wound up with the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MEYER'S RV SUPERSTORES

Pictured here is the Meyer's RV Supercenter store in Churchville, N.Y., which features a 20,000-square-foot indoor showroom highlighting the dealership's variety of RV brands for sale.



Meyer's RV is known for cultivating a next generation of managers. Pictured here from left to right are: Retail Store Manager Katelyn Burba, Rental Manager Kelsey Willis and Parts Manager Shane Duset.

Coachmen line and that was a good, exciting line and that really got the ball rolling pretty hard."

Like most kids who grow up around a family business, Meyer labored in his dad's dealership. Still, he didn't intend to be a second-generation store owner. Upon graduation from high school, Meyer attended a community college to earn a marketing degree. With that in hand, plans were to head to Syracuse University.

"I ended up going back to work for my father," he says. "During the summers, I was definitely home working in the store and I started at the bottom, detailing in the shop, and worked my way up from there."

### Back in the Day

In the 1990s, under the guidance of Meyer's father, the dealership known as Meyer's Campers, expanded with a second location at a small gas station-turned-Winnebago store in Syracuse, where the business took off. Later, the Meyers turned an old car dealership in the Rochester suburb of Churchville into yet another store. In the meantime, the original site in Caledonia was significantly upgraded, albeit around the time sales slowed during the Gulf War of early 1991.

"We had spent all this money on a building that was kind of out in the middle of nowhere, but in the end it's served us very well. We've added on to it two or three times. It's been our hub," Meyer says. "It has 24 bays on 20 acres, and we house a lot of our inventory there that's going to get shipped to other stores. We do a lot of the major service work that can't get handled in some of the other stores there and it has a very large collision shop in it with a paint booth."

*"There was a dealer that (previously) had Coachmen down the road from us. Somehow, my father wound up with the Coachmen line and that was a good, exciting line and that really got the ball rolling pretty hard."*



Pictured here are just some of the team members at the Churchville store for Meyer's RV Superstores.



Service is a big focus for Meyer's RV. Pictured here is Service Advisor Dave George speaking with a customer on the phone.

**Service Manager Laurie Waite** is pictured next to a Forest River Salem travel trailer that's in for repairs. Meyer's RV's store in Churchville has 10 service bays to perform repairs and make upgrades on customers' RVs.



In theory, that's also the delivery point of most of the Meyer's inventory, but in practice, many units, such as those designated for the trio of stores in Pennsylvania, for example, go directly to the appropriate dealership. Meyer takes a different tack on pre-delivery inspections.

"We've been finding that if you PDI units on arrival, you just wind up doing it again on delivery, so we go through it and we give it the once-over and we figure out what we think it's going to need and get it written up, but as far as actually prepping the unit and putting it on the lot and then waiting for it to sell, you wind up prepping it again," he says. "We're a little leery of doing that."

Shortly after the Caledonia expansion, Meyer made a key decision in the company's evolution by bringing the first non-family member into management.

"Mark Calzone started with me in 1992. We were just this small mom-and-pop store and my mother (Virginia Meyer) had been handling all the books, but it was getting way over her head. Mark was a CPA who had worked for the accounting firm we had been using for years and had left there. I was looking for someone to come in and work in the store and he was available," Meyer says. "Mark really grasped what the RV industry was about. So, when we hired him, it helped us shape things pretty quickly."

### Pivotal Moments

Five years later, Meyer bought out his father's share of the business. That, too, was a pivotal moment and it came about 30 years after those first trailers arrived in the Meyer's front yard. By 2004, though, Meyer chose to step away from RVs and sold his dealerships – by then with five stores across New York state – to Camping World.

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**Sales Associate Stephanie Lamarti stands ready to assist customers in the dealership's indoor showroom, which was decorated for the holidays.**



**Members of the service team are pictured working on a travel trailer. The dealership's talented techs are up for almost any job, big or small.**



**Meyer's RV stocks inventory from many major RV makers, including Forest River, Grand Design, Heartland, Highland Ridge, Keystone RV and Winnebago, to name a few.**

"I originally worked for them for a couple of years, but after that, I had bought a marina and decided I wanted to be in the boat business. We have two other locations that are standalone from the RVs that sell just boats. I have a son that is running those for us right now.

"Those locations kept me busy for a while, but the boat business isn't anywhere near as fast-growing or fast-paced as the RV business was and I certainly didn't know it as well," he says. "Now, in my son's case, that's all he's done and he loves it. He does pretty well with it. I think my roots are more in the RV side because of my relationships. They go so far back and it does help. There's no doubt about it."

After a six-year absence, Meyer returned to the industry he entered as a seven-year-old, buying back the Churchville and Bath, N.Y., stores in 2015 with Calzone. Caledonia, where everything began, wisely remained a Meyer property and never figured into the Camping World sale. Since the early 2000s, it's been solely a service center.

Even though his former Syracuse store remained a Camping World, Meyer still believed that market was big enough for another competitor. He knew a marine dealer there who dabbled in RVs wanted to retire; the store sat on 60 acres near other RV dealerships, so Meyer bought it.

"Our whole intention was to build a great big store there – and we still will – but we've been pushing it down the road a little bit just because we've found some other opportunities," Meyer says. "Quite honestly, that Syracuse market has done so well for us that I just didn't really have the need to go spend right now, but we will in the near future."

From there, the Meyer's brand made its first foray outside the Empire State by purchasing a small dealership in Harrisburg, Pa. Meyer found another store in Apollo, near Pittsburgh, and bought that dealership, too.

New Jersey came into the fold when the former Escape RV in Branchville became a Meyer's store. All three were family-owned enterprises whose owners simply wanted to move on, Meyer says, but the locations held great potential.

The same held true for what is now Meyer's Mentor RV in Madison, Ohio, northeast of Cleveland. Meyer heard the owner was considering retirement due to lack of inventory and wanted to move to Florida. Like the Syracuse store, Mentor RV had an excellent location, so Meyer bought it, as well as some property around it late last year.

"We're really looking to blow that market up over there. That'll be a really good market for us. It's going to take a couple of years, but it's definitely the right market," he says.

Only one of Meyer's acquisitions has proved the exception; the Mount Morris, Pa., store was a former auto dealership.

"We're trying to capture the points around Pittsburgh and that was a car dealership that I found. We're currently leasing and renovating it right now. That'll be about a 12- or 13-acre parcel. That's kind of a raw-land deal," he says.



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*Between 10 and 15 percent of Meyer's annual revenue is from parts and service.*

### Reaching Out to Younger Workers

While expansion may seem easy for Meyer, he's quick to admit the RV industry is mostly ignored by young job seekers.

"They need to think about it, so we've been doing hiring events," he says. "We just ran some television and radio spots down in the southern Pittsburgh market, as well as the West Virginia market and we had like 90 applicants come in."

Part of taking on younger talent is ensuring quick and steady progress through the ranks.

"We currently have at least three 30-somethings that have been with us a fair bit that we're moving through the system into management because that's the next level. That's where you've got to go and they understand it and they get it," he says. "They know how to make the money; they know how to take care of the customers and they know what's selling and what's not selling. We're very process driven when it comes to things like that."

Staffing the dealership's 100-plus service bays remains a challenge, according to Meyer, and good technicians are incredibly hard to find.

"COVID's made it even more difficult, that's for sure. We just keep plugging and keep looking all the time. You have to lift up every rug there is. You have to go to all of your trade schools and see what you can pull out of there but for the most part, you're

usually catching people going from one industry to another. It's been tough," he says.

While there's a little bit of poaching and floating between competing RV stores, Meyer believes his region is filled with good dealers.

"There's not a lot of floating going on back and forth," he says. "You try to hang on to your own. You've just got to take care of them. You've got to pay them well, you've got to treat them well and you've got to pass that message on all the time."

Meyer's RV is a flat-rate shop, but new technicians are paid hourly if they don't have experience. In the Rochester market, for example, Meyer can send them to the Caledonia service center, where veterans there can help new hires until they're ready to work by themselves at other locations.

Between 10 and 15 percent of Meyer's annual revenue is from parts and service, a percentage that has changed considerably since COVID-19 arrived on U.S. shores.

"I think that has a lot to do with the revenue cycle of what's been going on for the last 12 to 18 months now," he says. "It was probably more 70-30 sales to parts and service for a long time, but I think it's really changed because there's so many sales going on right now."



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*"You can tie up a lot of your capital in parts in no time and it's a slow turn. It doesn't turn nearly as quickly as some of the other dollars in the store."*

### Parts, Service & Trades Pose Challenges

Besides staffing, another problem is plaguing Meyer's service department.

"Just a few years ago, you would just let anybody come in the door and you'd accept them for service. Today, unfortunately, you have to cut it back to your own customers right now because you just can't take care of everybody. It's too difficult.

"That's not a good thing for the industry, I don't think," he adds. "We're not the only dealer experiencing that. I think every dealer I know is experiencing it right now."

The parts department hasn't been immune from change, either, according to Meyer.

"Truthfully, we've been reducing it a little bit. Between all the larger big-box retailers and then you've got the Amazons of the world, parts have really changed their scope over the years, so we're pretty cautious as to what we're doing with parts these days," he says. "You can tie up a lot of your capital in parts in no time and it's a slow turn. It doesn't turn nearly as quickly as some of the other dollars in the stores, so you have to be cautious of that and we have been. We keep a close eye on it."

Overvaluing trades, Meyer believes, remains a critical area of concern now more than ever.

"Here's what's going on right now. If you look at any average RV that's coming in, maybe a three- or four-year-old unit, the NADA book value on that particular unit is most likely considerably higher than the original invoice of that unit when it first showed up," he says. "So, we've been teaching everybody to go back into our system, if it's something that we're familiar with or something we've sold and see what that unit cost us in 2016, or whenever, and then decide from there what value we should put on it."

Meyer says he wouldn't be surprised to see 30 percent of a typical dealer's used inventory being overvalued when the market inevitably returns to pre-pandemic prices.

"I think dealers need to watch their turns. For us, we have plenty of used inventory right now. We did Hershey back in September and we picked up somewhere around 300 used RVs. So, we're in really good shape, but every single time we'd look at one, we had to go back in the archives to see what that thing sold for originally and what could we sell it for today." **RV**

Listen to RV PRO's Podcast Interview with Mark Meyer: <http://rvpro.link/odpv5>



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# DEALERS OFFER THOUGHTS ON 2022

By Lisa Dicksteen

In 2021, *RVPRO* talked to dealers three times about the effect the COVID-19 pandemic was having on staffing, sales and market conditions, as well as their ability to meet customer demand for new RVs, plus parts and accessories. Recently, *RV PRO* contacted dealers about the RV Industry Association's projection that 600,000 units will be shipped in 2022 and what they are looking at in terms of indicators of how the new year might go. Here is what they said:

**Mike Regan, president and general manager**  
Crestview RV  
Austin, Texas

"Six hundred thousand units is easily obtainable – it's just about the supply chain.

"It's probably going to take a year to replenish inventory at dealerships, then it will be another year before we're back to any sense of normalcy – especially on the motorhome side. There's a shortage of chassis due to a lack of chips. Most motorhome chassis come from Ford Motor Co. or Freightliner – and there's a lack of chips there.

"RVs became very popular during COVID. You could work from anywhere. But we never caught up after the plants shut down for 30 or 60 days, so dealer supply was limited this past summer. Manufacturers will do better (this) year. There are new plants coming online, so it will be better this summer.

"The dealer supply level has to build back up. Consumer demand is making that difficult. Whatever comes on the sales lot is getting sold immediately, so it's hard to build up inventory. We've had a lot of units selling before they even get on the lot.

"This (past) summer, we were telling people it would take a year to get a motorhome and six months to get a travel trailer or a fifth wheel. That's down to about nine months and 30 to 60 days now.

"I track consumer confidence and I try to talk to consumers, manufacturers and other dealers. And, I watch our internal numbers: what's on order, what's sold. The relationship with manufacturers is paramount. They can tell you what's happening in other parts of the country. I know what's going on in the Austin area, but they can tell me what's happening in Florida and the rest of the country.

"Interest rates are going to be interesting this year. Our industry has never paid any attention to inflation and our prices went up around 40 percent last year. We can't do that again this year.

Right now, the demand is still there, but at some point, we're going to price ourselves out of the market. It's unprecedented for the price of something to go up 40 to 50 percent in one year. It's not sustainable.

"Business has done quite well this (past) year due to consumer demand, but it will go down if inflation continues to go up."

---

**Ted Davis, president and CEO**

Airstream Adventures

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"That number (600,000) will trend in Q1 and Q2 due to the backlog of unfilled orders, but in Q3 and Q4 it will fall short. It's not sustainable for a number of reasons – one of which is market saturation. With that many units in that short amount of time, the market will be flooded. It's just not growing that fast. The number of retirees is not going up and the flare of COVID is opening opportunities for competing lifestyles, so the COVID surge is going to diminish and demand is going to soften.

"That number of units places a huge strain on manufacturers and dealers to support customers after the sale, which will lead to a lot of disenfranchised newbies who don't get the post-sale support they need in terms of warranties and the time it takes to get vehicles serviced. And with social media, it doesn't take any time for that to get out into the market.

"Distribution capabilities haven't even come close to keeping up with demand and that will cause frustration. And retail rates are going to go up, and when that happens, business slows.

"The industry has created its own competitor in the used market. People can buy a one- to three-year-old unit in great condition. This is placing pressure on the new market we haven't seen in decades.

"As someone with a degree in economics, I watch a lot of different indicators. At the macro level, of course, I watch the consumer price index, inflation, and the amount of money being thrown at the economy. I also watch the geopolitical situation, trucking traffic, the demand for drivers, raw materials availability and the supply chain. Eventually, everything reaches the manufacturing level.

"Locally, I track our web traffic, closing ratios, sold orders and cancellations, which have been trending up in the last two months. I also keep an eye on the number of units out there by checking the public listings. They are starting to tick up. That could be seasonality, or it could be the market softening as people move on to different lifestyles."

---

**Jim Miller, general manager**

Riverwood RV & Auto

Mandan, N.D.

"That number (RVIA's projected RV shipment total) seems a little overstated. Things have gotten a little better, but not to a point where we can move those numbers.

"We're still not getting the smaller units (22 feet and under, single axle.) Demand has gone up, but here's still a large backlog of inventory.

"KZ had to pick and choose what to produce last year. We can find others to fill that need, but I don't want to be in a position where we have a lot of manufacturers on the lot and five years



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*“RVs became very popular during COVID. You could work from anywhere.”*

**– Mike Regan, president and general manager, Crestview RV**

*“That number (600,000 units) will trend in Q1 and Q2 due to the backlog of unfilled orders, but in Q3 and Q4 it will fall short.”*

**– Ted Davis, president and CEO Airstream Adventures**

*“Travel trailers under 30 feet are the most requested.”*

**– Jim Miller, general manager Riverwood RV & Auto**

from now, we have to start cutting. It's good to have that problem in theory, but we don't like to do it – especially when we've sold a bunch of them and if we drop them, customers have no representation for that line. Also, lots of manufacturers can't service the dealers they have, so they're not taking on any new ones.

“These days, customers come in asking for what they want. As a result, any time we get a trade-in, it goes immediately to our long list of specific requests. Travel trailers under 30 feet are the most requested. We've gotten in some smaller fifth wheels, which are going very fast.

“The bigger stuff is available, and we take whatever we can get, but customers want smaller units. We haven't been able to get Sportsters from KZ because they took the material from that line and used it to make other lines. The one we just got sold in one day.

“It's forcing me to look elsewhere. My partner is in Georgia, and he looks at used units and goes to auctions. Prices are really high, but we're even looking at slightly damaged units, which not as many dealers want, so we're getting better prices on those. And whenever I'm on the interstate, I stop at whatever dealers I pass, just to see what they have, what they're doing.

“Sales are unusually slow for this time of year, but manufacturers are still going full out. Usually at this time of year, we get 15-plus units per month; now we're only getting five to 10. The number has not gone up to what it should be so, even though we have added a few new lines, we'll only be at about 60 percent of what we'd usually expect for March and April.

“And people are considering the inflation factor, which is making

them buy what's on the lot instead of taking a chance on a 12 percent price increase between the time they order and the time we take delivery.

“I watch everything: industry information, other dealers – even other industries. If one industry takes a hit, everything migrates through. Everything tracks: trailers, real estate, the attitudes of consumers are similar across industries.

“It's hard to gauge what's going on, country-wide, from here because everything is delayed. If something hits in Chicago, it takes a couple weeks for it to hit here – not a couple months like when I was a kid, but there's still a lag.

“As far as qualified staff, I have not had a problem. We haven't expanded much, and retention is pretty good. I try to keep up with fair compensation and keeping the mood positive.

“We were lucky: We never completely shut down and sent everyone home. All those people stuck at home for weeks or months had time to reassess their lives. That changed things for a lot of people.”

---

**Kenneth Floyd, general manager**

Leisure Nation RVs  
Oklahoma City, Okla.

“I understand why they're not going to increase the number of units shipped (this) year. 2020 was a tough year for everybody and manufacturers are still trying to replenish dealerships that don't

*“2020 was a tough year for everybody and manufacturers are still trying to replenish dealerships that don’t have any inventory.”*

**– Kenneth Floyd, general manager, Leisure Nation RVs**

have any inventory. We have stuff that’s been on order for some time. It’s coming, but slowly.

“We’re a small dealership. We only started full-time in the RV business on the first of this year, as a franchised Gulfstream dealer. We’ve just rebranded, so we’re not stuck geographically. Formerly as West OKC RV, we were really confined to Oklahoma City, but Leisure Nation RVs doesn’t limit us. In fact, we’re opening a second location outside the metro area.

“We run kind of lean, which is what we planned, but it’s helpful now, when you can’t tell when you’re gonna get stuff in. So, it (2021) was a hard year, but also a good year. Like a lot of other industries, we’re living on used units. The future is bright. If we stay lean, we’ll thrive.

“Everybody is buying. It’s the best way to social distance with your family. When everything shut down last year, it reminded us how much we miss our loved ones, how much we need to spend time with them. Lots of people decided: Let’s take our home with us. What better way to do it than with an RV?

Manufacturers are putting out higher numbers than they have in the last several years, pushing units out as fast as they can, so a number like 600,000 is challenging, but not unreasonable. But I don’t know if they would be able to push out any more.

“Obviously, we look at consumer confidence to see what people are doing. Now that we’ve got a new strand of COVID, people are pulling back a bit. Not as much as the first time, but some. The other things we watch are how the year is going and how many people are responding to our ads. Right now, interest rates are low. When they go up, thing will slow down, but I don’t expect that to happen for a few years, so, it will level out, but not for a while.

“If dealers are not selling now, they’re repairing what customers already own. We’re staffing up our service department to handle what comes in so we’re not asking customers to wait three or four weeks like some dealers. RV techs have always been hard to come across and it’s a little tougher right now. As a result, we’ve been advertising for people with one area of expertise: plumbing, construction, heating and A/C, and carpentry. An RV is like a home: it has all those systems.

“They start as a PDI tech, train, and move into the role of full tech or show-out/walk-out tech. Basically, we train them so they can leave and go somewhere else, and we treat them well enough that they don’t.” **RVF**

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# Northern Wholesale Marks 'Best-Ever' Show

By Bradley Worrell

Dealers turned out strong for the show, the event drew the most exhibitors ever and the distributor said show orders were up about 30 percent over the previous best show.

PHOTOS BY BRADLEY WORRELL



Northern Wholesale's show has a relaxed feel to it, offering plenty of time for exhibitors and dealers to talk. Still, exhibitors say they always take lots of orders at the annual show.





The booth for RV cleaning products provider Bling Sauce enjoyed continuous dealer traffic during Northern's two-day show. Company partner and National Sales Manager Fred Scuncio (center) is pictured here talking with dealers about the company's products, which feature eye-catching retail packaging.

**N**orthern Wholesale Supply's 2021 RV SuperShow was one for the record books.

First, it marked the Minnesota-based distributor's 35th annual show. More importantly, it marked the best-ever show in terms of orders placed, according to Dean Kruchten, Northern Wholesale's director of sales and marketing.

"It was the best year ever for Northern Wholesale – with sales up about 30 percent over the previous best year, which was 2020," he said.

Kruchten attributed the sales increase in part to a strong dealer turnout at the show, held at the Treasure Island Resort & Casino in Red Wing, Minn.

"Dealers told us they enjoyed the return of an in-person show," he said, noting that in 2020 the distributor switched to a virtual format because of COVID-19. "Dealers were happy to be there, interested in visiting with exhibitors and very interested in seeing new products."

While an exact dealer count was not immediately available, Kruchten said he believes it was roughly on par with Northern Wholesale's 2019 event. Plus, Northern Wholesale welcomed 35 new dealers to its 2021 show, which Kruchten described as a very positive indicator, particularly given that the COVID pandemic of 2020 has not totally receded.

Just as importantly, he said those dealers in attendance came ready to buy, ordering plenty of product in anticipation of another strong selling season in 2022.

"Dealers are anticipating a strong year. They know, with a certain degree of confidence, how many units they



Mike Conway, national account manager for Southwire, is pictured next to a planogram featuring the company's various power products on display in the company's booth.

(Left) Reese had a number of new towing products on display at the show. Here, a representative for the company (left) discusses the features and benefits of a sway bar with dealers.





**Northern Wholesale team members pose for a group photo at the completion of the RV SuperShow. (Photo courtesy of Northern Wholesale.)**

are going to get and how many they can sell,” he said. “And with supply chain challenges, they wanted to make sure they have the (parts) inventory in stock.”

For its part, Northern Wholesale has taken a number of proactive steps – including stocking up early on inventory and adding more than 110,000

square feet of warehouse space – in order to make sure it can keep up with dealers’ increased demand for products, according to Kruchten.

“We’re feeling really good about our ability to get orders filled. One of the things we’ve noticed is that dealers are looking to take inventory earlier than in past years and we’ve done a really good job of getting in front of it and ordering ahead of the show,” he said.

Yet another positive development for the 2021 show, Kruchten said, was that Northern Wholesale added about 10 exhibitors, filling the exhibit hall. Additionally, he noted that the dozen or so educational seminars hosted by vendors drew good-sized dealer audiences.

Summing up the 2021 distributor show, Kruchten said, “We thought it went well. We got very positive feedback from both dealers and suppliers.”

While Northern Wholesale’s shows have something of a reputation for being casual and relaxed, exhibitors told *RV PRO* they were pleased with the dealer foot traffic at their booths and also with orders placed at the show.

Jordan Harvell, a representative for Torklift, said his company always does well at Northern Wholesale, in part because his company’s aftermarket truck camper products are popular with the many dealers in Minnesota and the surrounding upper Midwest states who sell truck campers.

Meanwhile, at the Bling Sauce booth, dealer traffic was constant during the show.

Bling Sauce partner and National Sales Manager Fred Scuncio said the company’s Hot Sauce RV cleaning products were a hit with dealers, who appreciated the product’s bright, eye-catching retail packaging, as well as the fact that the company enforces minimum advertised pricing on its products.



**Thetford team members are pictured with the company’s four-wheel Titan Tote product and the Best New Product award the company received from Northern Wholesale, following secret ballot voting by Northern dealers. Pictured from left to right are: Constance Wells, Troy Walvoord, Sean Quick (holding the award) and Ed Minor.**



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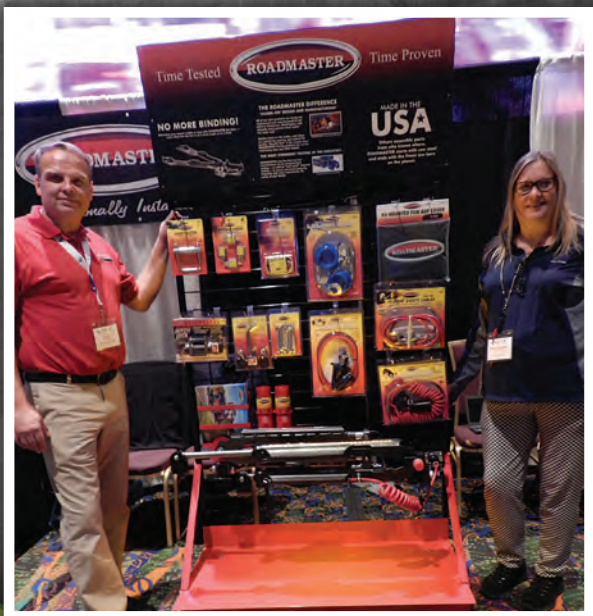
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Roadmaster National Sales Manager Eric Jason and manufacturer rep Georgian Voisem with Inspired Rep Group show off a new Roadmaster tow bar merchandising display system, which comes free with the purchase of related products.



"We're really happy with the reception we received because the RV market has not been a big focus for us until now," said Scuncio, noting the company got its start in the marine market about 10 years ago. The company has sold its RV cleaning products through Northern for a while, but this was the first time the company had a booth at the show, Scuncio said.

John Hawkins, aftermarket sales manager with BAL, said the Northern Wholesale show has long been a good one for his company based upon the number of orders dealers place.

"It's typically a high-buying show, even though it's not as large as some other distributor shows," he said.

Likewise, Raymond Padgett, managing partner of rep firm ARC Representation & Consulting, said he was pleased with the dealer traffic and orders being placed with companies his firm was representing, including Ultra-Fab and NSA RV Products, which was new to Northern Wholesale's show.

"Northern's show always attracts a lot of customers that don't come to the bigger shows, so it's worthwhile for us to be here," he added.

Also new to Northern Wholesale's show was Roadmaster. National Sales Manager Eric Jason said he was pleased with dealers' interest in the company's towing-related products, particularly its new tow bar merchandising display.

A number of exhibitors used the Northern



A dealer peruses the large selection of Camp Casual products on display at the JR Products booth. There were a record number of exhibitors at Northern's 2021 show.



A Texas Hold 'Em Poker tournament for prizes and the Club Mondo evening social event are hallmarks of Northern's show, held annually at the Treasure Island Resort & Casino in Minnesota.



Many of the classroom seminars at the Northern show were filled to capacity. Above left, a representative for PowerMax talks to dealers about the company's various RV-related power products. Above: Steve Stewart, representing Stromberg Carlson, talks about the features and benefits of the Base Pad Peak, which he is seen holding.

Wholesale show to highlight new products, including Pace International, which was showcasing its pay-as-you-go Wi-Fi product, the Travlf Journey1.

"We launched it recently, so the timing was good for us to be here," said Sam Schell, Pace senior vice president of business development, who noted dealers viewing the product were very receptive to the Wi-Fi system.

Harry Allen, representing Kuma Outdoor Gear, said dealers were very interested in the Canadian company's high-end camping products, particularly its new Yoho Bamboo Butterfly Chair.

"The reception to it has been phenomenal," he said.

Although Northern Wholesale is not the largest distributor show, it has always been worthwhile to attend, which is why the most recent Northern Wholesale show marked Allen's 35th one in his 50-plus-year career in the RV industry representing various suppliers.

For their part, dealers told *RV PRO* they found a lot of value in attending the show.

Mick Ferkey, president of Greenway RV in Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., said he's been attending the Northern Wholesale show for years because of the good show pricing, the relaxed feel of the show, and the opportunity to network with his fellow Midwest dealers.

Dave Pearo, who is a co-owner of Hilltop Camper and RV in Minnesota and is the parts and service director for the dealership group, says his company's relationship with Northern Wholesale has grown over the past 25 years.

"Well, a couple of reasons for that. They're local, close to our main store. The second reason is the relationships we've built over the years," he says. "They've always taken good care of us."

Perhaps the only damper on the recent RV SuperShow was that, with a heavy snowstorm bearing down on the southeastern part of Minnesota, where the show was held, on the second day of the two-day show, Kruchten said some dealers decided to cut their stay at Treasure Island short and leave that afternoon to get ahead of the bad weather. Still, dealers made sure their orders were locked in before departing, he added.

With another successful show under its belt, Kruchten said Northern Wholesale has already begun planning for its next show, which is set to take place Dec. 7 and Dec. 8, 2022, at the Treasure Island Resort & Casino. **RV**

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## SPECIAL PRODUCT FOCUS:

# New Products for 2022

*With a fresh year ahead, now is the time for RV dealers to get a look at the new products in stock for 2022. Including updates to essential products such as hitches and sway bars, boosts for electronics like thermostats and battery chargers, this year's new product lineup debuts a variety of items dealers will want on the shelves for the new year.*

*For more information on any of the products in this section, type the website address that appears below a respective product listing into your website browser. Viewers of the magazine's digital version can click on any listing to be taken directly to the company's website.*

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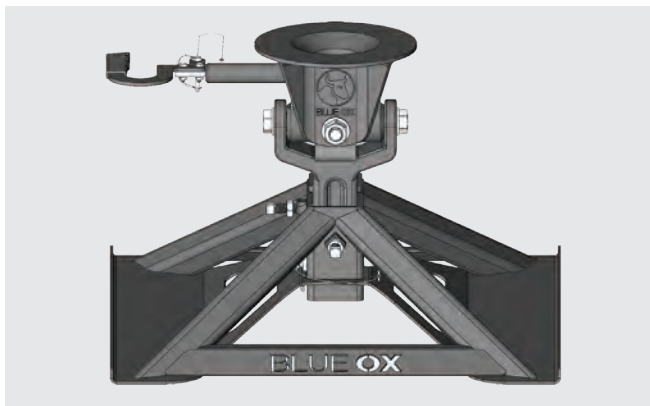
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[www.valterra.com](http://www.valterra.com)



### BATTERY CHARGING SYSTEM

**Arterra Distribution**, the RV division of **WFCO Group**, Elkhart, Ind., introduces its Auto-Detect. It detects lead-acid or lithium-ion batteries and automatically changes the charging profile according to the battery. Patent-pending technology reinvents the entire process of how a converter handles different battery chemistries. The company's new technology goes through a battery charge cycle and automatically detects which battery is being used and adjusts the charge profile to the correct battery type.

<http://wfcoelectronics.com>



## 200W SOLAR PANEL KITS

**Samlex America**, Burnaby, British Columbia, introduces its 200-watt Solar Panel Kits. Keep RV batteries charged and healthy while off-grid. Every SRV Kit includes a 30-amp flush-mount charge controller that is lithium battery compatible. Plus, the kit comes with all the other parts needed for easy installation. Customize or expand an existing solar system with Samlex's SSP Kits and connectors.

<https://samlexamerica.com/>



## CLASS B COCKPIT SHADES

**United Shade**, Elkhart, Ind., presents its custom cockpit shades designed for Class B vehicles. Providing privacy and light control, the shades help keep interiors cooler and more comfortable using reflective backing to deflect or absorb solar heat and harmful UV rays. The fitted panels maintain structural rigidity for a snug fit against the windshield, driver and passenger-side windows; yet they are also compact and foldable, stowing easily away when not in use. Strong magnets hold the shades in place for effortless install and removal.

[www.unitedshade.com](http://www.unitedshade.com)



## TOW-PRO LIBERTY BRAKE CONTROLLER

The REDARC Tow-Pro Liberty is the ultimate on-road brake controller. Tested on the most brutal tarmac in the Outback, the Liberty is a proven evolution of braking technology to give your customers absolute confidence. We're more than just a team of engineers and electrical experts. We get out there and put miles on the pavement, and we refuse to build anything we wouldn't trust on our own rigs. Every REDARC component is proudly built right here in the rough-road capital of the world. Haul with Australian confidence at [redarcelectronics.com](http://redarcelectronics.com)





## DRINKING WATER HOSE

**Camco Manufacturing**, Greensboro, N.C., introduces its EvoFlex Drinking Water Hose with 5/8" inner diameter, ideal for RV and marine use. The tough polyester outer fabric helps maintain the hose's shape and protect it from breaks, cracks and leaks. This product features aluminum fittings with a molded strain relief. It is drinking-water safe and has a lead-free, BPA-free and phthalate-free formulation. This extra flexible hose is compact and easy to store – perfect for tight spaces. Includes a storage bag. It is available in 25' or 50' lengths.

<http://www.camco.net>



## BLUETOOTH-ENABLED RV LOCKS

**Bauer Products**, Grand Rapids, Mich., introduces its Bluetooth Smart Locks. Just push one button to unlock when paired devices are nearby. Use smartphones, smart watches and tablets to control Bauer's innovative Bluetooth keyless smart locks with Close Field Technology. Use phones as key fobs, control the locks, track their activity, monitor battery levels and more. They fit standard entry door cutouts – both motorized and towable applications – for easy upgrades. Key the lock to match existing Bauer locks and get the convenience of having just one key.

[www.bauerproducts.com](http://www.bauerproducts.com)



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## OUTDOOR AIR CONDITIONER

**Pinnacle Appliances**, Houston, presents its Pinnacle OAC 2000 as a perfect addition to an RV lifestyle. The low-noise, portable AC is great for outdoor barbecues and parties under the awning and can easily cool areas with the single flexible air distribution hose. With the all-metal design, it has a weatherized exterior, waterproof, anti-rust, anti-corrosive, powerful cooling with the capacity of a 7,000 BTU, compressor overload protection and four locking castors for easy portability. The dimensions are 22.4" by 18.9" by 11".

[www.pinnaclecombos.com](http://www.pinnaclecombos.com)



## RV CARE LINE PLAN-O-GRAM

**Dicor Products**, Elkhart, Ind., offers its 4' dealer planogram with standalone brush display. Streamline in-store purchasing for customers with a standardized planogram that creates a one-stop section for all exterior cleaning products. The display showcases Dicor's new RV Care line, including cleaning formulas in various sizes and a line of brush heads specialized for RVs. The accompanying standalone display will neatly hold 12 compatible extension poles in an eye-catching but space-saving design. Everything needed for care for an RV's exterior.

<http://www.dicorproducts.com>

## SHOWER ORGANIZER

**Specialty Recreation**, El Cajon, Calif., presents its Shower Organizer as a space-saving shower solution designed for easy installation. It includes a designated soap shelf, towel bar and shower accessory storage area. Great for all recreational applications including RVs, campers, trucks, vans and marine.

[www.specrec.com](http://www.specrec.com)



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[samlexamerica.com/solar](http://samlexamerica.com/solar)



### GLASS FINISH REFRIGERATOR

**Way Interglobal**, Elkhart, Ind., presents its Everchill 12-volt refrigerators now available in a premier glass finish to meet any kitchen's aesthetics. Glass front fridges come in 11 cubic feet and 17 cubic feet to meet various storage needs. The stylish new look makes for a beautiful centerpiece for any RV kitchen. Everchill Premier Series models are built for boondocking, lasting well over a day when paired with a single battery or indefinitely when charging with Elite solar products.

<http://Wayinterglobal.com>



### BRAKE CONTROLLER WITH COLOR LED DISPLAY

**Tekonsha**, Plymouth, Mich., presents a first-of-its-kind brake controller that seamlessly integrates a color LED display into a vehicle's dash, providing easy-to-read diagnostics and alerts. Once installed, enjoy fingertip control using the rotary knob to easily adjust settings. Put complete control in your hands by downloading the Tekonsha Edge mobile app, allowing users to store multiple trailer and driver settings, and much more.

<http://tekonsha.com>

### SMART POWER INLET

**Hughes Autoformers**, Anaheim, Calif., presents its all-new, patent-pending SafeView Smart Power Inlet. Available in both 30A and 50A, these smart power inlets will alert users to unsafe wiring conditions when they plug in their shore power. These universal replacement power inlets feature multicolored LED lights and displays to quickly alert users if the pedestal or shore power is wired incorrectly

– open ground, open neutral, reversed polarity, etc. They also meet the requirement for the RVIA/NEC reversed polarity detection.

<http://www.hughesautoformers.com>



### SHOWER & BATH SURROUNDS

**ICON Technologies Ltd.**, Winkler, Manitoba, Canada, introduces its shower and bath surrounds. New for 2022, ICON has developed modular bath surrounds to accommodate aftermarket replacement of broken surrounds and bathtubs/shower pans. The modular design is extremely helpful in tight bathrooms and adaptable to many sizes. The surrounds come in three shower kits and one bathtub kit (Neo Angle 90-degree and 45-degree corners, as well as rectangular and Bathtub). The size is adaptable by trimming the panels prior to adhesion to the wall and clipping them into specially designed corner channels.

[www.icondirect.com](http://www.icondirect.com)





## MOBILE INTERNET HOTSPOT

**Pace International**, Rochester, Minn., introduces its all-new TravFi Journey1 hotspot as a pay-as-you-go internet hotspot that will automatically connect to the best possible signal among major carriers. Dealers can purchase a retail-ready P.O.P. display with six hotspots included. The pay-as-you-go internet starts at \$19. Affordable data plans range from 2GB to 800GB. The TravFi Journey1 is supported by Pace's award-winning RV contact center.

[www.PaceIntl.com/mobile/travifi](http://www.PaceIntl.com/mobile/travifi)



## RV AIR COMPRESSOR

**TireMinder**, Stuart, Fla., introduces its new TireMinder RV Air Compressor. This portable air compressor features a heavy-duty metal design, 1.8 CFM air flow rate with up to an hour of runtime, max duty cycle of 100 percent at 100 PSI, sound decibel rating of only 60db, automatic overheating protection, plus/minus 1 PSI digital tire inflator gauge, 30" hose with 30" hose extension (60" in total), 8" 12-volt DC power cable, high-quality carrying case and a three-year warranty backed by TireMinder.

<http://www.tireminder.com>



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### NEW, SLIM-LINE FIREPLACES

**LaVanture Products Co.**, Elkhart, Ind., presents its new slim line of fireplaces. The flush wall-mount electric fireplace features front tempered glass with a faux log or crushed glass look and adjustable flame brightness control. The 120-volt product has 5,100 BTU and 60 HZ power, with heat settings in Celsius or Fahrenheit. The slim fireplaces include a remote control, high-quality quiet fan, an over-heat shut-off device, digital temperature adjustment and an 8-hour timer – in addition to a three LED color flame effect in red, blue and orange. The product is CSA approved and saves 8" in height.

<http://www.lavanture.com>

### NEXT-GEN RV TOILET

**Thetford**, Ann Arbor, Mich., releases its next generation of the bestselling RV toilet, Aqua-Magic VI, in 2022. The space-saving lightweight design features a residential SloClose seat and cover, improved mounting bolt slots for easy installation and a foot flush positioned for minimal floor space interference. The Aqua-Magic VI provides the deepest toilet bowl available for RVs with the closest possible mounting to the wall and has an ADA-compliant 18" seat height.

<http://www.Thetford.com>



### KING WIFIMAX PRO

**KING**, Bloomington, Minn., offers its new and improved KING WiFiMax Pro Router/Range Extender, which now receives and transmits on 2.4GHz and 5.8GHz, delivering RVers a better bandwidth connection and extended range.

<http://kingconnect.com>



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## BED SPREAD TOPPER

**CKI Solutions**, West Palm Beach, Fla., presents the Dream Line Bamboo Blend Topper. With unique cross-stitch quilting and pockets generously filled with advanced cluster fiber, the design allows air to flow, creating a superior sleep environment. Unlike Down or other substitutes, the Dream Line Topper fill won't shift or lose its loftiness. Naturally resistant to mold and odors, it is hypo-allergenic and proudly made in the U.S.A. This topper is now available in all RV and standard sizes.

[www.ckisolutions.us](http://www.ckisolutions.us)



## AI-POWERED ANALYTICS ENGINE

**SpinCar**, Syracuse, N.Y., introduces its VINtelligent Retargeting AI-powered analytics engine, which uses proprietary behavioral data to identify the highest-potential shoppers, who are then matched with the most relevant RVs. Hyper-personalized VIN-specific ads are then delivered to them across the web. Interactive 360 WalkArounds are embedded right within each ad unit, making them the most interactive digital ads in the industry. The company says dealers report 90 percent savings in cost/VDP view, a 40 percent increase in VDP views and a more than 240 percent increase in time spent on VDP.

[www.spinacar.com/](http://www.spinacar.com/)



## 19-CUBIC-FOOT FRIDGE

**Norcold**, Ann Arbor, Mich., offers its new Polar Elite NDC20, to be introduced in 2022. The product is completely designed from the ground up for RVing. Relying on 60 years of RV refrigeration knowledge, the new design includes an energy-efficient DC compressor with a unique power management system that ensures the lowest amp draw possible, road-ready features, residential styling and easy OEM installation. Plus, 19 cubic feet of storage fits into an existing 18-cubic-foot refrigerator cutout. Big adventures demand elite performance, the company says.

<http://www.norcold.com>



## REVERSE POLARITY INDICATOR

**SmartPlug Systems**, Seattle, introduces its new Reverse Polarity Indicator System. On top of all SmartPlug coach-side power cord connectors are two LED Indicator Lights, one blue and one red. When the SmartPlug is connected to a power source, the lights will illuminate to indicate the status of a safe or unsafe condition. The cord sets are weatherproof and easy to use, plus they ensure a family can safely enjoy its next adventure.

<http://www.smartplug.com>



## TOUCH-SCREEN DISPLAY

**Truck System Technologies**, San Antonio, introduces its new Touch Screen Display. The touchscreen display makes programming a breeze, is compatible with recent 507 Series TST products, offers expansion opportunities up to five trailers, plus a power unit if users would like to expand the system. Flow-thru, RV cap, hybrid, and internal sensors are in-stock and ready to integrate. The new display includes a GPS giving drivers direction, speed, altitude and resettable trip odometer.

[www.tsttruck.com](http://www.tsttruck.com)



## TT LEVEL AND STABILIZING KIT

**Stromberg Carlson**, Traverse City, Mich., presents its starter kit with everything needed to stabilize an RV base. The Travel Trailer Level & Stabilizing Kit includes one base pad peak (which blocks the tongue, scissor and stabilizing jack), four base pads (provides reliable support on any surface), two base pad levelers (adds up to 4" lift), two wheel chocks (holds even large motor coach tires in place) and one storage bag.

<http://www.StrombergCarlson.com>

## RV GOOSE COUPLER



**PopUp Towing Products**, Chanute, Kan., presents its RV Goose Coupler, a one-piece replacement pin box allowing the use of a gooseneck ball. There is no need for a bulky fifth wheel taking up bed space. Unbolt an existing pin box and bolt the RVGC on in the same spot. This product has options, offering both non-cushion and cushioned models for most brands. PopUp's cushioned models were tested and proven to provide up to a 59 percent smoother ride.

<http://www.popuphitch.com>

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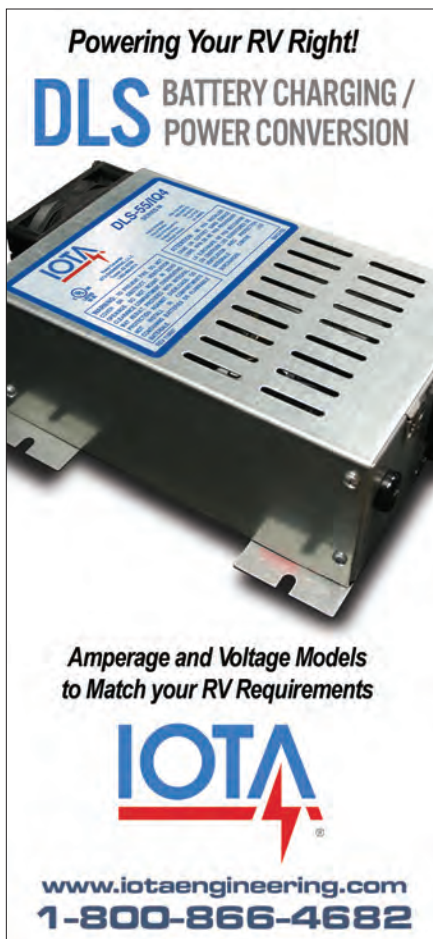
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## RUGS FOR STEPABOVE STEPS

**Prest-O-Fit Manufacturing**, Chandler, Ariz., offers its Trailhead Step Rugs for MORryde StepAbove steps. They are available for 2 Step, 3 Step and 4 Step in multiple widths, fitting both first- and second-generation stairs. Strong bristle fibers easily remove dirt and debris. The rugs are easy to install with the included springs and hook-and-loop fastening strips, fitting manual and electric steps. Made of heavy-duty outdoor turf and UV-protected against sun damage and fading. Resistant to mold and mildew. Easy to clean – simply hose off and dry.

<http://www.prestofit.com>



## APP CONTROLS RV FUNCTIONS

**ASA Electronics**, Elkhart, Ind., says its new iN-Command Control Systems offering gives users more options to control their RV. The iN-Command app for smart devices lets users access their motorized, monitoring and generator functions right from their phone or tablet. Now, with Global Connect, RVers can stay in control of select functions whether they are inside the RV or across the country.

<https://in-command.net/>



## IOSSO E-Z SNAP

**IOSSO Products**, Elk Grove Village, Ill., presents its E-Z Snap Lubricant. Between dirt, corrosion, UV rays and fabric shrinkage – snaps, zippers and hinges often become impossible to use. Iosso E-Z Snap Lubricant frees the most stubborn hardware. And now, the proven formula has updated packaging for a new look. Made in the U.S.A., the Iosso Zipper & Snap Lubricant lubricates and reduces friction on plastic and metal fittings. It keeps zippers and snaps from locking up and tearing fabric. The waterproof formula won't rinse away nor dissipate in hot weather.

[www.iosso.com](http://www.iosso.com)



*Danny MacAskill*  
Danny MacAskill



Mountain bike and street trial professional and Eberspächer brand ambassador **Danny MacAskill**: known from the YouTube hit "Wee Day Out"

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[www.eberspaecher-na.com](http://www.eberspaecher-na.com)

## KLEEN LUBE

**Bio-Kleen Products**, Kalamazoo, Mich., offers its Kleen Lube as an effective lubricator for RV slide-outs, awnings, key locks and catches, squeaky hinges, automatic step mechanisms, cables, windows and door tracks, rollers, conveyor belts, stabilizer jacks and anywhere else there is friction. Works at temperatures of -20 degrees F up to 210 degrees F. Safe on rubber, plastics, vinyl, metals and more. It dries fast and will not attract dust and dirt. It is designed to extend the life of RV slide-outs.

<http://www.biokleen.com>



## STEERING STABILITY PRODUCT

**Roadmaster**, Vancouver, Wash., introduces its Exact Center product. Vehicles with a center link steering system can suffer from a variety of issues that can affect steering stability. Roadmaster's new Exact Center steering stabilizer delivers a significant enhancement in control, with universal bolt-on fitment for a wide range of vehicles using application-specific Roadmaster mounting kits. Exact Center is a nitrogen-charged, stainless-steel tandem gas spring that measures just 1-1/4" in diameter, applying pneumatic pressure from either direction to keep the steering rack on center. Available January 2022.

<http://roadmasterinc.com>



## NEW ALUMINUM WHEELS

**Kenda Americana Tire and Wheel**, Reynoldsburg, Ohio, is launching two new aluminum wheels in early 2022 – the AMO3 and the AMO4. These contemporary and stylish aluminum wheels are available in six sizes that are most popular for trailers. The new wheels are made of cast-alloy aluminum for solid balance and performance with lower rolling resistance. Additional advantages include corrosion-resistance and light weight, which can increase overall fuel efficiency. The AMO3 and AMO4 wheels come in high-demand colors, including Matte Black, All Black Gloss, Gun Metal, and Silver.

[www.americanatire.com](http://www.americanatire.com)



## LIGHTER WEIGHT, EASIER-TO-USE HITCH

**GEN-Y Hitch**, Nappanee, Ind., introduces its new and improved version of the Executive. It has all the same benefits as before, like a gooseneck coupler, increased cargo protection, reduced tire wear and providing up to a 90 percent smoother ride. Additionally, it has been designed to be easier for customer use. With this new design, the Executive proves to be more lightweight, stronger, more convenient to install and up to 40 percent easier to detach from a unit with the improved cable system.

<http://www.genyhitch.com>





### RESIDENTIAL-GRADE, SPRING-COIL KITCHEN FAUCET

**Dura Faucet**, Camas, Wash., introduces its heavy-duty, residential-grade, spring-coil kitchen faucet brings a modern look to RVs. This two-tone faucet is also available in Chrome Polished, Matte Black, or Satin Nickel. In addition to offering a full line of metallic and nonmetallic kitchen faucets, Dura Faucet has metallic and nonmetallic bathroom faucets, nonmetallic shower valves, metallic and vinyl shower hoses, a variety of shower wands, shower boxes and quick connect spray ports. All are offered in a variety of finishes to fit customer's needs.

[www.durafaucet.com](http://www.durafaucet.com)



### 90-DEGREE PIGTAIL HOSES

**GasStop USA**, Clearwater, Fla., offers its new GasGear by GasStop pigtail hoses as an innovative take on pigtail hose design for RVers. These patented hoses feature a 90-degree brass connection that reduces stress on the components, enables accessory installations in tight spaces, and boosts overall safety. Available in rubber and braided stainless steel, these faucets are made using high-quality components.

<https://gas-gear.com/>

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## 21K MANUAL SLIDER

**Demco**, Boyden, Iowa, presents the Demco Recon 21K Manual Slider, the company's newest product in the popular Recon fifth wheel hitch line. The hitch conveniently comes in one box and pins together just like the others in the Recon series. Eliminate the need for multiple weight-rated manual sliders in your inventory. Proudly made in the U.S.A.

[www.demco-products.com](http://www.demco-products.com)



## ROCK SCREEN

**Rock Tamers**, Monument, Colo., offers its Rock Screen RT250, designed for towing customers that demand ultimate protection. The new Rock Tamers Rock Screen mounts in between the two mudflaps and keeps those expensive towables from damage. The RT250 is easy to install and fits on any size Rock Tamers Mudflap System.

[www.cruiserframes.com/rocktamers.asp](http://www.cruiserframes.com/rocktamers.asp)



## WIRELESS PHONE CHARGER

**Scanstrut**, Westbrook, Conn., introduces the Scanstrut ROKK Wireless Nest, designed to safely house and wirelessly charge cellphones. Now, users can keep their phone in a safe place onboard, tucked away, charged, and ready to go. This is the world's first 12/24V waterproof wireless charge system, ready for life on the road. Perfect for integration into seating, cabinetry, the grippy mat stops phones from sliding. The front lip, with an easy access thumb bevel, acts as a safety barrier, making sure the phone stays in the Nest.

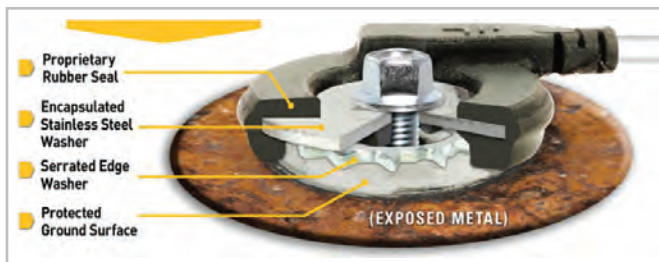
[www.scanstrut.com/vanlife](http://www.scanstrut.com/vanlife)



## L/P QUICK CONNECT DEVICE

**Lions Measurements**, Grand Junction, Colo., introduces the RV L/P Quick Connect Manifold. This patent-pending product is designed to reduce liquid propane regulator adjustment and timed pressure drop test from 20 to 30 minutes down to 7 minutes. It simply plugs straight into the RV's quick connect gas BBQ grill port to complete both tests. This allows the RV technicians to never break open the L/P system fittings and allows the tests to be done accurately and safely.

[www.lionsmeasurements.com](http://www.lionsmeasurements.com)



## ENDURANCE REPLACEMENT GROUND

**Hopkins Manufacturing**, Emporia, Kan., presents its Endurance Replacement Ground Connector to help solve the most common ground problems that come with towing electrical. Designed to seal out moisture and prevent corrosion, this new ground connector maintains perfect ground conditions for years to come.

[www.hopkinsmfg.com](http://www.hopkinsmfg.com)

## ODOR ABSORBER

**Walex Products**, Wilmington, N.C., debuts its Odor Absorber, now available in a refreshing Orange Twist fragrance. Odor Absorber is a gel product infused with a layer of charcoal that eradicates and absorbs odors. As soon as a container of Odor Absorber is opened, Walex's exclusive formula goes to work, neutralizing odors in the air and creating a bright, fresh-smelling space. Odor Absorber works in areas up to 300' square feet, lasts up to 60 days, is non-toxic, environmentally safe, and biodegradable.

[www.walex.com/product/odor-absorber/](http://www.walex.com/product/odor-absorber/)



## RV PRODUCT CARE LINE

**Sudbury**, Peabody, Mass., has launched a series of 14 new products formulated specifically for the RV market. The Sudbury RV line includes soaps, general and specialty cleaners, waxes, and items for tire and outdoor fabric care. For inside the camper, products are available to clean bathrooms, sinks, carpeting and upholstery, as well as eliminate mildew. Rounding out the offerings are toilet and



holding tank chemicals. Sudbury uses only premium quality ingredients in its products and manufactures them in the U.S.A. Designed to provide discriminating RV owners exceptional results, they're easy to use and environmentally responsible.

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# So, You Still Need More Techs?

*Savvy dealers hire good people and train them in their processes and policies, then watch those ‘green peas’ develop into full-fledged techs in six months or so.*



**By Don Reed**

Don Reed is the CEO of DealerPRO Training Solutions based in Columbus, Ohio. For more information, visit [www.dealerprotraining.com](http://www.dealerprotraining.com) or call 888-553-0100.

“November marked a comeback for RVDA with the return of its face-to-face convention in Las Vegas. And by all accounts, it was a resounding success, with about 1,500 attendees and a sold-out exhibit hall!

As a speaker and exhibitor, I was particularly encouraged by all the new, young professionals who just joined the ranks of our association by buying their very first RV dealership. These new dealers came to the convention to “learn” all they could in a short period of time – and they had *lots of questions and were very eager to learn*.


As I’m sure you can imagine, they asked a lot of questions about finding techs, hiring techs, training techs, motivating techs and how to compensate techs. For those of you who have read my articles in the past, you know I am a firm believer that you must compensate techs based on their individual performance in order to motivate them to perform at a higher level.

My team and I were presenters at four different RVDA workshops and we shared our thoughts on technician compensation plans, along with those for service advisors, service and parts managers, warranty clerks and parts counter personnel to more than 500 attendees in total. I find there are still far too many dealers who still do not “buy-in” to performance-based compensation and thereby dwell in the land of mediocrity, with shop productivity around 50 percent – *or less*.

## Recruiting, Hiring & Training New Techs

So, let’s look at recruiting, hiring and training new technicians to add more capacity to reduce that backlog of appointments waiting to get into your service shop.

RVDA’s keynote speaker was a man by the name of Nathan Jamail, who I thought did an outstanding job of stimulating the audience to think differently about how to



*“From green pea new-hire RV techs to producing billable hours in your service department within six months! I know many dealers who’ve been looking for years to hire more techs, so why not get proactive and **grow your own?**”*

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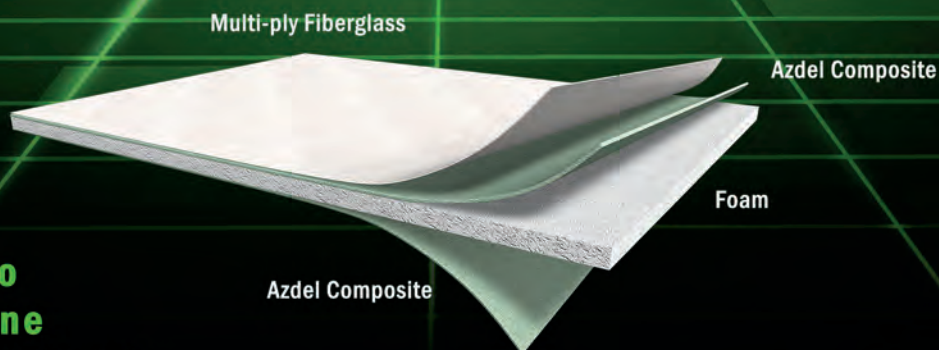
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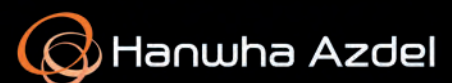
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*Hire good people without RV experience and then train them to do their job your way with your processes and policies.*

better manage their dealership operations and how to lead their team to greater success.

I was one of the fortunate ones who raised his hand and answered a question for Jamail, and he gave me a copy of his new book, entitled: “Serve Up – Coach Down” which deals with mastering the middle and both sides of leadership. One of the strategies he uses is calling on the audience for input and then uses that input to make his point in a very meaningful way.

For example, as he walked up and down the aisle, he asked about a half-dozen people what attributes they wanted in a new hire, and they said things like “honesty,” “friendly,” “punctual,” “willing to learn,” “integrity,” etc. He then asked another half-dozen or so what attributes they *do not* want in a new hire and they said things such as “dishonesty,” “bad attitude,” “unreliable,” “can’t get along with others,” etc.

He then asked everyone: “What was missing from *both* the “hire and don’t hire” answers?”

Answer: “Industry experience.”

Yes, that’s right – industry experience! His point being to *hire good people* without RV experience and then *train them to do their job your way* with your processes and policies, thereby bringing no bad habits from previous employers.

Next, he asked a service manager, “How long would it take you to train a new hire with no experience how to properly service an RV?”

Answer: “About six months.”

Jamail replied, “That’s all?”

Think about that for a moment, please! *From green pea new-hire RV techs to producing billable hours in your service department within six months!* I know many dealers who’ve been looking for years to hire more techs, so why not get proactive and *grow your own?*

### **Tech Schools a Good Source for ‘Green Peas’**

Let’s explore some ways you can get outside the box and make this a reality in your dealership.

All across our country there are hundreds of institutions that can provide you with these *green peas* who are actively pursuing a career in the service industry without knowing it could actually be in the RV service industry. They are called *technical schools* and they are in every state in the country with the following curriculums that students are willing to pay for out of their own pockets: Appliance Repair, Electrical Systems, Small Engine Repair, Automotive Repair, Collision Center Repair, Electronics Systems, Carpentry, Plumbing, HVAC, Welding and more.

These curriculums last for maybe six months up to a year and sometimes a bit longer. All of these institutions have a *placement program* and or an *early employment program* where they help the students gain employment even while they are going to school.



*The benefits to your top technician are obvious. He gets a performance pay raise for training the green pea.*

They also offer job fairs where employers can come to the school and conduct interviews for specific positions they need filled. It's a no-brainer and costs the RV dealer nothing! I'm speaking from experience here, since I actually did this in my own dealership back in the '90s and hired two graduates from UTI who went on to become two of my top technicians, with one eventually becoming the director of technical training for a major OEM. A simple internet search will give you all the information you need to find the schools in your state and your neighboring states as well.

OK, so let's say you follow my lead here and you actually hire a couple of these *green peas*. You might be wondering what you will do with them and how do you pay them. Here's a very good option for you to consider:

1. Pair them up with one of your top-producing technicians as an apprentice.
2. Your technician is responsible for *training* the apprentice on proper RV service and repair.
3. The apprentice will help your technician become more productive by helping to produce more billable hours.
4. Your technician must be on an incentivized-based pay plan that pays him more for producing more billable hours, even though you may be paying him on an hourly rate basis.
5. The technician is paid on all hours produced by himself and his apprentice.
6. An apprentice is paid a flat hourly rate until he becomes properly trained and eventually becomes a line technician himself and moves to the incentivized pay plan.

### **Everyone Wins When 'Green Peas' Join the Fixed Ops Team**

The benefits to your top technician are obvious. He gets a performance pay raise for training the *green pea*. He can increase the repair event cycle time and can process more units.

Benefits to service advisors are a shorter backlog for appointments and now they can conduct proper walkarounds and sell preventative maintenance to customers with menu presentations that most of the time can be completed by the apprentice while the technician is diagnosing and repairing the customer's primary item repair or service.

Now, I know that some of you are thinking, "Wow, this will increase my expenses and I can't afford it. Well, at the RVDA convention, I spoke with many dealers and managers who told me their retail labor rates ranged from \$135 up to \$269 an hour, so I'm confident you can afford to pay this *green pea* anywhere from \$12 to \$20 an hour, depending on your market.

More importantly, remember that your *shop productivity will increase* with the same number of clock hours available each day. Your repair order count will increase. Your sales will increase. Your gross profit will increase. Your service absorption will increase and your net will head toward record levels. Oh, did I forget to mention about *happier customers, too!*

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# Holy Rollers!



By Holli Koster



Joel Holland and his wife joined Harvest Hosts as members after becoming serious RVers a few years ago. Holland acquired the business from the original owners in 2018, determining that Harvest Hosts had strong growth prospects.

**Churches and businesses partner with Harvest Hosts to meet the growing demand for private destination RV campsites, earning extra income and generating attention for their local communities.**

Joel Holland and his wife, Mary Ashley, became avid RVers a few years ago after selling their Washington, D.C., area video technology company.

"We impulsively went out and purchased a fifth wheel and a truck and we RVed through 48 states," says Holland. "We totally fell head-over-heels with the lifestyle."

Along the way, the couple became members of Harvest Hosts, a membership program that matches RVers looking for unique places to stay with an array of hosting businesses across North America, where guests can often enjoy experiences on the properties.

One of the Hollands' first stays through Harvest Hosts was at an alpaca farm operated by nuns in Kansas.

"We walked away from that experience saying, 'Wow, this kind of experience really needs to be available to more people,'" Holland says. And so, when the opportunity to buy Harvest





**Shiloh Vineyard & Winery in WaKeeney, Kan., became a Harvest Hosts site for RVers six years ago. Now, the business hosts up to 12 RVs on its 100-acre pasture, which offers RVers plenty of room to spread out.**



**Harvest Hosts is currently partnering with more than 2,800 locations across North America, including working farms, wineries and vineyards, like the one pictured here.**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARVEST HOSTS

Hosts from its original owners presented itself in 2018, Holland jumped at the opportunity.

When Holland purchased the business, Harvest Hosts had roughly 6,000 members and 6,000 hosts. Today, the company touts that it has more than 200,000 RVing members and more than 2,800 locations – while continuing to add about 200 host businesses per month.

According to Holland, demand for the company's services is surging as RVing has soared in popularity in recent years, making it difficult for existing public and private campgrounds to keep up with demand.

"The massive surge in RV interest has led to a spike in campground reservations," he says. "This means that many hot spots around the country, like national parks, are regularly booked up months in advance."

Seizing on the opportunity to grow, Harvest Hosts in May acquired Boondockers Welcome, a site that connects RVers to free overnight parking on private property. With an expanding roster of more than 5,800 unique sites – including Boondockers Welcome sites – the Vail, Colorado-based company also is growing at a rapid rate, with 40 employees across the country, according to Holland.

### How It Works

Through Harvest Hosts, members get unlimited access to 655 wineries, 743 farms, 349 breweries and distilleries, 417 golf courses and 546 other attractions, such as museums – all for a \$99 annual fee.

Members can view a host calendar and request a stay through Harvest Hosts' online system, as well as post reviews and photos for the hosts they visit. Host sites can accommodate all classes of RVs, except for pop-up campers.

**RVers relax at the Kickapoo Creek Winery, located on 250 acres in central Illinois. As RVing has increased in popularity in recent years and existing public and private campgrounds have faced challenges accommodating new campers, Harvest Hosts RVing sites have helped fill some of that demand.**



*“We’re confident a program like Harvest Hosts keeps people RVing longer. We add a lot of value for buyers.”*

**– Joel Holland, owner, Harvest Hosts**



**Fluffy Fields Vineyard & Winery, located in Dickinson, N.D., has found it very worthwhile to belong to Harvest Hosts. The vineyard’s owners say the steady stream of traffic has contributed to many positive online reviews, which, in turn, continues to drive traffic for the business – up to 10 RVs per week.**

Hosts do not guarantee access to electricity, water or sewer hook-ups, although some do offer them, and stays are for a maximum of 24 hours, at the host’s discretion. Members are encouraged to visit the host site and make small purchases or donations.

Although the host sites do not collect camping fees from RVers, some sites earn between \$10,000 and \$30,000 in annual revenue through sales or donations, amounting to roughly \$40 million total across all host sites, according to Holland. Belonging to Harvest Hosts results in free publicity for the organizations and for their respective local communities, he adds.

As with many businesses around the country, the pandemic initially brought challenges for Harvest Hosts. But the tide eventually turned, as more customers purchased RVs and began to look at Harvest Hosts as a safe way to get out and explore the country, Holland says.

“There was that brief period at the beginning of the pandemic where all companies seemed to have been caught flat-footed and everything dried up,” he says. “At that time, people were not using the program. It was scary.”

However, since May 2020, the company’s fortunes have rebounded sharply and it has doubled in size, according to Holland, who adds, “Interest doesn’t seem to be letting up.”

Once states loosened restrictions, Harvest Hosts engaged in a nationwide TV advertising campaign, airing on networks ranging from Fox News to the Travel and History channels and promoted the service on Facebook through video ads.

As the website gained members, and more members have begun utilizing their memberships, Harvest Hosts has continued to focus on building its base of host sites.



**Harvest Host says RVers are generous patrons of host sites, and that as a result those businesses and organizations can receive anywhere between \$10,000 and \$30,000 in additional revenues through sales or donations.**



**In addition to farms and vineyards, many museums have partnered with Harvest Hosts, like the air museum pictured here.**



**Harvest Hosts sees churches and marinas as strong growth prospects for future site locations. Pictured here is Our Savior Christian Academy, a private Lutheran school in Smithville, Mo., which has benefited financially from its affiliation with the organization.**

## An Avenue for Outreach

For many host sites, the opportunity to partner with Harvest Hosts is a both an opportunity to bring in extra revenue and to put its location on the map for travelers. For Our Savior Academy, a private Lutheran school in Smithville, Mo., another focus is outreach.

“It’s a way for us to connect to the RV community,” says Superintendent Lavonne Pappert, who, with her husband, is also an avid RVer. “We’ve met some incredible people.”

A pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade school experiencing record enrollment, Our Savior School has made its main Smithville campus accessible to RVers. Located right off the highway and next to a large lake, the site can accommodate up to six RVs, with access to electricity, water and a dump station.

“Our parking lot is very level and sits on 9 acres,” says Pappert. “Children have full access to our picnic areas and playgrounds, there’s space for people to bring their dogs, and it’s quiet.”

A host site for many years, Our Savior Academy has watched Harvest Hosts continue to streamline its reservation process and add Venmo as an option for donations – which has benefited the school.

“We’ve had folks who have been incredibly generous,” says Pappert. “One time, we were holding a school benefit at \$100 a plate. We introduced ourselves and told our RVers we had extra plates and asked if they would like to come. They donated \$1,000. They were excited to help children.”

On average, Our Savior Academy earns about \$25 per night in donations – up to \$400 per month – and its space is full virtually every night. The nonprofit school has been able to use the



One of the benefits of belonging to Harvest Hosts is that it provides free national-level marketing for businesses and smaller communities, which might not otherwise not be places RVers would consider visiting.

proceeds to purchase new Bibles, a science curriculum and iPads, and to offer school scholarships.

"We have students coming in from all socioeconomic pathways. Some of these families are just scraping by," says Pappert. "And we're able to serve and help them with their needs."

Meanwhile, serving as a Harvest Hosts site also has enabled the school to minister to travelers in need, such as COVID-positive RVers needing a safe place to recover and a cancer patient who stayed for more than a month over the summer while receiving chemo treatments nearby.

### Plenty of Room to Spread Out

The low overhead of being a Harvest Hosts site has enabled the owners of Shiloh Vineyard & Winery in WaKeeney, Kan., to share land that has been in their family since the 1920s with travelers for many years.

Kirk Johnston, who helped his uncle ranch and farm the land in the 1970s, transformed the property into a winery and vineyard in 2008 with his wife, Treva.

"Initially, we wanted to sell grapes to another winery, but two years after we grew the vines, the other winery announced they were getting out of the business," says Johnston. "That one decision led to a whole cascade of events."

Inexperienced in making wines, Johnston says he read and watched everything he could find to teach himself the process. Six years ago, Harvest Hosts approached the Johnstons about serving as hosts to RVers.

Now, they host up to 12 RVs on their 100-acre pasture, which offers RVers plenty of room to spread out near the Johnstons' small pond and even turn around without having to unhook towed vehicles.

Johnston says being a Harvest Hosts site has been beneficial to the business – especially during the pandemic, when many local groups cancelled weddings and other events.

"Everyone felt very safe here," he says. "There's plenty of room to distance. We didn't even really have to change our protocols. We always clean things well. If it was not for Harvest Hosts, that would have been a really tough year."

He adds that he feels RVers respect his property and are pleasant and interesting guests at the winery.

"When they arrive, they've often been traveling all day and just want to relax," he says. "They're very interesting people with interesting stories to tell."

Harvest Hosts continues to bring a stream of guests to the Johnstons' winery, including in non-peak winter months.

### Putting Small Towns on the Map

When Harvest Hosts first approached Fluffy Farms, a family-owned, full-service winery in Dickinson, N.D., the owners passed on the opportunity. At the time, owners Deb and Kevin Kinzel were still working to get their business off the ground.

Kevin Kinzel, a farmer at heart who started planting grapes as a hobby, continues to work his full-time job as a mechanic, while Deb Kinzel left work at a local hospital to run the winery full time.



*“We didn’t even really have to change our protocols (for COVID). We always clean things well. If it was not for Harvest Hosts, that would have been a really tough year.”*

**– Kirk Johnston, owner, Shiloh Vineyard & Winery**



Heritage Farm Alpacas & Events is one of several working farms that welcomes RVers to stay with them through its association with Harvest Hosts.

However, a few years later, the couple decided to give Harvest Hosts a try.

“Within two days, people were calling to reserve spots,” Deb Kinzel says. “It’s been consistent since Day One.”

Visitors often take advantage of Fluffy Farms tours, wine and beer tastings – as the winery also has local North Dakota beers on tap.

“We have a full menu, so they can come sit on the patio and have wine and dinner,” says Kevin Kinzel. “Sometimes, we also have events they can take part in at the winery also.”

For Fluffy Farms, the steady stream of traffic has contributed to positive online reviews, which, in turn, continues to drive traffic for the business – up to 10 RVs per week. Kevin Kinzel recently reached out to the local tourism department to encourage other businesses to partner with Harvest Hosts and bring even more RVers to the area.

### **Long-Term Vision & Value**

As Harvest Hosts continues to add hosts and build a vision for the future, Holland says the company is constantly evaluating the landscape to get a better understanding of scenic locations that are being underutilized, with space that can enable parking and staying the night.

One recent opportunity the business has identified, he says, are churches.

“Churches are interesting. They’re located all over the country

and often have big parking lots that are not utilized most days of the week,” Holland says.

Among the first churches Harvest Hosts has partnered with, Christ the King Lutheran Church in Lake Tahoe, Calif., has received more than \$6,000 in donations and \$12,000 in income over the course of the year by inviting RVers onto its property.

Harvest Hosts set up a donation service so lodgers can contribute to the church. Some also attend church services while staying on the property.

Meanwhile, Holland says the team has also recently identified boat marinas as an opportunity for future growth.

While continuing to expand its host base, Harvest Hosts also is partnering with RV dealerships and OEMs. Ohio-based manufacturer nüCamp purchases one-year Harvest Host memberships in bulk to provide to new customers while Grand Design RV offers discounted memberships.

For Harvest Hosts, partnerships with dealers and OEMs offer a way to keep RV owners engaged with their new units, helping to minimize the risk they will sell their units once the newness wears off.

“We’re confident a program like Harvest Hosts keeps people RVing longer,” Holland says. “We add a lot of value for buyers.” **RV**

# If I Had a Crystal Ball

One of the most common questions dealers are asking today is: “What will the landscape of RV retailing look like after the current boom?”



By Chuck Marzahn

Chuck Marzahn moderates virtual 20 Groups for RV dealers in the U.S. and Canada. He can be reached for comment and questions at [Chuck@RV-VDG.com](mailto:Chuck@RV-VDG.com).

A week or so before I started jotting down thoughts for this article, there was a *Wall Street Journal* article that mentioned the effect of the lack of used car inventory and resulting prices. Dealers are likely to see many owners bringing units to trade with negative equity in a time frame as soon as two years out. Another recent article in the RV trades mentioned how the RV service business may hold the key to dealers' future success.

Those two articles got me pacing up and back at a vigorous rate. I truly find those prospects exciting. I have long held – the negative equity situation notwithstanding – the potential in service as a solution to the cyclic nature of unit sales is as valid an opportunity as any. Let me build you a case to support that premise.

No one could argue against the understanding that we are in a very cyclical business. The need to reduce the pendulum effect of the

sales cycle on profitability is an ongoing concern. With the negative effects from changes in supply chain and changes in production becoming more frequent, the urgency to find a stabilizing financial influence becomes even more evident.

Indeed, the wise dealer in today's market is looking for ways to set aside profits against the inevitable slide in sales. Many are making capital improvements. Some are working on diversification plans. There are some predictable paths, such as taking on a marine line, or perhaps, truck caps or horse trailers. Some are even moving into totally unrelated industries.

Doesn't it seem to you, as a dealer or manager, that the quickest and simplest way to diversify is within your own marketplace?

## Profits in Plain Sight

I find it amazing that the dealer body has long ignored the opportunity with the highest gross profit potential in the dealership. With the correct mix of techs and work type, that opportunity is your service department.

Identifying and rewarding the techs with the right mindset and a great heart attitude is possible today. I see it as a chance to use existing skill sets and facilities to greatly increase recurring revenue.

The idea that you have an increasing flow of gross profit from the service and parts departments to pay the bills is deserving of your focus. What we measure in 20 Groups is “fixed absorption”. Simply put, it is the measurement of the percentage of fixed overhead expense that can be paid with the gross profit (also called “available income” or “AI”) from service and parts.

Think of it as a measurement of how well you could pay the bills if you didn't sell any units. Then consider this: If you didn't need to sell units to make a profit, how competitive could you be on selling those units? Some of the “bigger” outfits have learned to pull from





*“Don’t you think it’s time to spend some time looking at the department that brings in the highest margin – rather than the one with the lowest? Opportunities abound in that area. The market is ripe.”*

the back end (finance) to seem more competitive in retail pricing.

One of the thoughts in that regard we may be missing is the gigantic size of the underserved market. It’s huge!

Think about how many towable products there are on the road. Each and every axle on each and every unit should have a wheel bearing repack/inspection done each year. How many labor dollars is that?

It’s easy enough to reason through. Look at towable registrations for the past five years in your market area. How many about per axle do you charge for repacks? Multiply the two and that’s the target market. And virtually no one is going after that market.

Consider how many rubber roof inspections and repairs could be done. Think of the customer who doesn’t have to face a major water leak repair because someone helped in the maintenance of their investment. And those are only two examples of maintenance items that every customer should have done each year.

It’s the simple maintenance items we are missing. Some of us involved in consulting in fixed operations have long advocated for the use of service menus at the time of drop-off on the service drive. We are regularly told that it does no good to sell if you don’t have the techs to turn the work.

Let that logic sink in. No. Really. Stop a minute and think about that ...

It illustrates that there is a huge untapped market to be captured that makes great money and helps the RV owner to enjoy the lifestyle.

What’s it going to be? Excuses or results?

A little better understanding of the problem and some better application of some simple strategies should be a total game changer.

Car dealers have long recognized the potential of *customer labor sales* (CLS). In a prior life, working for Toyota, we gauged our dealers’ success in the shop by an ever-increasing measurement of CLS per work order.

It’s a simple enough calculation:

Divide your customer labor sales dollars for the month by the labor rate, then divide that by the number of customer work orders. Do that for several months, maybe even a year back, and look for trends. I’m betting your CLS/WO drops off in the press of the summer season. Given that you are only comparing against yourself, feel free to stick those body jobs in there, too.

Here’s another way to consider this: Internal work is a business requirement of the dealership. You have to prep ‘em to sell ‘em. Warranty work is required to keep the customer happy. Incidentally, there is another case to be built regarding the quality of prep and the amount of subsequent warranty issues experienced by the customer. CLS alone is the measurement of a customer’s decision to do business with your service department. They have a choice in when and if they spend any of their own money with you. An ever-increasing amount of CLS/WO indicates a healthy relationship with your service customer base.

So why should you, as a dealer, care?

Each of those units coming in for customer work represents a customer who is generally happy doing business with your dealership. And, as author and business strategist Fred Reichheld proved, they are more loyal. More loyal customers mean repeat business with higher than normal grosses. People are willing to pay a premium to do business with professionals who care about them personally.

Where do you get the techs, you might ask? I’ll get to that.

### **‘Gravy’ vs. ‘Grief’ Work**

First, let’s get an understanding of the type of work that you can do to grow your CLS. It’s “gravy” versus “grief.”

Grief work is an easily understood concept. These are the jobs that can be categorized as hard to do, painstaking and lots of downtime and requiring heavy troubleshooting. Here’s a short list:

1. Any repair under warranty. Those jobs almost never pay

# If I Had a Crystal Ball

CONTINUED

enough. And they are always caused by a problem or deficiency in material or workmanship. There is most often some angst in the transaction with the customer.

2. Large body jobs. Any time you must order parts from an OEM that came off the line several months ago, you are in for a struggle. Additionally, large body jobs move in and out of the shop many times. They require lengthy estimate and approval processes. They must be stored in disassembled condition, either in a bay or some area protected from weather and theft. The complexity of the work requires a heavier commitment of administration.

3. Anything that requires OEM parts can be included. The Repair Event Cycle Time (RECT) increases drastically during those circumstances.

Before we leave the understanding of “grief work” let’s consider a couple other factors. Grief work generally requires a tech with higher skill sets. Those techs are harder to find ... and more expensive to keep.

But here’s a hidden trap: When you tie up your best techs in doing only the heavy lifting, they can’t be as efficient. If you have an A-level tech doing A-level work (“grief”), you can expect about 85 percent efficiency. The same tech doing B work can hit more than 100 percent. If you turn that well-qualified tech loose on a prep, for example, the efficiency can rise to 125 percent. Those concepts lay out a compelling business case to change the type of work you have in your shop.

Now consider the “gravy” work. Lower-echelon techs can be hired and trained to do the simpler maintenance jobs. You can buy the parts and have them overnight. If you stock the parts associated with what you sell on the drive and on menu sales, you can lean into one-day turnarounds on maintenance services.

Basically, if you can get the parts from a catalog, it’s gravy!

If you use a pay model that protects and rewards those techs for learning the trade and continually improving (see my article in the November issue on that topic) you can afford to compete for those techs with much higher pay levels that you currently use.

That brings up another point. You may be saying to yourself that:

1. You don’t have time to do that work,
2. You don’t have techs to do that work and
3. You don’t have writers who can sell that work.

Those are excuses.

Do you have time to do the work that comes into the shop with an unhappy customer because no one has been maintaining their unit? Do you have any trainee or apprentice techs working along other techs who can do training on maintenance work with the unit is already in the shop? Have you given any training in selling to the writers? Have you given them the tools to sell?

It has been clearly shown that much maintenance work can be done concurrently with the work that is already being done in the shop and with no additional length of RECT.

Many dealers spend too much time chasing the next “shiny object” in the form of a new, hot model or a new method of moving units. We all understand that selling units brings in most of the money.

Still, don’t you think it’s time to spend some time looking at the department that brings in the highest margin – rather than the one with the lowest? Opportunities abound in that area. The market is ripe. Lots of first-timers have no idea how to maintain and protect their investment.

This move to gravy work represents a stable revenue stream and higher absorption for the business. It seems to me to be nothing short of a renaissance for those who can seize the opportunity.

As a good friend once summed it up after having pretty much this same discussion: “If you wanna make the dough, you gotta change the flow!” **RV2**



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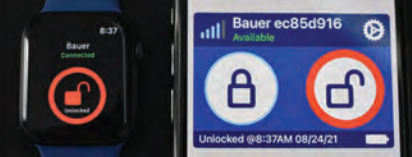
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# In Case You Missed it

Breaking news exclusives from RV PRO's website



Brand Ambassadors Aaron Tucker (left, with dog, Archer) and Mike Pfeiffer are pictured with their new Class B motorhomes, provided by Jayco.

## Encore RV Seeks Its Niche in Niche Market

After sitting on the sidelines honoring the non-compete agreement he signed with his last employer, industry veteran **Rich Schnippel** is back at it with his new company, Encore RV.



Encore's Rich Schnippel is pictured in his manufacturing facility in Elkhart, where he is producing his Rôg adventure travel trailers.

Schnippel is launching his company with an entry into what is one of the hottest subsectors of the RV industry right now – the adventure travel trailer.

"We have a three-product plan over the next five years, but it's going to be adventure trailers to start with," he said, calling his first line the Rôg. "I'm planning on five or six units in this first phase that'll go into the Rôg name, and what's interesting about that is a few will be toy haulers, but they'll also have a camper floorplan as well.

"There's a few that really are more overland-style, the kind you'd see coming from small manufacturers, like guys that put up a 50-, 60-foot shed. Three buddies build these things, they do a great job of it, they're high-quality, they tend to be a little heavier because they're

made out of steel and not aluminum," Schnippel said.

The difference between his company and those three DIY'ers is that his company will be making enough units to supply a dealer network, Schnippel said.

He said Encore's units will be made of an all-aluminum frame. In fact, he said, it's the way the units are constructed that will set them apart.

"My design is very unconventional – the way that it's built, the way that it's assembled and there's a lot of things that eliminate my need for trim and caulk that really make it an incredible product," said Schnippel. "It's completely wood-free – there's not a stick of wood in this stuff. All my cabinets are 1/8th-inch aluminum plate that's CNC cut, formed and powder-coated, and it's a neat design. It's not just lightweight – it's an integral part of the construction and strength of the trailer."

Read more: <http://rvpro.link/xgmbd>

## Jayco Provides Class B's to Brand Ambassadors

Representatives from Jayco visited Morrison, Colo., in December to meet with two members of the company's 'Ascend Ambassador' program – one a veteran member of that group and the other a newbie.

The Ascend Ambassador program extends across the company's four brands: Jayco, Entegra, Starcraft and Highland Ridge, according to **Trey Miller**, director of corporate marketing.

"We kicked this off not long ago, and we really kind of use this in a lot of different ways," Miller said of the program. "They'll help provide content with us for our marketing, they'll help with our social media, they will be at our shows, they'll go to our rallies, and they're really kind of our authentic – they kind of carry the torch for us, sit by the campfire and talk about our products to other campers, and they're really the authentic users of those products."

In this case, one of the two gentlemen in question is **Mike Pfeiffer** from Last Line of Defense. He is considered a major outdoor industry and now RV influencer – with his own YouTube channel, naturally – and he had been using a Jayco Swift Class B that he had upfitted.

That Swift is being handed off to a new Jayco ambassador, **Aaron Tucker**, who is a retired firefighter paramedic, police officer, tactical medic and cadaver K9 handler, narcotics and bomb detection dog trainer, Spartan Race competitor – which he runs with his service dog Archer – and an influencer for large military-related brands like Black Rifle Coffee.

So, with Tucker – and Archer – taking over possession of the Swift, Pfeiffer will be given one of Jayco's new Terrain 4x4 Class B's. Mounted on a Mercedes-Benz chassis, that rig will be upfitted to suit Pfeiffer's needs and he'll continue to serve as an ambassador.

Read more: <http://rvpro.link/q5ecr>



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