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ABOUT THE COVER:

Photo courtesy of Blue Ox
Blue Ox has made the leap into automation and robotics, and with an expansion that began in 2017, the company's manufacturing plant in Pender, Nebraska, will double in size to 185,000 square feet. Read more on page 102.

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Training seems to be a word I'm hearing a lot lately, as I'm sure you are, too. As dealerships, suppliers and manufacturers seek new employees in a marketplace where it seems everyone is hiring, training will inevitably become a part of that process. And, hopefully, if your business intends to turn employees into long-timers—like the men and women featured in this month's "Years in the Making" special section (page 46)—then you will continue to offer ongoing training as your employees progress professionally. As Brad Thompson of Premier RV in Blue Grass, Iowa, says in our Dealer Profile (page 117), he takes the long-view with his technicians and the rest of his team—looking to give his people not just a job, but a career. "Having a certified tech in today's market is very difficult. But we've had success in the past by developing a technician career chart—or tiers—so that an entry-level tech starts off in our prep department and, as they become more seasoned and their skill sets increase, we 'mentor them up' with a senior technician," Thompson says. Seems like a good model for all of us to aspire to.

Speaking of training—you may have noticed a few new names on the masthead for RV PRO to the right, including mine. About one month before press time for this issue, Cahaba Media Group of Birmingham, Alabama, acquired RV PRO and its sister publication, THE SHOP, from National Business Media. As the new executive editor, I am looking forward to getting to know all of you at industry events this year, and I urge you to email me with questions or comments: jdking@cahabamedia.com. I've been "training" on everything related to the industry with help from Managing Editors Jordan Benschop and Tony Kindelspire, along with Associate Publisher Chris Cieto and Account Executive Rebecca Tittel. CMG is happy to welcome these new team members to our work family, and we will strive to continue our mission to bring you educational and newsworthy content that helps you do your job better.

As always, thanks for reading!

Jennifer King

RV PRO Managing Editor Jordan Benschop and Associate Publisher Chris Cieto attended RVs Move America Week in Washington, D.C., in early June.



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Hauling in Style

Eighteen years after the brand first hit the scene, Keystone RV's newest Raptor toy hauler packs a punch—and the difference is on the inside.

By Mike Harbour



The new Raptor 420 continues the tradition of one of the top-selling toy hauler fifth wheels on the market, says Colin Clark, Raptor product manager.



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As towables have evolved through the years, toy haulers have probably changed the most in less time than anything else in the category. What began as cargo trailers modified by powersports enthusiasts across the West Coast with prefab cabinets and cassette toilets back in the 1980s, have morphed into incredibly capable and comfortable units today.

Helping lead that charge is Raptor, a Keystone Key Performance line and one of the top-selling toy hauler fifth wheels in the country. The brand has a long history of evolution that began back in 2004, says Colin Clark, Raptor product manager, and for 2022, the all-new Raptor 420 continues the tradition.

From the outside, the 420 doesn't appear much different than the 429, Raptor's top model. Both are almost 45 feet long, ride on a triple-axle frame and have three slides. They even weigh about the same: 15,400 pounds for the 420 versus 16,023 pounds for the 429. The difference is on the inside.

"It's got a full walk-in closet and a private bathroom up front," says Clark of

the king bed primary bedroom. "We've got double bunks in the back and there's a bathroom there, too, for your children so they don't have to go all the way up front to get to their parent's bathroom. It's got a tremendous amount of storage up front. There's a linen closet next to the shower, there's his-and-her storage on each side of the walk-in closet and also in the middle, there's a padded bench, so you can sit down and change your shoes."

Those arrangements haven't been done in the industry, according to Clark, who firmly believes offering something out of the ordinary is a key factor to success in what has become a highly competitive segment. Credit for the 420's unconventional design goes to his sales team, but not everyone at Raptor took to the idea as quickly.

"It probably took me five or six months to sell our plant on it, but once they built this, they fell in love with it. Going into a tough market, you have to be different, and this will be different," he says. "When someone walks into it, it'll be like,

From the outside, the 420 doesn't appear much different than the 429, Raptor's top model. Both are almost 45 feet long, ride on a triple-axle frame and have three slides ... The difference is on the inside.



From a walk-in closet to a private bathroom for the primary bedroom, the interior of the Raptor 420 stands out.

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While traveling with the slides pulled in, the front bathroom can still be accessed—a convenience while on the road.

“Wow, you know what? This makes sense. This works.”

Clark concedes the 420, introduced in April and retailing at \$146,130, would make for a great couple’s coach given all the space and amenities found in the primary bedroom, but with plenty of sleeping space available elsewhere, it’s definitely still livable for a family. The optional rear ramp patio and its electric awning and side-entry steps provides room to enjoy the outdoors securely with pets and children alike.

What really helps make the 420, as well as the other eight floorplans in the lineup, appealing is the decor, according to Clark, and that’s what makes Raptor’s truly high-line fifth wheels that just happen to have attached garages.

“We have geared our interiors to be more modern, more upscale,” he says. “If you think about the garage, that’s generally not going to be a focal point for women. That’s for a canoe or a grill.”

Yet the 420’s garage is a comfortable place for people. Like all Raptors, there’s a HappiJac bed back there, along with flip-

down sofas and a dedicated air conditioner with ducted heat. A separate entry door, again a Raptor hallmark, makes for easy access, and a pair of hardwood corner cabinets offer handy storage. Naturally, there’s even a 40-inch pull-down TV.

Available in two décor styles, the 420’s dedicated living spaces are finished in a Scandinavian-modern style with beachwood and white cabinetry with soft-close doors, hardwood ceiling treatments, as well as faux wood vinyl flooring. There’s also LED lighting throughout the unit and Thomas Payne recliners that heat and massage occupants. Ceiling heights are 8 feet throughout the main floor and 6 feet, 5 inches in the primary bedroom. In other words, Clark says, it’s not much different than Keystone’s top-selling Montana high-line fifth wheels.

One innovative idea that first appeared in Raptors five years ago is attached to one side of the 420’s island: flip-up barstools.

“With separate barstools, you have to strap them down or place them on couches to travel,” Clark says. “You’ve got to put

them somewhere and people forget about them. They run a slide-in and they crack the barstools.”

Speaking of slides, Clark believes owners will enjoy the 420 even while en route to a destination.

“Once your slides are in, you can still access the front bathroom if you’re going down the road. So you can flip your steps down and walk to the upper deck and get in. Sometimes you can’t do that with certain units,” he says.

Storage was a top priority during the design phase for the Raptor team, according to Clark.

“Here’s the thing with a toy hauler: We have to use all the space. If you think about it in thirds, a third of it is wide-open garage, so that space is used for toys, then the other third is a living room and the remaining third is a bedroom,” he says. “Recently we added within the last year and a half a pull-out spice rack just next to the stove. We previously had a blank there so we utilized that space for a spice rack and things like Pam and olive oil. Any available

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space we use for storage because a third of it is gone from the outset.”

On the exterior, the 420 features a large pass-through storage compartment, a rarity for the brand, Clark says.

What isn't rare for Raptor is multiple model debuts throughout the year, so shortly after the 420 appeared, the 362 was introduced. Smaller than the 420 by about 5 feet, the two-slide 362 still offers a 13-foot-long garage (the shortest Raptor thus equipped), so Clark believes it should enjoy wide appeal.

“The key to this unit is the tandem axle and a 40-foot overall length so people feel comfortable, as opposed to 44 feet and triple axles,” he says, noting that with its weight of just under 14,000 pounds, the 362 is easily pulled with a 3/4-ton truck.

The inspiration for this model came from the Carbon 338, itself an updated version of the now-discontinued but popular Fuzion 310. The common dimensions between both units were their 35-foot lengths, 10-foot garages and tandem-axle configurations.

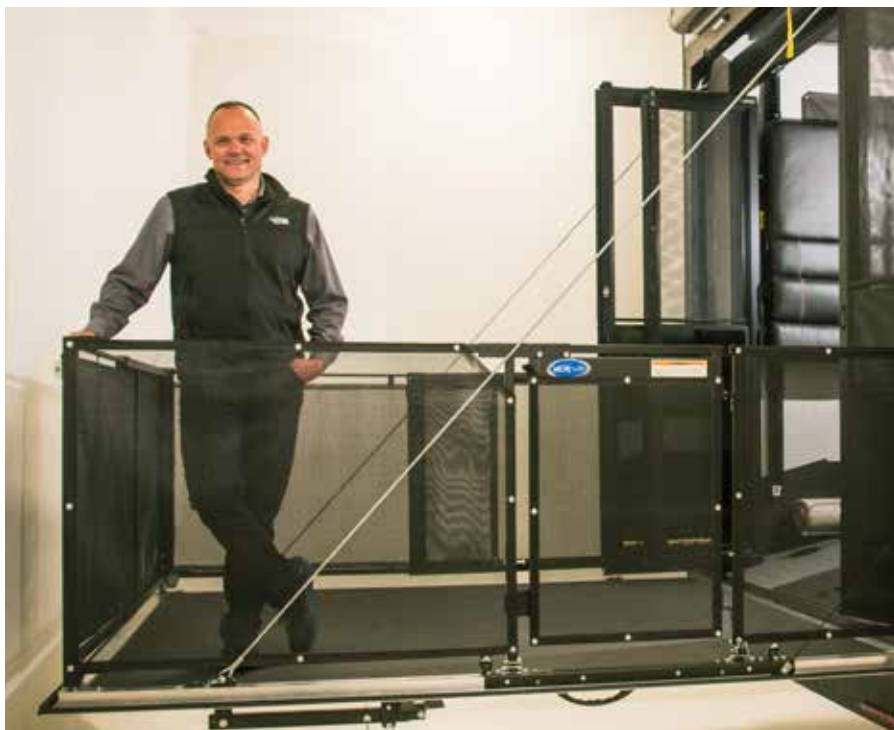
“Fast forward to the 362, we used that exact same floorplan and added 3 feet to the garage,” Clark says. “It’s an awesome floorplan. There’s three floorplans that I would buy if I was camping: the 362, the 420 and the 429.”

The 362, still a tandem-axle model and now shipping to dealers, offers buyers a lot of coach for its \$124,466 retail price tag, he says.

For example, there are no slides on the camp side of the coach, so only a tiny gap exists between its pair of long awnings. The U-shaped kitchen tucks in nicely between the dinette and the garage to maximize space. In the primary bedroom, there’s a large wardrobe slide and the spacious bathroom has two doors for convenience.

Despite all the emphasis placed on style, Raptor hasn’t forgotten what the garage is really supposed to do, according to Clark, and that’s to be a garage. Accordingly, Raptor provides, as it has since 2004, tie-downs strong enough for almost anything a buyer wants to transport.

“Those are actually welded right to the frame. They are not coming out. A lot of our competitors use a D-ring with a single screw into the Dyna Span floor. If you get someone like me who over-ratchets everything, I could pop that single screw right



out of there. That’s one of the biggest things that we have that none of our competitors have,” he says.

There’s another old-school feature still found in Raptors that Clark is particularly proud to point out.

“Dovetail storage. A lot of brands went away from that,” he says. “There’s a compartment with a door that goes in between the I-beams just inside the garage so you can put tie-downs, gloves, chains, a grease gun,” he says. “I personally believe it’s one of the coolest features in the garage, and we’re one of the only manufacturers that still do it.”

Contrary to some manufacturers that make highline RVs, Raptor doesn’t intend to go to an order model any time soon; indeed, Clark says only 10% of his units were retail ordered in 2021. Instead, the brand will continue to crank out models from its Goshen, Indiana, plant as the market demands despite an occasional bobble.

“I’ve got such a great team around me. The latter half of 2020 and 2021, I don’t think our group sat on our hands. We could’ve pushed harder and maybe did some more innovative things, but we really stepped it up at the end of 2021 and coming into 2022, we’re really looking good. In the fourth quarter of this year, we’ll have some great floorplans. We continue to do cool

stuff and innovate throughout,” he says.

One thing’s for sure: toy hauler garages will continue to grow in length.

“That 13-foot garage fits the majority of everything right now. My West Coast rep says anything from 14 to 17 feet is his sweet spot, but we are working on more floorplans for him out there as well, because you’ve got a lot more dry camping in the dunes,” he says.

Rising fuel prices, a concern for almost every American who owns a vehicle with an internal combustion engine, don’t worry Clark much, even though Raptors need a stout tow vehicle—usually of the diesel-powered variety—to get them where they’re going.

“I don’t think this buyer is going to get affected. I think this buyer is educated. I had a dealer tell me earlier this year at a show the average camper camps within 100 miles of home. This buyer generally has great credit. They’re spending \$100,000-plus on a Raptor or Carbon and they have a \$27,000 Razr in the garage,” he says. “The thing that would scare me the most would be interest rates on loans. If you’ve got an \$80,000 or \$90,000 diesel truck, you’re not worried about fuel. You’re just not. Interest rates? That’s a whole different world that sort of scares me a little bit. If they tighten up on lending, this industry will contract.” **RVF**



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We the RV Industry...

Compiled by RV PRO staff

In order to form a more perfect industry, RV PRO asked 13 professionals for their insight into the future of RVing, camping, electric vehicles, automation, diversity and more.

Working Together to Offer Camping & RV Experiences Consumers Want

From the Desk of Craig Kirby, President and CEO, RV Industry Association (RVIA)

The past two years have fundamentally changed people, and many are re-evaluating their lives and what is really important to them. Despite the challenges and uncertainties, this period has created an upturn in interest in the outdoors, with millions of consumers discovering how RVing can help them enjoy their best life. They've come to realize the effect the outdoors has in creating long-term positive impacts on their individual health, but also on the collective health of those around them. The RV industry has stepped up to meet this growing interest, but there are many challenges we must address head-on. For the camping and RV industry's growth to continue, we must ensure that we and our partners deliver exceptional experiences that our customers expect and deserve.

The "typical RVer" has also changed over the past two years with the median age of a first-time RV buyer dropping to 33 years old in 2021—down from 41 in 2020. The makeup of these new buyers is also more closely reflecting the demographics and diversity of the wider population. These changes in demographics open up a much larger customer base, but as the demographics of our owners keep getting younger and more diverse, the customer expectations get higher.

The industry is well positioned to continue our 40 years of long-term growth, but there are challenges our industry needs

to face in the immediate future. We know, and RV Industry Association's research has confirmed, if an RV owner is unable to easily find a preferred campsite and get their RV maintained in a reasonable amount of time, they are less likely to continue RVing. The groundwork has been laid over the past few years through the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, and the creation of our Campground Taskforce, to make a difference in not only the number of RV campsites, but also the availability of amenities like full hookups and Wi-Fi.

EVs continue to proliferate at an exciting pace—but we have a lot of work to do to ensure we are prepared for the emerging needs of this "electrified" segment at all levels. Similarly, the creation of the RV Technical Institute has positioned the industry to train and recruit the RV service technicians needed to maintain and service the millions of new RVs that have been produced over the past several years. But we need everyone to invest in this critical industry endeavor.

Our past success has come from the entire industry uniting and working together to overcome obstacles. From self-regulation and consumer marketing to industry training and advocacy, we're stronger together than apart. Industry unity is not easy. It takes vision, understanding, compromise and trust. With the millions of new people looking to get outdoors, we have an incredible opportunity in front of us. Working together is our most important effort, and it is critical to ensuring that camping and RVing are the preferred form of outdoor enjoyment for millions of consumers for decades to come.

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RVDA's Focus on Repairs, Education & the Road Ahead

*From the Desk of Phil Ingrassia,
President, RV Dealers Association
(RVDA)*

As the industry adjusts to a post-pandemic business environment, RVDA will continue to be the voice of the dealer on the burning issues impacting RV retailing and the entire industry. Some of the issues that RVDA will be working on include:

Repair Event Cycle Time (RECT)

RVDA's focus on improving RECT remains a top priority and, with more than 1 million new RVs being sold over the last two years, we know that service capacity will face additional challenges. Thankfully, industry stakeholders have several major RECT initiatives already in place, ranging from new manufacturer-distributor partnerships, parts identification programs, RECT data reporting, and many dealers adding service capacity through facility expansion.

RVDA has developed a RECT Progress Report, which aims to put all the efforts in this area into context. This report is really a never-ending working document that will track all efforts throughout the industry that work to improve repair event cycle time.

Volunteers from the RVDA Board of Delegates also are forming a task force to work with their respective dealer management software (DMS) providers to help improve RECT reporting. Many dealers tell us that they are using the data from the RECT reporting to see patterns of bottlenecks in their fixed operations departments and to improve customer experience.

The Mike Molino RV Learning Center has developed two online programs to help dealers improve their service management efficiency—one for RV service writers/advisors and one for parts personnel. These programs are affordable and accessible for dealers looking to take their fixed operations department to the next level.

It's encouraging to see the industry focus on this important topic, especially as so many customers over the past two years are first-time buyers.



2022 RV Dealers Convention/Expo

The RV Dealers Convention/Expo in November will feature some exciting changes that focus on providing not only exceptional education, but exceptional experiences as well. The revised schedule provides new opportunities for networking with dealers, manufacturers, suppliers and other industry partners.

Dealer business models continue to evolve and the RVDA Convention/Expo committee is working hard to provide an event program that will provide valuable information for managers from all sizes of dealerships. We look forward to a great event at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas.

Outdoor Recreation Legislative Efforts

RVDA, along with 35 other national recreation organizations that are part of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR), are working on the America's Outdoor Recreation Act of 2022, a legislative package that includes the Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation Act, the Recreation Not Red-Tape Act, and other bipartisan outdoor recreation initiatives. The legislation will provide Americans better access to national parks, national forests and other public lands, enhance visitor services, and create jobs by supporting rural economies and communities. In addition, more states are adding offices or divisions of outdoor recreation to spur economic development. More officials are recognizing the benefits of removing barriers to campground and other recreational infrastructure projects.

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*From the Desk of Ronnie Merchant,
Chief Operating Officer, Blue Ox*

Blue Ox began implementing a 20/30 vision plan five years ago. In optometry, 20/30 vision is a diagnosis that means you see objects 30 feet away at 20 feet. That is what we see regarding automation and artificial intelligence in the manufacturing sector. The pandemic created a lot of wrinkles for the industry: the exiting of the baby-boomer generation from the workforce is a dark secret that isn't being discussed. The pandemic pushed millions of baby boomers into early retirement—the workforce that most companies in the RV industry were built upon. That workforce isn't coming back, and it is not replenishing with recent graduates who have the appetite for the manufacturing sector. So, how do we continue to grow or, at the very least, maintain?

With the already small pool of employees, our opinion is that direct labor will continue to be volatile

and that organizations will have to evolve to recruit and retain. Today's workforce knows they have options. The most radical and beneficial thing we can do is encourage and empower a younger generation to join the frontlines of manufacturing by giving them a voice and the opportunity to build a lifelong vocation. When we talk about automation, people automatically equate it to a loss of jobs. Automation is an opportunity for members of our team to learn new skills like operating a robot or a CNC machine that are valuable skills that will progress their career.

All organizations are looking for the next big innovation or breakthrough in manufacturing. The secret is, we already have it: If we do right by our employees, engage them and give them a prosperous future, they will do right by us.

What started as an ergonomics project to alleviate the hand palletizing of product being performed by our assembly staff turned into our 20/30 vision program. To further mitigate the labor shortage and improve quality, throughput, and efficiencies, we have reinvested every dollar down to soda can returns into automation and artificial intelligence. We have utilized these technologies to alleviate the natural turnover rate while enriching our employees.

The revolution is happening, and those that fail to embrace change will quickly find themselves unable to compete. We are at an inflection point in manufacturing—and the first one to automation wins.

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More Consolidations Predicted for the Industry

*From the Desk of Jesse Stopnitzky,
Partner and Director, RV Division,
Performance Brokerage Services, Inc.*

Business consolidation is the concept of companies merging to form a larger company. All industries experience consolidation: food and beverage, technology, manufacturing, financial, pharmaceutical, etc. Dealership verticals such as automotive, trucking, powersports and equipment have been experiencing vast consolidation for many years. Such trends have not skipped over the RV industry as dealers, manufacturers, suppliers, financial institutions and insurance providers are merging.

Beyond increased revenue, drivers for consolidation include acquiring new customers, entering new markets, and protecting market share, leveraging negotiations with product and service providers, and improving operational efficiency through synergy and shared overhead.

Consolidation is a natural and healthy process that strengthens the RV industry. It creates greater product and brand awareness among the consumers and typically elevates the standards for customer service. It introduces advancements in technologies and demands superior performance from the vendors. Plus, the larger companies are better heard when interfacing with manufacturers, lawmakers, governing agencies and associations that impact the entire network.

Over the last two years, buy-sell activity in the RV industry has reached an all-time high. The national companies led the charge, though due to record-breaking profits and access to historically low interest rates, dealers were cash flush, reduced the debt on their balance sheets, and pursued additional investment opportunities in the form of dealership acquisitions.

As values for RV dealerships reached record-breaking levels, many dealers chose to cash out at higher valuations rather than continuing to compete, evolve and adapt. While the independent dealer has always faced higher SG&A (selling, general and

administrative) expenses, the pandemic brought operational challenges that created an even more competitive landscape. Most notably, the inventory shortage and inability to secure preferred models, and difficulty hiring and retaining quality talent.

As consolidation continues, we will see an increase in the number of mid-size dealership groups as local dealers merge to compete against the larger companies. Next, we will witness the regional dealership groups merge with each other, and potentially, the formation of the next national retailer. But what happens when a top retailer chooses to exit? Will there be a suitable buyer?

Currently, the automotive industry has reached a point where some of the largest dealership groups are exiting the business and, for the most part, the only acquirers have been the publicly traded companies. With fewer national retailers in the RV industry, this will invite new companies to emerge from the outside. Just four years ago, the second largest retailer in the RV industry was only an idea.

Although we believe consolidation will accelerate, it is important to recognize that there will always be the need for quality independent dealers to demonstrate their unique strengths, deliver a warm family environment, and provide a superior customer experience, which is more difficult to duplicate with a national retailer. After all, the RV industry was built on offering customers the opportunity to create lifelong memories with their families, reconnect the family unit and embark on meaningful adventures. performancebrokerageservices.com





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



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

RhinoEXTREME RV Sewer Hose Kits



RHINO
EXTREME



| Part # | Description |
|--------|---|
| 39861 | RhinoEXTREME 15' Sewer Hose Kit w/ 4n1, Elbow, Caps |
| 39867 | RhinoEXTREME 20' Sewer Hose Kit w/ 4n1, Elbow, Caps |

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| Part # | Description |
|--------|--------------------------|
| 39761 | RhinoFLEX Sewer Kit, 15' |
| 39741 | RhinoFLEX Sewer Kit, 20' |



TST Max Citrus Scent

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



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TST Max Lavender Scent

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



Curved Leveler & Wheel Chock



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

EvoFlex Drinking Water Hoses



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

Water Hose and Electrical Cord Basket



| Part # | Description |
|--------|---------------------------------------|
| 20166 | Water Hose and Electrical Cord Basket |

TastePURE Water Filters w/ Flexible Hose Protector



| Part # | Description |
|--------|--|
| 40019 | TastePURE XL Water Filter w/ Flexible Hose Protector |
| 40043 | TastePURE Water Filter w/ Flexible Hose Protector |
| 40045 | TastePURE Water Filter 2 pack |

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| 44515 | 4 x 2, Yellow |
| 44525 | 4 x 2, Brown |
| 44527 | XL, Heavy Duty, 4 x 4, Black |

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Diversity in the Industry Will Result in a 'Return on Inclusion'

*From the Desk of Earl B. Hunter Jr.,
Founder and President, Black Folks
Camp Too*

Over the years, many have asked the question, "Why is there a lack of diversity in the outdoor industry and lifestyle—particularly in the RV industry and, more particularly, concerning Black folks?"

After many conversations with industry leaders, it's apparent that most industry heads have no clue why more Black folks, who are also major contributors to America's economy, have not ventured into the camping and RV spaces. Because those leaders are not properly educated on the issues, it makes it harder for them to allocate and justify time and resources to improve the narrative. The work seems to be a burden, rather than an opportunity.

We believe inviting and welcoming more Black folks to the industry workforce and lifestyle is quite simple. However, it becomes harder when the work to improve the situation is seen as a "Kumbaya" rather

than an ROI—which means "return on inclusion."

The data shows that diversity in the workforce and lifestyle creates more opportunities for industries to grow faster. In other words, casting a wider net to invite and welcome folks from different races, ages and genders will strengthen the industry and remove any doubt that the \$114 billion RV industry is serious about its economic future. Otherwise, the industry will see tough times ahead while bragging about the 500,000 RVs sold in the pandemic years, rather than celebrating the millions that could be sold every year.

The bottom line: We must start at the toenail of the elephant. The industry must be educated from the top down, allowing the education to flow to current majority consumers while providing sincere, meaningful, measurable and sustainable welcoming mates to future consumers.

If our industry is willing to be proactive rather than reactive with its diversity recruiting and retaining efforts in our industry and lifestyle, then five years from now we will see more growth, which will lead to more dollars, which also leads to more families enjoying the lifestyle—which will ultimately lead to more unity in the RV community and beyond.

Either you want to attract new customers while improving diversity in the RV industry and lifestyle or you don't. The choice is yours. The ball is in the court.

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What Lies Ahead for RV Parts & Accessories Merchandising

From the Desk of Val Byrd, Customer Merchandising Manager, NTP-Stag

The brick-and-mortar store is an institution that continues to withstand the test of time. War, economic depression, plagues and pandemics, the internet, social and political upheaval are just a few of the major world changes that retailing has survived. This resilience can be explained by retailers simply offering the goods that consumers need to survive, because we've moved away from growing our own food and making our own essentials such as soap and clothing. Ultimately, the customer shopping experience fills a much larger need in our lives. We shop to alleviate boredom, socialize and fulfill our basic hunter/gatherer instinct. Retailing will never die, but it will definitely change.

As time goes on, we continue to face market and environmental challenges that make Robin Crow's 2010 call-to-action book "Evolve or Die: The 7 Keys to Prospering in the Modern World" ring true.

The seven keys are (spoiler alert):

- Exceed expectations
- Gets things done
- 100% accountability
- Commit to continual improvement
- Boundless optimism
- Environmental responsibility
- Make a difference

I realize some business self-help books offer pie-in-the-sky, esoteric commentary about what the business community "should" be doing, but this one is realistic and filled with logic. It details why and how the "same old thing" will not cut it today. The year 2020 made this abundantly clear.

The RV parts and accessories store of the future will be shaped by technology, consumer trends and, to a certain extent, adversity. Recent headlines regarding retail have included a fair amount of doom and gloom—empty shelves, labor shortages, etc. The good news is retailers found new ways to keep the ball rolling. Dealers and retailers everywhere examined current operating strategies and reevaluated technology, resulting in effective and arguably better tactics for finding new ways and talent to shape the future of retailing.



Expanding the Market

Product selection in the RV aftermarket will soon include accessories for other forms of RVing. A growing international camping trend is overlanding, which Wikipedia describes as "... self-reliant overland travel to remote destinations where the journey is the principal goal." Overlanders use Jeeps, vans, pickup trucks, and SUVs outfitted with tents, awnings, and other accessories to create compact homes on wheels. Because overlanders must cook and take care of other daily tasks, there is now a market for overlanding gear. The 2021 Go RVing RV Owner Demographic study found RV ownership has increased over 62% in the last 20 years and identified several "RV Owner Clusters" such as adventure seekers and escapists. I mention this as proof that there is some overlap between traditional RVing and off-the-road camping.

More Technology & Automation

As the labor resource becomes more volatile, RV retailers will be forced to evolve operations to include automation at receiving, checkout, inventory management and general operations. The use of barcode scanners, mobile POS technology, electronic shelf tags and smart devices to conduct cycle counts and inventory will soon be the rule. The RV industry is one where relationships and a personal touch are important, and I do not predict that this will change. While self-checkout may not match the culture of this industry, automation of backend tasks will occur and will allow more time for valuable customer-facing activities.

New Methods of Fulfillment

Over the last decade, much ado has been made of e-commerce, and rightly so, as online purchases now account for a large percentage of all transactions. Going forward, digital age and the brick-and-mortar will move forward in lockstep, as one supports and promotes the other. As omnichannel marketing continues to manifest, all marketing will be essential. BOPIS (buy online, pickup in store) is here to stay and customers will soon want a delivery option for the holding tank treatment and electrical adapters. Our best strategies for surviving and thriving in this evolution is to remain agile and embrace the changes.

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Using Analytics to Understand Market Share

*From the Desk of Jason Krantz,
Founder and CEO, Strategy Titan*

Consolidation will continue to bring ever-increasing sophistication to the RV industry. A key component of sustained success in the coming years will be anchored on the ability to effectively use data and analytics to craft, execute and refine strategy.

There are two primary perspectives for analytics: 1) internal, and 2) external. Internal will focus on well-known topics such as inventory, sales and marketing management.

One critical internal topic to clearly understand is the profitability of your customer mix. All customers are not the same. Profitability wise, adding a few high-value customers could be better than adding many lower-value customers.

The key is to identify beforehand who your ideal customer is, do your best to recruit for that profile, and understand how much of your historical customer profile matches your optimal customer profile.

It is also essential to understand the return on your marketing spend. Put your marketing data to work. Do the analysis to know what is and is not working and focus more resources on those areas that are working. Analytics is a great way to do that.

External analytics is usually a newer topic for most companies. This involves leveraging outside data to understand market trends. One of the most important metrics to watch is market share.

You should know your current market share, your share movement over the past 12 months and the revenue impact of that share movement. Market share is an unbiased metric that clearly outlines who is winning and losing in your markets. Share allows you to



contextualize your sales performance to the market, not just your internal historical performance benchmarks. You could be leaving millions in revenue on the table in the form of share loss and not even know it.

With so much share movement over the past two years, you owe it to yourself and your business to know your performance in this key external metric.

Knowing your share figures over time enables you to highlight opportunities, contextualize growth and gain insights into where your market is going so you can plan accordingly.

Having a solid data and analytics strategy that integrates with your operations will help you remain competitive and profitable for years to come.

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Increased Amenities, EV Charging Stations Coming to RV Parks & Campgrounds

From the Desk of Paul Bambei, President and CEO, National Association of RV Parks & Campgrounds (ARVC)

With more than 57 million Americans saying they will be camping in 2022—which is up 20% from the previous year and a whopping 80% since 2014, per KOA's North American Camping Report data—there is no doubt that the outdoor hospitality sector of outdoor recreation is thriving and will continue to thrive for the next three to five years.

Despite the recent trend of higher gas prices, reservations remain at the highest levels we've seen in years. The camping consumer is not camping less. In fact, they are camping more, because it is an affordable way to make family memories. However, what they are doing is camping closer to home.

Prior to COVID-19, the average camper would venture out about 50 miles from home. That number increased to 150 miles during the height of the pandemic, but we are now seeing a return to the pre-COVID trends.

As work habits have changed across the country, campers are staying longer, realizing they can now work from anywhere and enjoy the benefits of outdoor recreation at the same time.

Private outdoor hospitality businesses are responding to this increase in campers by expanding their sites and adding new amenities. New businesses also are being built at record pace. From our own research—the annual Trends and Insights Report—we estimate that more than 80,000 new campsites will be built out in 2022, which accounts for a more than 30% increase from the previous year's growth.

In 2021, almost 50% of outdoor hospitality businesses made improvements to existing amenities and 25% added new amenities. The most popular amenities to add continue to be Wi-Fi and cell service, along with efficient bathhouses and laundry facilities.

Meanwhile, the most popular recreational activities continue to be fishing, swimming, hiking/nature trails, biking and court-related sports (basketball, volleyball, pickleball, etc.).

With increasing popularity in camping comes increased profits, which means we will continue to see these improvements and additions made in future years.

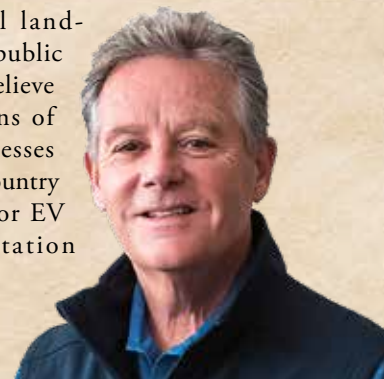
In addition to amenity improvements, two in three outdoor hospitality businesses also made major infrastructure improvements in 2021, including water, sewer and electric upgrades.

With more and more campers arriving with electric vehicles in tow—and now with major brands like THOR/Airstream, Winnebago and others launching E-RVs in the next year—we anticipate a greater need for electric charging stations at campgrounds. Furthermore, we see private outdoor hospitality businesses playing a major role in the expansion of the EV charging station network in the coming years.

Currently, there are only about 100,000 EV charging stations nationwide and most of those are in and around metro areas. In the next five years, our country needs to look to the rural areas, the small towns and the traditionally underrepresented gateway communities in and around national landmarks and public lands, because it is the highways and byways that crisscross through these places that campers will use the most.

Current growth trajectory shows the number of EV charging stations increasing to 500,000 in the next two years. And with more than 75% of private outdoor hospitality businesses located in rural areas within 25 miles of national landmarks and public lands, we believe the locations of these businesses across the country are prime for EV charging station expansion.

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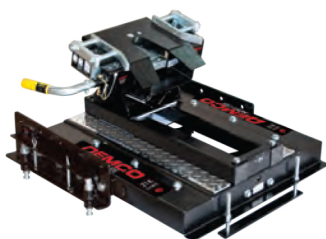
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8550060



8550061



8550038

| PART DESCRIPTION | PART # |
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| 18K Ram Prep Package | 8550060 |
| 18K Chevy/GMC Prep Package 2000+ | 8550061 |
| 18K Ford Prep Package | 8550024 |
| 21K Ram Prep Package | 8550062 |
| 21K Chevy/GMC Prep Package 2000+ | 8550063 |
| 21K Ford Prep Package | 8550038 |

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| Autoslide Mounting Plates GM 2020-Present Puck Systems | 6402 |
| Autoslide Mounting Plates Ford 2011-Present Puck Systems | 6033 |



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Mobile RV Service Providers & the Consumer-Dealer Relationship



*From the Desk of Matt Warner, Owner,
Mobile RV Pro*

It's a good time to be in the RV industry—and mobile technicians are playing a vital part of the satisfaction of the RV consumer.

As the industry grows, so have the needs of the consumer. Many of today's consumers are looking for convenience when it comes to repairs and service.

Many dealerships are backlogged with service requests and consumers are becoming frustrated waiting months for service. In a recent RV Industry Association (RVIA) survey of new owners, less than one-third of full-time RVers felt their service was done in a timely manner. Mobile technicians will continue to assist in reducing this backlog, benefiting consumers.

Mobile technicians service RVs in many locations, including on the side of the road. Many RVers now expect this convenience, and more qualified technicians in the field will allow for better service and keep the RV consumer purchasing more RVs.

However, there are some challenges mobile technicians encounter while servicing the RV consumer, including:

1. Lack of training or documentation on new systems
2. Timely technical support from suppliers and manufacturers
3. Warranty claims and/or procedures

RVs are becoming more and more technologically

advanced, and it is imperative to get training to all technicians. As a company, we've found great success in online and hands-on trainings provided by suppliers. As we've partnered with local dealers and service centers to receive training on product lines, we've seen greater satisfaction in the service a consumer receives, whether on-site or in a dealership.

Some dealerships treat mobile technicians as competition. However, we're there to assist the dealership in providing quality care to their customers and joint training can help everyone.

Also, even our certified technicians with years of repair experience need to contact technical support. However, many technical support lines are placing technicians on hold. Technicians have other customers to service and the next job could be miles away, making the wait inefficient and costly to the consumer. Having the ability to schedule a specific date and time for a call-back could eliminate many of these issues and allow the consumer to get the service they need.

Warranty claims are always challenging—and for mobile technicians these challenges can even be greater than for a dealership. Furthermore, consumers do not want to have to pay out of pocket for warranty work.

However, it is also unfair to expect a service provider—who was not involved in the original sale—to wait months for payment. Having clear documentation and procedures allows for mobile companies to provide the level of service the RV consumer needs.

In the situation where the consumer needs to pay the service provider, if the consumer has the documentation on-hand to file the claim on their own, it can prevent lengthy delays in payment.

The future as a mobile technician is looking great. As an industry, it is wonderful to see the advancements in training from the RV Technical Institute and many proactive suppliers and manufacturers. Mobile technicians look forward to working with these companies throughout the industry so they can continue to provide the RV consumer the best experience.

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RV Monitor & Control Systems Advancements

*From the Desk of Jim Hess,
Vice President, RV Division,
ASA Electronics*

The current pickup truck has eight times the number of cameras than an RV. However, RV users will have the same kinds of observation systems—if not better—in the next five to 10 years. That's important, because users cannot afford to drive or tow their RV blindly—especially now knowing the possibilities. And we don't expect them to settle for less. With most drivers utilizing the latest technology in their current vehicles, it's a wonder that RV drivers do not have the same assets at their disposal.

However, this is changing quickly. The RV industry is now being provided with access to the observation components campers and travelers so desperately need.

Although it's been argued that some people are not ready for the technology, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically shifted the landscape of tech users. Online banking, QR codes for menus at restaurants, and communicating with friends and family through social media are now the norm with most Americans. People of all ages and demographics are now equipped with the know-how for a simpler and safer RVing experience.

RVs aren't just used for camping, either. Lately, many are purposed for traveling the country, boondocking, part-time living, or even full-time living. With such a widely purposed vehicle, users need up-to-date technology to keep them safe on the road and to aid them in their adventures.

Fortunately, RV suppliers are hyper-focused on staying relevant to the RV market and adding value to various specialty vehicles. Instead of using products one can find in any big-box store, a better option is incorporating current technology available from RV



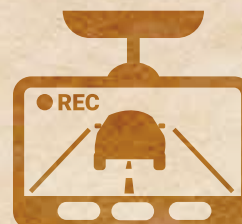
suppliers that are designed to interface with RVs and other specialty vehicles. Users already can control their RV from their smartphone—and they will be able to monitor and control even more in the years to come.

It's all about optimizing the experience for the user. That's why leading manufacturers are looking to incorporate more observation and smart control equipment.

Campers want control of their RV and safety components to protect their investment. Now, technology finally answers that call. With RV observation systems, RVers don't have to haul blind—they have it all within reach.

In the next few years, the RV industry will look completely different—it will be easier, safer and undoubtedly better.

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Solar & Battery Banks Now the New Normal

*Mark Spilsbury, Manager,
RV Division, Go Power!*

In the Go RVing demographics report released in 2021, off-grid features like battery banks and solar were among the most-wanted features for current and future RV owners. The 2021 report also outlined that solar and smart RV technology is high on the list for dealer-level focuses. These trends have shown continual growth throughout 2022 and will continue into 2023.

RVs that are designed and built to go off-road and off-grid straight from the factory have become some of the fastest selling units on the market. RVers commonly ask for units to be “adventure-ready” off dealer lots, supporting the move toward offering more standardized off-grid power solutions.

With full-service RV sites becoming harder to find, and the “go anywhere” mentality of the new demographics of RVers, manufacturers have begun adding off-grid power amenities—namely solar and battery power—more often.

“We’ve seen a big influx of manufacturers adding solar and battery systems on OEM units,” says Go Power! RV Division Manager Mark Spilsbury.

“When (Go Power!) started working with manufacturers, it was primarily in a ‘pre-wired for solar’ capacity. Over the past few years, those partners have moved into adding one-, two- or even four-panel solar and battery systems. Almost everybody that worked with pre-wired systems before is now doing solar onboard, and that trend continues to climb,” Spilsbury said.

Making solar readily available on these units also continues to see growth in aftermarket sales at the dealer level.

“Having a mobile power system added on units at the OEM level is a great start for RVers to get on the road and off the grid easily,” Spilsbury said.

“Most of the systems installed at the plant level



are expandable. A dealer or DIY customer can add more solar or batteries as they need them. We’ve seen significant growth in the aftermarket from people (and dealers) who want to upgrade the systems on the RV they just purchased.”

Alongside fully installed RV systems, portable power products like solar generators and portable solar panels have also shown strong growth. Particularly popular with ultralight, truck camper, and towable aftermarket segments, these products see quick adoption and easy sell-through, as customers enjoy the ease of use and multi-use functions.

RV manufacturers have also begun integrating off-grid power systems with smart RVs to simplify the user experience. Companies like Jayco and THOR have been pairing smart RV-C multiplexing systems with solar to make the end user experience easier.

“We’re past the early adoption phase. Solar is a viable standard and will only continue to grow in the RV market.”

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Lithium-Ion Batteries Can Offer Recreation Without Boundaries

*From the Desk of Dr. Denis Phares,
CEO, Dragonfly Energy*

When we consider the future of lithium-ion batteries for the RV industry, one thing is very clear: it's quickly becoming the standard. The benefits are endless, most notably the lessening of the environmental impact. That's one of the main reasons for the increased demand, and adoption is now matching that demand thanks to innovations in technology and the availability of resources—yes, even during a time when the supply chain is struggling. Customer benefits are even more impactful. And the model is changing.

It's a big departure from the not-so-distant past when batteries were considered an afterthought in the RV manufacturing process—an add-on just before delivery. Today, we're seeing even towable RVs being delivered to dealerships with lithium batteries installed.

Suppliers are working closely with the manufacturers (the OEM) to help make this shift in the industry possible. A lot of research and time was spent educating OEMs and consumers on not only how to apply lithium, but how to experience the benefits and optimize the customer experience. Compiling the usage data and information in a way that's meaningful for customers as well as OEMs in recognizing the benefits of integrating lithium-ion batteries into the system design is important. Because of this, many OEMs are seeing the potential and incorporating the energy system as the lifeblood of the RV itself. Lithium is the technology that makes it possible for consumers to be off-grid and experience the same lifestyle they are used to when plugging in at home.

Developing new and innovative products and continually optimizing these products with the cus-

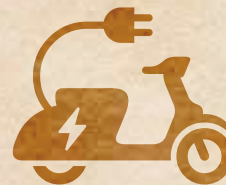


tomers experience in mind is the focus. Suppliers are diving into the fundamentals of the cells and lithium systems to make improved and safer energy storage systems. Suppliers also work closely with the manufacturers to strategize ways to streamline the manufacturing process while keeping costs down for the OEMs and the consumers.

On the direct-to-consumer side, RV owners who don't have lithium batteries already installed can purchase them directly. Technical specialists are available to work directly with customers to find the perfect solution including designing whole systems for their rigs if needed. Suppliers can offer a whole range of parts and devices to make the system work seamlessly, so customers can truly use their RV how it's meant to be used wherever they want to take it—recreation without boundaries.

We applaud RV manufacturers for truly listening to their consumers. Customer satisfaction with lithium-ion batteries is exceptional because they're seeing the capabilities that lithium batteries provide.

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Future of Media Platforms & How the Industry Can Harness Their Power

*From the Desk of Chris Cieto, Associate
Publisher, RV PRO*

It is difficult enough to talk about the present-day landscape of media, let alone the future. Before we dive into the DeLorean, let's look at present-day media in the RV industry.

The consumer aspect of media has seen a lot of change with Trailer Life and FMCA's magazine going through major brand and strategy changes in the last couple of year. Businesses in the RV industry want to desperately reach that end consumer, but the cost of print has become almost prohibitive to have a national publication going to households unless readers want to pay more for subscriptions. Look to see media focused toward the RV'ing consumer to go increasingly digital to survive.

From a business-to-business (B2B) perspective, there are three main trade magazines, plus RV Executive Today. All three B2B trade publications have gone through major changes as well. New staff, new ownership and a relatively new publication. If my experience transcends across all three, print costs will continue to rise. This is not just inflation.

Paper mills retooled during the pandemic to create different paper pulp that would be used for cardboard boxes instead of paper that you would use for a magazine. Remember all those Amazon boxes that came to your house during the pandemic? That's why paper mills re-tooled; the number of mills making pulp for publications decreased. Hence, an increase in print rates. Like consumer publications, digital will be an increasing presence in the trade media space.

For the future of media in the RV industry, let's talk social media. Facebook still has a strong presence, but it's B2B impact is somewhat flat, in my opinion. (Remember when we put so much stock in a Facebook to determine how engaged they were with our brand? They just pushed a button, people, and it seems silly now.) As of 2020 Instagram, had 157 million users in the U.S. alone. If you or your company are not doing Instagram, you need to be.



LinkedIn and TikTok will be the future of RV social media, the former for B2B and latter for B2C. If you are not on LinkedIn right now, you need to be, to connect with other professionals and post content and news. There are 66.8 million U.S. profiles on LinkedIn, and remember: we are only talking about working professionals. Personally, I believe the increase usage of LinkedIn to connect with others in their sphere of influence was fueled by the pandemic. In 2019, only 58.5 professionals were on LinkedIn.

With TikTok—what started as a fad, now seems to be here to stay. And it should not be just for influencers and full-timers. At the end of 2021, TikTok had 120.8 million users in the U.S. alone. By April, that has grown to 136.4 million users, and it will surpass to over half of the U.S. population by the end of the year. Over one-third of users are over 30 and it is aging up. What if the RV industry could harness this platform and excel at it?

I'm not sure if TikTok will ever have B2B impact. Seeing Bob Martin of THOR or Pete Liegl of Forest River ride down the road in a Class A to the song "Danger Zone" would be entertaining, but I don't know if it's going to ship more RVs.

Thanks for listening to the ramblings of a media guy. I would love to hear what you think, whether you think I'm right or wrong. I'm always learning, and things change fast.



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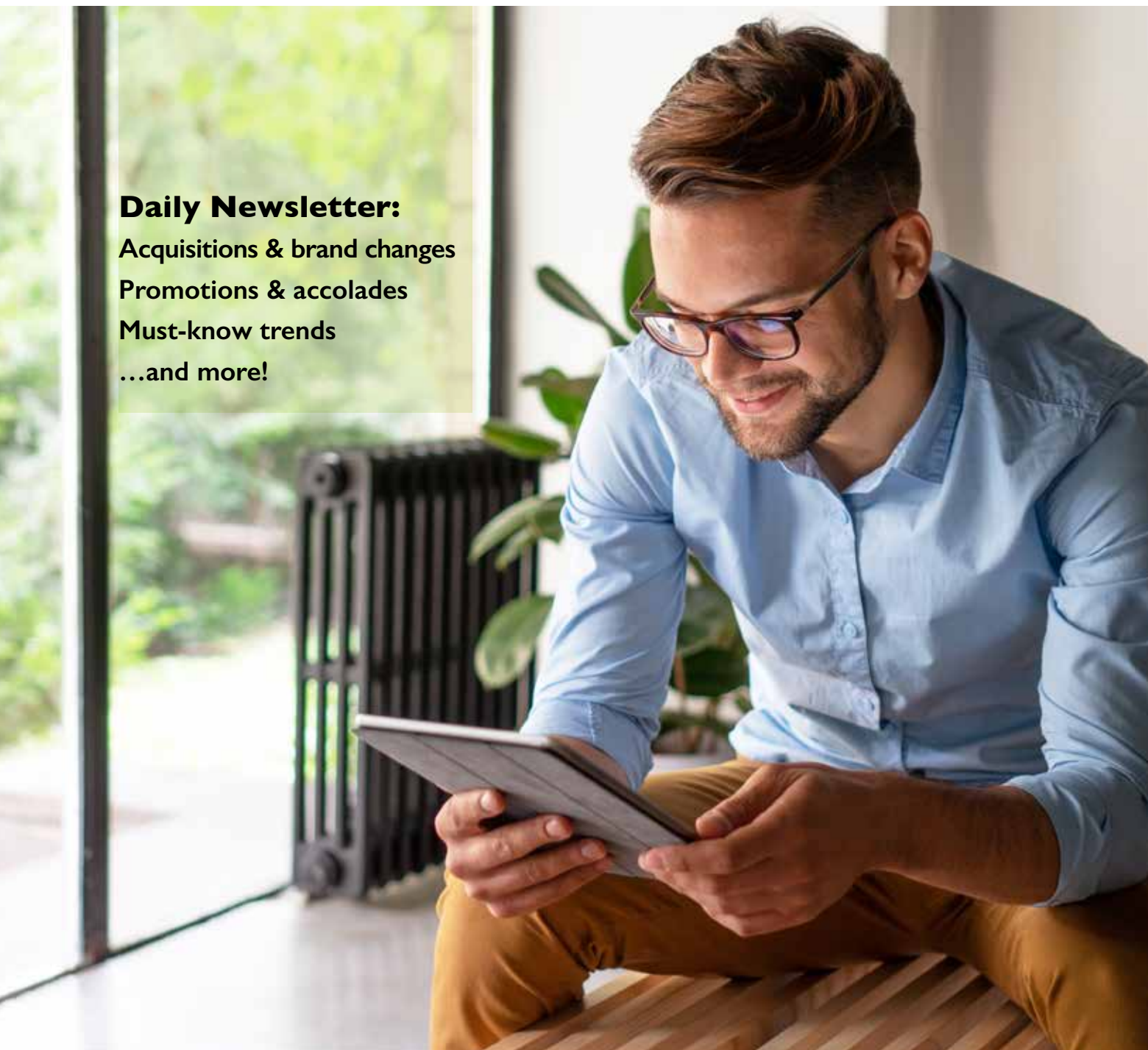
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YEARS IN THE MAKING

Celebrating the industry's longtime veteran employees.

You hear a lot of people say that their workplace “feels like family.” It’s a common refrain, especially when someone has developed friendships at their job or have felt well taken care of by the company in terms of benefits, work/life balance and more.

It was no surprise to us here at RV PRO that this sentiment was repeated consistently by the longtime employees who sent in their names, photos and bios to be featured in this section. Not only are the next 36 pages a celebration of the people who work tirelessly in the RV industry to create amazing products for customers; maintain steady relationships between OEMs, suppliers, and dealerships; and keep the day-to-day operations running smoothly, but these pages also represent lessons industry business owners should pay attention to.

What do we mean by this? As you read about these employees, take note as to why they’ve stuck around at these companies for five, 10, 20, 30 and more years. Some people may have fallen into the RV industry by luck but stayed because of the respect and the value they were shown by employers. Feeling as if you belong is important in the workplace—and many of these employers are clearly getting it right as these employees remain dedicated and loyal. We hope you find these lessons valuable, and thank you for joining us in celebrating these outstanding individuals.





Jerry Shepherd

Account Executive – Shepherd Sales

Years at company: 53

Industry years: 53

Started as: Sales rep

After 53 years, Jerry Shepherd is still on the road. In the late '60s, he was living in Utah when he got a call from his father, Ken, who had started the company back in 1949 after he got out of the U.S. Army.

Jerry Shepherd moved to Denver in 1969, after his father hounded him to join the business and he has been in Colorado ever since. The business started with selling hard parts and eventually other automotive accessories. Shepherd's move to Denver in 1969 coincided with the company getting into the RV side of the business. Today it is about 85% focused on RV.

Shepherd still travels to 35 dealers throughout Colorado and Wyoming doing store sets and training. He says that Valley Towing was one of their first clients on the RV side in the mid-70s, and they stayed a client for many years. A notable client from the automotive side was Turtle Wax, who they represented for 50 years. Their longest-standing RV client that still remains is Carefree of Colorado, which they have had a relationship with since the mid-70s.

He has seen it all—several recessions and booms and acquisitions across the decades. And he has seen multiple gas spikes; the first back in the early '80s and then, now—40 years later.

After all he has seen, Shepherd Sales, according to Shepherd, sells knowledge. With complex products like Winegard and new dealer parts managers and technicians, there is plenty to train professionals on.

Shepherd didn't know much when he started in 1969, but he has learned a lot along the way. He said he was "thrown to the wolves" and attended the school of "hard knocks." One of the things he learned first was to not sell a dealer the distributor price rate. He made this mistake once, called his dad and let him know what he had done, and the dealer was nice enough to let him off the hook. That dealership is still in business today.

CONNECTIONS & COMMENDATIONS

In 2014, Jerry Shepherd won the Jim Barker Lifetime Achievement award for his contributions to what was the RV Aftermarket Association, which is now under RVIA. Shepherd's first conference was in 1971 when it was still called WDA.

About six years ago, Jerry Shepherd sold the business to his son, Ken (who was named after his grandfather). Ken Shepherd became owner and the former "boss" stayed on and became an employee.

The elder Shepherd owes his longevity to relationships. He is now calling on accounts that are friends and the relationship is in the second or third generation—the children, or even grandchildren, of the accounts he called back in the early '70s.

His wife, Marge, worked for the company for 32 years – she handled the books and has since retired from the business.

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AIRSTREAM



Clark (Gene) Evans, 55 years

Evans' first job at Airstream was on the skin crew. For the last 52 years, he has been a forklift operator. Four generations of his family are employed with Airstream, which has a family-like culture. Evans says, "I don't like changes and it is like home."

Gary Shaner, 50 years

Shaner's first job was welding chassis at Henschen. He now checks and cleans floors for Airstream units before they move down the line. Shaner says he stayed at Airstream because he has always liked working there. It's close to home, and he has always been treated well.

Dixie Dancy, 46 years

Dancy's first job was cost accounting clerk, and she is currently the cost accountant. She said her job is exciting and challenging, and she gets to work with every aspect of Airstream in some way.

Cindy Oakley, 44 years

Oakley's first job was six months as a parts clerk in the parts department, and the other 43.5 years in the HR department. She is currently HR administrator and says, "I love my job at Airstream and working with the associates is totally rewarding. It has always felt like family to me."

Lonnie Ott, 42 years

Ott's first job was insulation installer and currently is material handler and truck driver. He has worked for other companies but always came back to Airstream. It's the people and camaraderie that he likes. He has enjoyed Airstream and says, "They provide great insurance and benefits."

Ron Ludwig, 42 years

Ludwig's first position was insulation installer, where everyone started back in the '80s. He is currently production department manager. Ludwig says the company is local and a great place to work, which is why he has stayed here and will "until he retires."

Deb Gates, 41 years

Gates' first job at Airstream was insulation installer and her current job is warranty clerk. She stayed at Airstream because of how family-oriented the company has been.

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Michelle Krueger

Purchasing & Inventory Management—Arrow Distributing

Years at company: 29

Industry years: 29

Started as: Inside sales

Krueger didn't know a thing about RV parts when she was hired, and 29 years later, still learns something new every day. After being in sales for more than 25 years, she took a role in purchasing/inventory management. Krueger's kids are "Arrow brats," known by customers who ask about them, she says. She's stayed with the company because it functions like a huge family and helps people enjoy the outdoors. Krueger says she feels each year that passes is just another year of being part of a family that strives to create a "wonderful outdoor experience for fun-loving people looking to spend time with their families."



Beth Blanchard

Director of Marketing—Pace International

Years at company: 9

Industry years: 9

Blanchard oversees Pace's marketing team and works closely with strategic partners and customers. Over the years, she has played an important role in helping to grow the DISH Outdoors business for Pace, along with other key business initiatives including the recent launch of Pace's internet service, TravlFi. Blanchard is a dynamic leader and respected by her peers and teammates. In addition to her success in RV industry marketing, she is a mother to three children and enjoys a lively family life.



Ken Day

Regional Sales Manager—JR Products

Years at company: 16

Industry years: 30

Day's duties today are very similar to the early years, he says, with the main goal to keep distribution and dealers up to date on any changes in the marketplace and keep them informed of new items. "Just call me steady Eddie," he says, because he just keeps on keeping on. He noted his relationship with John Roba, who he met many years ago in the truck accessory market and looks up to for his honesty in business. "Always take the high road in all that I do" is Day's motto.

Nazeli Vardanyan
Customer Service Specialist—Valterra by Dometic
Years at company: 21
Industry years: 21

Vardanyan considers customers the most important part of business and has provided top-notch customer service for the past 21 years. She is responsible for servicing the company's customers with timing and status updates for orders, troubleshooting shipping issues and ensuring satisfaction with Valterra's partnerships. The company has been like a family, Vardanyan says, with a culture that values employees and team players. To her, the respect and appreciation she is shown is the most important part of her role.



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Dan Grove

Warehouse Manager—Hughes Autoformers

Years at company: 5

Industry years: 5

Grove (called “Danny” by the company) is Hughes’ go-to person for warehouse questions. He handles all shipment—inbound and outbound. Palletizing, organizing, stocking, inventory, workflow, etc. are all things that Grove does with ease. He also assembles the company’s Autoformers, tests and packages them, as well as anything else that is needed to run the warehouse or shipping. Hughes Autoformers said Grove is a good worker and eager to help others if needed. He is dependable and voices his ideas for improvement.



Tim Grove

Quality Control—Hughes Autoformers

Years at company: 8

Industry years: 10

Grove is certified for RV components and is Hughes’ lead quality control tester and calibrator for its Autoformer units. The units are still made manually in the company’s Anaheim, California, warehouse. Each unit needs to be manually tested and calibrated before they ship out. Grove uses his skills to check the quality of many different parts that make up the whole unit. He also checks and tests new products. Hughes said Grove is a quiet but determined person. When he gets to work, it is 100% focus. If Grove thinks of a better part or method for building units, he always lets the company know.



Ian Thomas

Sales Manager—Hughes Autoformers

Years at company: 10

Industry years: 10

Started as: Assembly

Thomas is considered one of the Hughes pioneers. He started work as an assembler who manually built every Autoformer—starting with an empty metal can and progressing to final assembly, calibrating and testing each unit. He now manages sales and customer service for Hughes. His knowledge and helpful demeanor helps satisfy every customer interaction. A small, family-based company, Thomas is the owner’s son. While not his first job, Hughes Autoformers allowed Thomas to grow in duty and responsibility. He has grown as the company has grown and is an integral part of it.



Luke Schwartz

Welding Team Leader–NexGen Industryz

Years at company: 5

Industry years: 5

Started as: Warehouse associate

Schwartz started with GEN-Y Hitch in 2017 as a warehouse associate. As the company grew, NexGen Industryz was established as the manufacturing division of GEN-Y Hitch. Schwartz transitioned to NexGen and was promoted to welding team leader, managing all robotic and hand-welding cells, along with managing team members. Most recently, he spearheaded efforts to replenish current welding power sources and robotic weld cells. Schwartz's daily and long-term goal is to "work together with the rest of the team and continue to explore new technologies and machinery that are more efficient." The best and most rewarding part of his job is seeing what his team has produced at the end of the week and working on new goals.



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Debbie Norris

Parts Manager–Parkview RV Center

Years at company: 36

Industry years: 36

Started as: Parts associate

Debbie Norris started with Parkview RV Center in 1986, after her husband Dave recruited her to assist the parts department. Norris immediately became a key element to Parkview, received her parts manager certification and continues to work with RVDA on ways to improve industry certification content and testing. She is known as a “parts pioneer” with customer service and recognized for her welcoming behavior and willingness to go above and beyond for customers.

David Norris

Shop Foreman/Certified Technician–Parkview RV Center

Years at company: 36

Industry years: 36

Started as: PDI technician

David Norris has received various certifications and is among the original technicians who passed the RVDA/RVIA Technician Certification. Norris is recognized by RVTI as a Level 2 tech and holds various troubleshooter accolades, including for Airstream bodywork and Cummins Onan. He is known throughout the mid-Atlantic area as a go-to technician for RV service and body mechanics. Debbie and Dave are members of the Parkview family and can usually be seen at activities within the community supporting the RV industry. They are avid RVers with a seasonal site in Elk River, Maryland, where they enjoy their waterfront views and dock their pontoon boat, “Looney Toon II.” The couple has two daughters and two sons-in-law, three grandsons and one granddaughter. Family is their highest priority. Dave and Debbie plan to retire in 2022 after a stellar career, and anxiously await spending time camping and boating on the river.



Jason Helmuth

Sales Manager–GEN-Y Hitch

Years at company: 4

Industry years: 23

Started as: Eastern sales manager

Helmuth started his RV industry career in 1999, working at Newmar as a welder in the chassis division. After moving to roles with Nappanee Window and Challenger Door, he joined GEN-Y Hitch in 2018 and was promoted to Eastern sales manager in 2021. Helmuth said the company initially appealed to him because of its leaders. One of the most important things about his job is having a healthy work/life balance, and he says, “Working here enables me to keep the important things in perspective.”



Dan Miller

President–GEN-Y Hitch

Years at company: 4

Industry years: 27

Started as: General manager

As co-owner of Precision Painting Group, Miller helped the business become one of the most successful RV exterior paint and finishing suppliers to OEMs in Elkhart County. He made a career transition to join GEN-Y Hitch in 2018 and, a year later, led the formation of its manufacturing division, NexGen Industryz. Miller was promoted to president of the organization with the mission to assist Carl Borkholder, founder of GEN-Y Hitch, by growing and developing a diverse, high-achieving team. Under Miller's leadership, the GEN-Y Group team has grown to more than 60 people with more than 500% in company growth.



Mike Buca

Product Development Manager-Design Engineering, Inc.

Years at company: 9

Industry years: 40

Buca has worked in the automotive/truck/powersports industry since he was 16. Starting at the dealership level, he worked into the aftermarket side, responsible for products in a large mail-order aftermarket company. Buca developed numerous products for cars, trucks, RVs and powersports. Design Engineering is a family-owned company with a great atmosphere, he says. A customer himself for years, it was an easy decision to work for the company. Buca says developing products that function and make a difference in a vehicle's comfort is a rewarding feeling, and that everyone at DEI supports each other.



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Lacey Pintado

Director of Technical Services—Coach-Net

Years at company: 17

Industry years: 17

Started as: Call center agent

Pintado's career in the RV industry started at 16 years old as a roadside assistance dispatch agent with Coach-Net. She worked her way to RV technician and is now director of technical services, leading the company's RV technician team. Pintado is a RVTI Level 4 Master Certified tech, RVDA Service Writer Certified and holds credentials from companies including Spartan, Airstream, Winnebago, AquaHot and Lippert. She was named among RV PRO's Top 40 Under 40 in 2021, and currently serves on the RVTI Curriculum Committee. Pintado and her husband, Jeff, own a fifth-wheel and often go camping with their daughter, Zoey.



Rod Fone

Director of Service Provider Network—Coach-Net

Years at company: 25

Industry years: 25

Started as: Dispatch agent

Fone started with Coach-Net as a dispatch agent in 1997, when the company had less than 20 employees. He answered a newspaper ad for a call center position in the RV industry and eventually became a dispatch manager. In 2000, Fone created the Tech department as the technical services manager, and in 2002, moved to the Vendor Network to create infrastructure for the department. Fone was involved in Leadership Development Programs and learned how to analyze, trend and report data using Tableau software. As a "car guy," he enjoys the mechanical aspects of how things work.



Kim Gregory

Vice President of Sales—Coach-Net RV Motor Club

Years at company: 15

Industry years: 15

Started as: Executive assistant to vice president of sales

Gregory joined the RV industry as the executive assistant to Coach-Net's vice president of sales. She earned numerous promotions and eventually became vice president of sales. Gregory serves on the RVIA Events Committee, is a regular participant in RVs Move America Week and a board member for the RV Women's Alliance. Prior to Coach-Net, she worked in real estate, where a client introduced her to the RV industry. Gregory is a coach's wife and mother to five, including 5-year-old triplets. She spends weekends coaching girls' volleyball and never misses Friday night football games with her son and husband on the field.



Melanie Spires

Inside Sales Assistant/Logistics Coordinator—Aliner

Years at company: 17

Industry years: 17

Started as: Marketing assistant

A graduate of Saint Vincent College, Spires joined Aliner in 2005 as an entry-level marketing assistant. She now oversees inside sales, production scheduling and shipping logistics coordination. Navigating supply chain issues and exploding product demand is no easy task, and Spires never misses a beat. Her infectious positivity and motivation have led the Aliner team to continued success. Spires says her workplace actively seeks and values her input, creating a family-like culture where she can enjoy the challenges of logistics management and work to reach monthly and quarterly goals.

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Ken Ullmer

Service Manager—New Horizons RV Corp.

Years at company: 25

Industry years: 25

Started as: Sales and customer service

Ullmer has been with New Horizons since 1997 in roles such as production manager, purchasing manager, customer service and sales. He joined the company as a salesman, helping the team bring in new prospects. Ullmer was able to help each customer with their needs and because of that, his knowledge of the RV industry has grown. Moving from sales to service manager, New Horizons says Ullmer has a universal grasp of skills at the company, making him a go-to for servicing all types of RVs and a valuable asset to its team.



Frank Prescher

Designer/Draftsman—New Horizons RV Corp.

Years at company: 25

Industry years: 25

Prescher has designed almost every New Horizons unit ever built. In 1997, he drew the floorplans by hand, and now uses a CAD system to engineer the company's fifth wheels. He has grown with the company alongside new technology over the years, bringing in new perspectives. From the floorplan to drafting cabinetry, Prescher's eye for detail goes into each New Horizons RV design. Throughout the years, the challenge of change keeps him striving to bring the best skills and knowledge of designing custom RVs for New Horizons RV Corp.



Rachel Eminger

Inside Sales/Customer Service—Arrow Distributing

Years at company: 17

Industry years: 17

Eminger helps customers with their parts and service questions and orders, including processing special orders and daily stocking orders. When she first started with Arrow, she had a lot to learn about its products, she says. Several of the company's customers and vendors have turned into lifelong friends along the way. When Eminger gets a call that a customer needs a part for a delivery or repair, she makes sure that happens and she says it feels rewarding to know you can be relied on. Arrow is family-owned and Eminger says she knows she's more than just a number at the company.



Jeff Coffman

Senior Vice President of Enterprise Solutions & Marketing-Rollick

Years at company: 19

Industry years: 19

Started as: Account executive

Coffman joined AVALA Marketing Group (now Rollick) in 2003 as an account executive in the RV and marine industries. He was eventually promoted to vice president of sales, and in 2012 was promoted to president of AVALA, a position held until the Rollick acquisition in October 2018. Since that time, Coffman has led Rollick's OEM sales efforts. He helped the business evolve from a traditional agency to a marketing technology company, including leading efforts with the company's Aimbase platform, which is now used by more than 110 recreation OEMs.



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Angelica Saldana

Administrative Specialist–Dragonfly Energy

Years at company: 5

Industry years: 5

In the five years that Saldana has been with Dragonfly, the number of orders the company receives daily has grown “exponentially.” She plays an integral role in ensuring the quality of each order Dragonfly’s customers receive. In Saldana’s words, “I come to work every day and I get the job done.” Following her tenure in background checks and fingerprinting, she was offered an administrative position at Dragonfly. While she jokes that the best part of her job is getting donuts on Fridays, she has truly loved having a front-row seat to the tremendous growth Dragonfly has experienced over the last five years.



Trevor Bauman

Training Program Coordinator–Dragonfly Energy

Years at company: 5

Industry years: 5

Started as: Temporary production employee

As part of Dragonfly’s first employees, Bauman started as one of two people building 20 batteries a week. He now oversees and develops training for the battery building process. Over Bauman’s five years with the company, he’s worked in three buildings, starting with 5,000 square feet and progressing to the current 100,000-square-foot warehouse. Prior to Dragonfly, he had an 11-year career in the restaurant industry, where he worked his way from a dishwasher to a chef. He truly believes in what Dragonfly’s founders started and looks forward to future growth prospects and change within the company and industry.



Eric “Stoo” Halverson

Quality Manager–KING

Years at company: 17

Industry years: 17

Started as: Production trainer and quality inspector

In 2005, Halverson was hired for a dual role as production trainer and quality inspector. He developed an audit system for KING’s finished products that evolved and is still used by the company today. He was promoted to quality manager in 2008 and says, “no one enjoys problems, but solving them can be very gratifying, especially when a permanent solution is found.” Halverson held several other positions over the years, including circuit board repair manager and repair department manager. He still oversees production troubleshooting in the repair department and helps out wherever else it is needed.



Tanya Miller-Winn

Director of Operations/Functional Project Manager, New Projects—KING

Years at company: 18

Industry years: 18

Started as: Inside sales coordinator

Miller-Winn says it may sound cliché, but she loves what she does. After positions in sales, purchasing and marketing, she now runs operations for KING—the “steady, yet controlled chaos.” From procurement to production to getting product shipped on time, there is never a dull moment and no two days are alike, she says. Miller-Winn has a loyal, hard-working team who also enjoys what they do. She says KING is a terrific place to work, with a culture that is holistically supportive of one another, and yet challenges each other to do and be better.



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Nathalie Zaroor Wheeler

Administrative Specialist—Advantage PressurePro

Years at company: 14

Industry years: 14

Started as: Customer service rep

Wheeler first cut her teeth in PressurePro operations working in accounting and customer service, becoming a familiar face to its clients and partners. She grew up watching her father not only create the business but grow it exponentially, and it was common to sit at the dinner table with partners from around the world. Wheeler started part-time at PressurePro and eventually became full-time after college. She says building relationships with new distributors, dealers and partners is rewarding, along with the day-to-day office functions and working alongside her siblings as they “continue to grow Dad’s legacy, pushing the innovation of TPMS.”



Bob Feinen

**Recreational Products Manager—American Guardian
Warranty Services**

Years at company: 10

Industry years: 20

After a career in law enforcement investigations, Feinen joined the F&I industry 20 years ago to help develop AGWS’ Recreational Products division. Ten years ago, the company consisted of nearly 45 employees, which has increased by more than four-times. Feinen says he’s been lucky to have careers that don’t feel like work, and are rewarding, enjoyable and fun. At AGWS, he enjoys the staff, his colleagues, developing relationships with independent agents and fostering existing ones. The F&I industry continues to evolve and AGWS still maintains “forging partnerships that last”—one of Feinen’s favorite quotes.



Craig Herriot

General Manager of International Sales—REDARC Corp.

Years at company: 8

Industry years: 22

Started as: Project manager

Herriot is responsible for REDARC’s international sales teams, distribution partners and operations. Having been with REDARC for more than eight years, he’s interested in evaluating new geographic regions and has helped take the company to North America, Europe, the U.K., Middle East, South Africa and Southeast Asia. At the time Herriot joined REDARC, no products were sold outside of Australia and New Zealand. He believes the company’s commitment to a positive work culture is key to providing first-class customer support, and that “it’s wonderful to work for a company that sets the benchmark by which its competitors are measured.”

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Meta Steeb

Design Director of RV & Manufactured Housing—Richloom Fabrics

Years at company: 22

Industry years: 17

Started as: CAD designer

After studying in Europe and earning degrees in textile and fashion design, Steeb joined Richloom Fabrics Group as a junior CAD designer in 2000. She worked as senior woven designer in the upholstery and outdoor hospitality divisions before joining the RV team in 2005 as design director. With her Shanghai team's support, she designs and merchandises Richloom collections. Designing fabrics for the industry is not without its challenges, she says, but those challenges force her to push the envelope and make fabrics that look and feel like an extension of home.



Michael Christensen

Director of Manufacturing Operations—Lippert

Years at company: 27

Industry years: 27+

Started as: Welder

Christensen started in manufacturing in 1995 as a welder through a cooperative program offered by his high school. He took on responsibilities in fabricating, designing and building new products and received promotions eventually leading to director of manufacturing operations for CURT Mfg., acquired by Lippert in 2019. Manufacturing in the U.S. was a business Christensen eagerly wanted to be a part of, he says. Today's team has grown exponentially in size and maintains an environment of honesty and integrity. He says he enjoys being part of something greater than himself—"a force for good."



Marbella Ortega

Screen Line Team Leader—Lippert

Years at company: 26

Industry years: 26 years+

Started as: Building panels

Ortega started in leadership building panels for Lippert's Rockgaurd line, when it was "plant 228." She then worked for plant 8700 and others as a leader. She eventually became a quality leader and is now a screen line team leader. Lippert's leadership is what motivated her to come to work every day, she says, especially Brian Edwards. Ortega sees herself working for Lippert for many more years to come and has enjoyed the company's efforts to shift leadership and team dynamics.



Michael Schicker

Senior Development Technologist—Truma Corp.

Years at company: 21

Industry years: 21

Started as: Technical support representative

Schicker got his start in the RV industry as a technical support representative in his native Germany, where Truma was founded. He started in the German call center and in 2014, came to Elkhart, Indiana, to help kick-start the North American division. Schicker was supposed to spend three months in Elkhart—eight years later, he has transitioned to the senior development technologist on the North American Business Development team. He says that corporate culture and continued opportunities to help the company and industry grow in new directions are the primary reasons he has continued to stay on board in Elkhart for so long.



Chantal Hershberger

Senior Customer Care Coordinator—Truma Corp.

Years at company: 6.5

Industry years: 24

Started as: Customer care coordinator

An Elkhart native, Hershberger was one of the first employees at Truma's North American headquarters in Elkhart. She got her first RV industry job after high school and was familiar with the appliance supplier world when she first saw Truma exhibit at the RVIA show. She says she was immediately impressed, applied right away and jumped into the customer care coordinator role. Hershberger says the most rewarding part of her job is getting to help people in the call center. She also says the end user customers are the primary reason she has stayed in the industry for so long.



Jonathan Ellis

Technical Sales Representative—Truma Corp.

Years at company: 6

Industry years: 6

Ellis was an early addition to the Truma Corp. team. He got his start in sales for accessory and replacement parts for conveyor systems, having some overlap with the RV industry. Now Truma's technical sales representative, he works closely with RV manufacturers to add Truma systems to their product lines. As an Elkhart area native, Ellis was always aware of the RV industry and loves that RVing gives people a way to experience the outdoors and travel with their families. Ellis says he has continued to be impressed by the company's products and the team environment it has built.



Steve Bayne

Senior Project Engineer—Truma Corp.

Years at company: 5

Industry years: 25

Started as: Senior technical sales representative

Bayne joined Truma in 2017 as a sales team member with more than 20 years of RV industry experience under his belt and a love for travel. In 2020, he transitioned to the business development team as a senior project engineer, helping bring new Truma systems to North America. Bayne got his start in the marine industry but says he spends more time RVing than on the water. As an avid RVer, he is most passionate about end users having the best experience possible with their Truma system. This includes creating documentation around product operation and conducting manufacturer audits.



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Kim Bargmann

Purchasing Manager–Blue Ox

Years at company: 25

Industry years: 25

Started as: Planner

Bargmann started in the planning department, where she learned about the different products along with the manufacturing processes. After six months moved into the purchasing department. She has produced year over year cost savings, developed relationships with supply partners along the way and reduced lead times on purchased parts helping inventory reduction and the time to deliver to customer. She said, “When I interviewed Jay Hesse, the owner at the time, he mentioned that these products were for the outdoor industry, and people were always going to share these hobbies, so I knew there was job stability.”



Don McQuistan

Welder–Blue Ox

Years at company: 32

Industry years: 32

McQuistan has a degree in animal science, but when the recession hit and there were no jobs in his field, he took welding classes and joined Blue Ox. He has a natural ability to configure new jigs and create new welds for the company's various RV and AG products. He has trained many Blue Ox employees in his tenure and is gifted in passing down the tools of the trade to younger generations. Consistent work and family have kept McQuistan in Pender, Nebraska. He has two children, one grandchild and enjoys hunting, fishing, trapping, canning food and Cornhusker sports.



Les Roeber

Machine Shop Manager–Blue Ox

Years at company: 36

Industry years: 36

Started as: Machine operator

When Roeber left his family farm and was looking for a good job, his father-in-law introduced him to Blue Ox/Automatic, where he spent the next 36 years. He has worn many hats in his time with the company, including four years as a machine operator/roll welder, 18 years in R&D, eight years as fabrication supervisor, five years as Ag department manager and the rest as machine shop manager. He is never one to shy away from a challenge and enjoys learning about the opportunities each position provides. When Roeber isn't with his six grandchildren, you can find him camping, fishing and hunting.



Carlos Avilia

Profit Center Leader—MBA Insurance

Years at company: 19

Industry years: 26

Started as: Underwriter

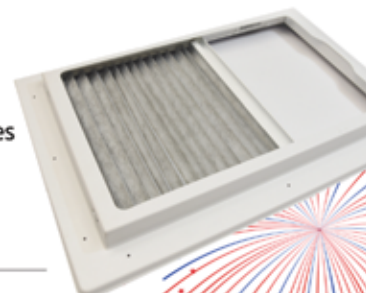
Avilia started in the insurance industry as an assistant underwriter, joining MBA's underwriting team 19 years ago. He took on marketing and sales functions, along with an additional lead IT role. He grew the company's IT department, which is now considered a key component to the Brown and Brown IT function and development team.

Avilia was promoted to profit center leader, taking over the company's reins. He says MBA and its niche offered a chance for personal growth not available at a bigger company. He enjoys a challenge and has met "each challenge with a smile and resolve."

*About Les Roeber:
He is never one to shy
away from a challenge and
enjoys learning about the
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Martina Elorza Garcia
Safety Cables—Roadmaster

Years at company: 26

Industry years: 26

Started as: Safety cable department

A native of Mexico, mother of four and grandmother to five, Garcia began working in the safety cable department at Roadmaster in 1996 and has been there ever since. She starts with a spool of galvanized steel cable, rated at 6,000, 8,000 or 10,000 pounds, cuts the cable to the correct length, then strips the vinyl coating from the ends. Once the cables are assembled, Garcia ties them into a loop and puts them in a clamshell container with instructions, ready to ship to the customer. "It's not an easy job, but I like the way I'm treated here..." Garcia says. "That's why I've been here so long."



Valentina Ponomarenko

Brake System Quality Control—Roadmaster

Years at company: 23

Industry years: 23

Ukraine native Ponomarenko tests not only completed products, but every critical electrical component. She started working at Roadmaster in 1999, assembling hardware packages for base plate kits. When the company developed its first portable braking systems, she transferred to the brake department's assembly line. It was Ponomarenko who one day discovered a problem with a vendor's circuit boards using a thermal imaging camera, sparking change in Roadmaster's circuit designs. Department Manager Mike Cannon says, "This is the kind of work that Valentina does every day—and our parts list continues to grow. Somehow, she still puts up with us."



Trevor Swanson

Installation Dept. Manager—Roadmaster

Years at company: 17

Industry years: 17

Started as: Shop helper

Swanson installs base plates, wiring kits and braking systems while supervising the department, customer relations and installing/repairing Roadmaster product at RV shows. He began his Roadmaster tenure in 2005 as a shop helper and now runs it. When the previous installation department lead became customer service manager, Swanson was promoted to installation manager in 2020. He also trains dealers/installers and performs suspension/steering upgrades on motorhomes. The best part of the job is "it's a different project every day," he says. "It doesn't feel like work... It's a nice company to work for. It feels like home."



Dick Grymonprez

Director of Park Model Sales—
Skyline Champion Corp.

Years at company: 32

Industry years: 41

Started as: Zone manager

Grymonprez's first assignment with Skyline was zone manager training at Redman Homes in Indiana, eventually being promoted to sales manager in 1988. In 1996, he moved back to Athens, Texas, until Champion closed the plant in 2003. He then became an owner of the closed facility and helped reopen it as Athens Park Homes, bought by Champion in 2012. He served as president of the Recreational Park Trailer Industry Association until it joined RVIA in 2013. Grymonprez was appointed the first park model manufacturer board seat on the RVIA Board of Directors in 2013, followed by three additional three-term seat elections.

About Trevor Swanson:
The best part of the job is 'it's
something different every day.
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Claudio Correa

Maintenance Technician—Progress Mfg.

Years at company: 20

Industry years: 37

Started as: Maintenance and pollution

Correa came to America from Chile in 1998 and started working at Progress Mfg. in 2002. He is one main reason that Progress has kept its longest streak for its master's production schedule. The most rewarding part of Correa's job is maintaining and fixing machines. He said he would never leave Progress because of the company's philosophy. His job allows him to provide for his family, work in a great environment surrounded by kind people, and work for a company that holds religion in high standards, as well as a great rewards program.



Paxton Hamby

General Manager—Three Way Campers

Years at company: 45

Industry years: 45

Started as: Scrubbing putty off shop floor

Hamby is the "do it all" man at TWC, which is family-owned and operated since 1952 in Marietta, Georgia. He was hired in 1978 to scrape putty off the shop floor for \$3.50/hour. Hamby now trains long-term employees and is "more than an employee—he is family." His journey from service tech to general manager culminated in 1996, after then-owner Charles Porter retired and left the business to his sons, Jeff and David, who knew they couldn't continue business without Hamby. He is described as a "wise counselor for life beyond business" whose two of three children also work for TWC.



Al Pereira

Master Service Tech—Major's RV

Years at company: 24

Industry years: 24.2

Started as: Service tech

Pereira was pumping gas for minimum wage 24 years ago and persistently came in asking for a job. He knew nothing about the RV industry yet has grown into an invaluable Level 4 Master Certified service tech through the RV Technical Institute. Through trial and error, he properly repairs customers' RVs and helps new techs look at the bigger picture. He stays updated via Lippert's online program and completes the modules on a bonus pay program, along with other training courses through RVDA and RVIA and traveling to factory training at HWH and Dometic facilities across the country.



Merle Aanrud
Special Repairer–Winnebago Industries

Years at company: 51

Industry years: 51

Aanrud applied for a job at Winnebago Industries at the request of his future wife, as he was working in another town at the time. His first day was in 1971 in the weld shop prepping generators and he later took an opportunity to work in security for three years before transferring to ship-out in 1976 for the remainder of his career. Aanrud's fondest memories include a trip to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, to ensure units met Canadian chassis specifications and winning the Quality Person of the Year award in the 1980s for his attention to detail.



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Tom Halvorson

Master Tool/Die Maker—Winnebago Industries

Years at company: 50

Industry years: 50

Halvorson started with Winnebago in 1972 and worked one day as a mechanic before he was asked to help in the machine shop. He ended up staying in the machine shop for the next 50 years, where he built many components that are instrumental to the manufacturing process. During Halvorson's career, he has enjoyed being a part of the Plant Emergency Operations (PEO) crew, where he serves as coordinator for maintenance buildings. He currently owns a 1993 Itasca Sunrise and a 2009 Winnebago Sightseer and enjoys taking trips with his wife and daughter, along with fishing at his cabin in Minnesota.



Maria de La Luz Almaguer

Team Leader—Prest-O-Fit Manufacturing

Years at company: 22 years

Industry years: 22 years

Started as: Assembly

Almaguer joined Prest-O-Fit as an assembler in 2000 and was promoted to team leader in 2014. She is a positive force in the warehouse, focused on making sure her team is happy, functioning well and getting quality products out the door. She has won the company-wide chili contest and goes above and beyond for everyone in her life. When asked what she likes most about her job, Almaguer says it's all about the work environment. She enjoys working with her colleagues, participating in company sponsored events, such as the annual picnic and holiday dinner, and receiving special perks like bonuses and gift cards.



Rob Stratton

Sales Account Representative—Progress Mfg.

Years at company: 18

Industry years: 18

Started as: Shipping operations

Stratton has been a regional sales account manager for Progress Mfg., overseeing a majority of the Midwest and Atlantic territories. He helped develop and service its network and received individual awards for "rep of the year" from distributor and dealer partners. The family-like atmosphere, along with family-driven goals, is what drew Stratton to Progress, where he developed lifelong friendships. It's the sense of accomplishment and wonderful relationships that have kept him going, he says. As each year ends, he gets excited for the next season and what opportunities it will bring.

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About Maria de La Luz Almaguer:
She is a positive force in the warehouse, focused on making sure her team is happy, functioning well and getting quality products out the door. She has won the company-wide chili contest and goes above and beyond for everyone in her life.

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Ricki Weaver

Office Manager—Kenda Americana Tire & Wheel

Years at company: 15

Industry years: 20

Started as: Customer service

Weaver's original job duties included answering phones, helping customers and order entry. She was promoted to office manager and keeps the office running smoothly while handling customer inquiries/issues when they arise. She came to Kenda Americana in 2006 already knowing the industry and customers, who, paired with coworkers, grew into family. Continued flexibility kept her at Kenda ATW, and she loves the dynamic complexity of the job, which Weaver says keeps her engaged every day.



Tara Brossman

Director of Marketing—The Great Outdoors RV

Years at company: 7

Industry years: 7

Started as: Photo/video production

Brossman's influence has left a mark on TGORV, from its logo to the slogan "As Colorado as It Gets." Her industry expertise has attracted 34,500 subscribers through TGORV's YouTube channel that began six years ago, and the company's podcast released in 2021, which is now leading into its 26th episode. Brossman developed the first RV industry mascot known as Myles the Moose, now partnered with the Colorado Eagles, and recently implemented new industry events. She said the best thing about her job is that "no day is ever the same" and it's a privilege to manipulate the day-to-day to make "great ideas work."



Lisa Carey

Human Resources Manager—Thetford

Years at company: 29

Industry years: 29

Started as: Assembler

Carey has been with Thetford for nearly three decades. She started her career as an assembler working on the Porta-Potti and grew into a human resources pro, serving in the HR generalist role for several years before being promoted twice to senior HR generalist and now, HR manager for U.S. Thetford business. In 2021, she was recognized with one of the company's prestigious "Values Awards." Carey has had a role in hiring most of the company. Her infectious positivity is displayed through all her interactions, and she is sought out by many employees and leaders for advice and counsel.

About Lisa Carey:
She has had a role
in hiring most of
the company. Her
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Eddie Argumaniz

Service Manager–Bobby Waynes RV

Years at company: 18

Industry years: 21

Started as: Technician

Argumaniz manages the Bobby Waynes RV location in Lancaster, California, starting as an entry-level technician and becoming service manager. He was Beaumont RV's first employee, which grew to multiple locations including Bobby Waynes, which now has more than 100 employees. Argumaniz started his industry journey at Eclipse RV, where he maintained 15 units per day using limited resources and developed skill sets that are "indispensable" to his current company. The dealership says Argumaniz's ingenuity was a key to becoming "California's best full-service RV dealership."



Alberto Perez

Manufacturing Cell Leader–Truck System Technologies

Years at Company: 24

Industry years: 24

Started as: Electrical cable/tubing preparation

Perez oversees the preparation of TST's TPMS Sensor assembly for shipment to RV tire/wheel plants, to be installed on all Forest River and THOR lines. He is a recipient of the company's "President's Award" and a two-time recipient of its "Excellence Award." Perez helps the transition of Hispanic-speaking employees into cell leaders and supervisors through peer counseling. When he first arrived at the TST's San Antonio location in 1998 under a work visa, he quickly adapted to a new language and processes, becoming TST's "first choice" when it comes to implementing a new process or mentoring a new hire."



Kevin Wenglikowski

Operations Manager–Stromberg Carlson

Years at company: 18

Industry years: 18

Started as: Plant manager

Wenglikowski was hired at Stromberg Carlson as plant manager in 2004, when there was just five shop employees and five office staff. He was promoted to operations manager in early 2022, overseeing shop managers and day-to-day operations, along with shop layout, buildings, new products and working with HR. When not at work, Wenglikowski enjoys being outdoors, camping, golf, walking the dogs and spending time with his beautiful wife, two children and three grandchildren. Although he's been able to vacation around the world, he says, "I will always take a small tropical island with the wife."



Kelley Hanks

Senior RV Technician—Ronnie Bock's
Kerrville RV

Years at company: 30

Industry years: 30

Hanks began his career running the service and parts department for Ronnie Bock's Kerrville RV, a franchised Winnebago dealer in Texas. As the company grew, he focused on service, earning numerous Winnebago certifications and developing skill sets in diagnostics and repairs. In his 30 years, he says he can't remember an RV challenge he has not solved. Hanks is considered a "big brother and like another son" to the dealership's owner. Hanks recently celebrated 32 years of marriage to his wife, Nell. He has "dedicated his life to Kerrville RV" and is responsible for the success of its business.

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Robin Sutton

Finance Director—Advantage PressurePro

Years at company: 15

Industry years: 15

Started as: Accounting specialist

Joining PressurePro in 2007, Sutton brought years of trucking and financial experience from owning Sutton Trucking with her husband, John. Paired with a background in accounting, she quickly rose to head PressurePro's financial department. Sutton now oversees the company's accounting operations and remains fundamental to its supply chain and production planning. Outside of PressurePro, she spends time with her grandchildren, Tensley and Sutton. One of the most rewarding parts of being a PressurePro partner is being rooted in its family-run, small town-based business ideals, while creating change on a global scale.



Donna Warr

National Sales Manager—Valterra by Dometic

Years at company: 35.5

Industry years: 35.5

Started as: Customer service

Warr started with Valterra in 1986 through an employment agency looking for a bilingual receptionist—a great way to practice her high school Spanish, she says. Warr worked five years in customer service and was promoted to sales, eventually becoming national sales manager. In 2018, she was recognized as one of the “Top 10 Women” in the industry. She is on the RVIA Consumer Outreach committee working to build training education for consumers. Warr considers Valterra a family-oriented company and said she looks forward to another 15 years, when she will hit her 50th year in the industry.



Belinda Garcia

Customer Service Specialist/Technical Help—Valterra by Dometic

Years at company: 16

Industry years: 16

Started as: RV/aftermarket desk

Garcia started at the RV/aftermarket desk entering orders and answering calls for orders. She said she learned a lot about RV parts, working with Valterra's sales team and front desk as a receptionist for many years. At her initial interview, Garcia met “two strong, intelligent women” in management and throughout the company's changes, believes Valterra truly cares about its employees and customers. Today, she is home receptionist, customer service, technical help and works with vendor sales platforms. While the technical inquiries are her most challenging, she finds it rewarding to help fix a problem.



Brad Vander Pol

Sales Territory Manager–Demco

Years at company: 35

Industry years: 34

Started as: Trailer assembly

Coming from a small market radio station job, Vander Pol was looking for a more stable benefits package. He was hired by Demco in 1988 and worked in rental trailer assembly, and, after numerous roles, was promoted to sales territory manager for the Midwest. In his early years, Vander Pol would always hear “The customer is always first. Whatever you do for us will impact the end product for the customer.” He says Demco has always been faith- and family-first focused. Coming from a radio broadcasting stint, he says he’s a people person and it’s been very rewarding to establish relationships with customers.



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Bryan Schell

Director of Inside Sales & Service—Pace International
(Dish Outdoors)

Years at company: 6.5

Industry years: 6.5

Started as: Inside sales representative

Schell started selling Dish Outdoors equipment and was promoted to call center team lead to head coaching, training and driving sales. He was promoted to inside sales manager and service, with his latest promotion as director of inside sales and service. He says working for Pace International was like working for a locally owned business that takes care of their people. The best part of his job is knowing his employees, Schell says, and understanding what motivates them to do their best. Working at Pace also allowed him to partner with other companies such as Dish, Wingard and King Connect.



Katie Lentine

Vice President of Business Development, RV division—US
Warranty Corp.

Years at company: 27

Industry years: 27

Started as: Bookkeeper

Lentine started with USWC in 1995 at 20 years old. Throughout her first 10 years, she worked through underwriting, claims adjusting and finally sales, where she advanced to vice president of business development. Due to her tenure and caring personality, she is successful in building relationships with key decision-makers and is the boots on the ground for several program iterations and company growth initiatives. Lentine is very patient and often assists onboarding new employees due to her historical perspective and product knowledge in the RV industry. She has two boys in high school and a little girl “who thinks she is 16.”

Jay Demaske

Vice President of Business Development, Marine Division—US
Warranty Corp.

Years at company: 20

Industry years: 20

Started as: Claims adjuster

Demaske started as a claims adjuster in 2002, which he describes as being “a detective without the danger.” He became claims department supervisor after two years and, in 2018, was tapped to head USWC’s new Marine Division. Demaske has authored outdoor industry articles and has four children ranging from ages 8-12. He is a jack of all trades, from hanging items to shooting unscripted videos/podcasts. USWC says Demaske illustrates the company’s core values through his development of core competencies like empathy, relationship management, resilience and a great sense of humor.





Tim Edwards

Director of Human Resources, People Management-THOR Industries

Years at company: 21

Industry years: 21

Started as: Pre-delivery inspector at Keystone

Edwards' career with THOR began in 2001 at Keystone RV in Goshen, Indiana. Over 18 years, he held various positions as a PDI team member, production team member, group leader, safety manager and HR manager. In 2019, he was promoted to HR director of people management for THOR's global headquarters. Edwards is a 2013 graduate of Indiana Tech who began his career at Keystone RV because the salary with no weekend hours appealed to him and his girlfriend-turned-wife of 22 years, Jeri, who also worked at Keystone. Edwards and his wife reside in Middlebury, Indiana, with their dog, Blue.



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Cheryl Barnes

Warranty Claims Specialist—Jayco

Years at company: 45 Years

Industry years: 45 Years

Started as: Human resources payroll department

Barnes was not quite a year past high school graduation when she started with Jayco. She was hired in 1977 to work in the human resources payroll department, and a year later took on warranty duties. She went full-time as a member in the warranty department in 1979, where she continues to serve today. The most rewarding thing about her job is the people she works with internally and externally, she says. Barnes is working to put her kids through college and says her husband thinks she “would not be happy staying home.”



Harold Aldrich

R&D Technician—Jayco

Years at company: 46 years

Industry years: 47 Years

Started as: Production

Aldrich worked briefly for Jayco in 1974 and returned in 1976, holding several production positions before moving to engineering. He was promoted to R&D foreman in 2011, and six years later went part-time as an R&D tech. Aldrich worked with Jayco founders Derald and Wilbur Bontrager, getting to know the two more as family than employers. He announced his retirement at 68 years old to the company, which asked for his part-time help two weeks before his last day—of which Aldrich obliged. He now helps out in the mornings, driving attendees to a local program called “Helping Hands Outreach.” It was never about the money, Aldrich says.



Jeremiah Huss

Product Specialist—Foretravel, Inc.

Years at company: 5

Industry years: 5

Started as: HSE coordinator

Since starting with Foretravel, Huss has saved the company “tens of thousands of dollars” in accident prevention loss. He implemented its employee leadership training program, a recycling program, robust COVID-19 protocols, established Foretravel the first Class A to be certified Green by TRA and more. Having just retired from a career in the Coast Guard, having extra time to spend with his wife, Tanya, and their three kids was important to Huss. He says Foretravel was a perfect fit because of the importance it places on family.



Jim Mezza

Business Architect–Horizon Global

Years at company: 38

Industry years: 38

Started as: Computer operator

In the early years, Mezza says Horizon's IT department consisted of three people who were cross-trained in "about every IT job possible." Mezza worked in programming and led a project in the 1980s to computerize the company's warehouse locations. When the company was known as Cequent in later years, he managed the programming team, was a network admin and responsible for Global IT Cyber Security at Horizon for four years. Mezza started working with Draw-Tite at 23 years old and was happy to have a job where he could apply his college major.

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Paul Miller

Parts Department Purchasing—Crestview RV

Years at company: 5 years

Industry years: 5 years

Miller was “skeptical” at first on the RV industry, thinking purchasing is purchasing. He couldn’t have been more mistaken, he says, noting a big learning curve. From learning trims, colors, sizes and styles – there are many items that go into the construction of an RV. Miller comes from a long background of management and considers his current role a nice change. Since he started at Crestview he has felt supported and says it’s “a great feeling if you need help with an issue and your superiors can help.” It is very important in any career that have that kind of support, he says.



Victor Cardona

Senior Lot Porter—Crestview RV

Years at company: 12

Industry years: 16

Cardona was born in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, but moved to Texas as soon as he could, he says. He was hired in 2010 in the Crestview RV detail department and soon after started operating the forklift, where he is today, in addition to cleaning the shop’s 20 service bays. He has been in the RV industry for 16 years and now assists Crestview’s 25 service techs by bringing in RVs needing repairs. When needed, Cardona also still helps the detail department. Those who know him know his gratitude and that he feels “blessed to be able to work for such a great company,” he says.



Tony Quintana

Sales Manager—Crestview RV

Years at company: 18

Industry years: 18

Quintana’s background is in business management, from owning a vocational rehabilitation service company to opening McDonald’s restaurants across Texas and Oklahoma. He came to Crestview RV in Buda, Texas, in 2004, and four years later was asked to open the shop’s largest completed dealership ever constructed. Under his stewardship, Crestview RV Georgetown said it became one of the highest-volume single dealerships in Texas. Quintana has been married for 30 years with three children and one granddaughter. He believes “behind every successful person is a spouse who is even greater.”



Dave Locken

Parts & Service Director—Crestview RV

Years at company: 13

Industry years: 28

Locken started in the RV industry in 1994 as a service advisor at a Washington dealership, and within a year and a half was promoted to service manager. He eventually relocated to Georgetown, Texas, and worked for Crestview RV in 2009, as parts and service director when the dealership had 10 technician bays; today there are 32. Locken has been married for 40 years and is a proud father and grandfather. Most weekends he's found at the coast fishing with his wife, Skeeter, or hunting for deer. He has "the heart of a homesteader and is always off on some sort of adventure."



Jack Wells

RV Shipping & Receiving Clerk—Crestview RV

Years at company: 13

Industry years: 13

Wells is a retired veteran from the United States Air Force with a military family who "had your back at all times." As shipping/receiving clerk, Wells makes sure of proper accounting and inventory control for all parts received. He is constantly thinking of the "bigger picture" on how his job affects Crestview RV as a whole. He was attracted to the job because it is a family-owned operation. Prior to the dealership, he worked in high-tech IT as a technician, semi-conductor as a field service engineer and in the petroleum industry as a project manager.

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Brian Bodine

Director of Sales & Marketing—CDK Global Lightspeed

Years at company: 28

Industry years: 22

Started as: Shipping clerk

Bodine started with Lightspeed at 19 years old in the shipping department. Through his curiosity, hard work and drive, he was promoted eight times and is now the director of sales and marketing. He took over all sales four years ago and has led the company to four straight record years of sales. Bodine has always enjoyed the culture at CDK Lightspeed and has had a strong belief in the products and services that they provide. It was early feedback in his career from dealerships, saying how they couldn't imagine running their dealership without Lightspeed, that fueled his passion.



Xavier Taylor

General Manager—Weekend RV Center

Years at company: 15

Industry years: 28

Started as: Service tech and warranty manager

Taylor started as a detailer at Campers Corner in Knoxville, Tennessee. He became a service technician, then lead tech, then parts manager. He also became one of the first Master Certified technicians in Tennessee in the '90s. Later, he met the owner of an up-and-coming dealership named Weekend RV Center and relocated to that dealership. He started as a service tech and warranty manager and is now the general manager, overseeing the day-to-day business of the company.



Bruce Terwiske

Director of Purchasing—Meyer Distributing

Years at company: 34

Industry years: 34

Started as: Insurance sales

Terwiske started off traveling a three-state area to sell insurance to used car dealers. Eventually, he moved into sales and purchasing full time with Mike Braun, pioneer of Meyer Distributing. The two were the only office staff at the start. Terwiske was promoted to director of purchasing in 2005, and played a vital role in Meyer's unprecedented growth, including new warehouse locations and several acquisitions. Terwiske found it a privilege to learn from Braun, as Meyer evolved from a small regional supplier to a national leader in parts distribution. It's rare to work with a company of Meyer's size while also working for a friend, Terwiske says. He also was elected to the RVAA Board of Directors in 2015 and served on the RVIA Aftermarket Committee until 2020.



Beverly Wirkler

Customer Care Supervisor–Pinnacle Appliances

Years at company: 5

Industry years: 20+

Started as: Post sales calls

Wirkler wears many hats at Pinnacle Appliances, but her main job is customer service. She started with the company after her husband recommended her for a part-time job, and has been in the RV industry for 20-plus years. Wirkler says she likes that her job is constantly changing due to the shift in the average age of the RVer. She is able to help those who have never been on the road, and those who are “industry veterans.” Wirkler says she enjoys being the frontline for customers, along with traveling to RV and distributor shows to meet new and old friends who are now part of the Pinnacle family.

*About Beverly Wirkler:
She likes that her job is constantly changing due to the shift in the average age of the RVer. She is able to help those who have never been on the road, and those who are ‘industry veterans.’*

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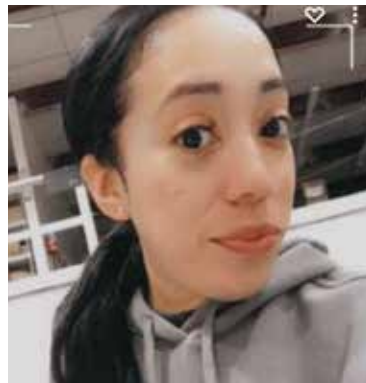
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**Chuck VanAcker****Crater-EQ United****Years at company: 26****Industry years: 26**

VanAcker has spent 26 years working in various positions for Days Corporation, now known as EQ United, EQ Logistics and EQ Systems. He started at the company in 1996, working in the garage, performing light maintenance and yard duties. Three months later, a position in the crating and export packaging department became available so he made the switch. He built crates and packaged everything from small boxes to equipment as big as a house. A year and a half later, he had the opportunity to apprentice and become a journeyman for the Iron Workers. VanAcker said since then he has worked for export packaging, but he enjoys lending a hand where needed. He has filled many open positions, learning to do everything from general warehousing to unloading OSB from rail cars and cutting wood for the RV industry. VanAcker says he continues to work at EQ Logistics because of the people—the company is full of good people, from the owners to my fellow workers. He says he feels he can talk to anyone, and they will listen and treat him with courtesy and respect.

**Derrick Siade****Fab Shop Lead-EQ United****Years at company: 6****Industry years: 6**

Siade says he is responsible for set up and making sure the welders are set to weld. He also troubleshoots plasma tables, organizes and keeps inventory of parts. The most rewarding part of the job, he says, is the appreciation given by everyone day to day. Originally, the family aspect of the company is what made him want to work there. The main reason he has stayed with the company, Siade says, is that the company gives him new opportunities to excel. He says he also really enjoys a lot of the people he works with. Siade was named the Employee of the Quarter for the first quarter of 2022.

**Jack Bradley****Shop Foreman-EQ United****Years at company: 46****Industry years: 46**

Bradley came on board at the company in the summer of 1976. At first, he says the company made interior decorations for the restaurant industry, until management decided to go in a different direction. The company already had most of the tools and personnel that it would take to go into the export packaging business. So, Bradley says he worked at then Days Machinery Movers for 35 years, and now EQ Logistics as it has evolved into what it is now. Bradley says he has always been treated decent, and loves woodworking, but after 15 years of sanding, staining and finishing decorations, he was ready to make the change to packaging machinery and more. In both lines of work, Bradley has always taken a lot of pride in what the company does. Crating machinery has always been a challenge for him; he says it always keeps him thinking of what is the best way to pack things. Bradley says he has always gotten a lot of satisfaction in a job well done.



Joe Bradley
Crating–EQ United
Years at company: 24
Industry years: 24

Bradley started at Days Corporation, now EQ United, in 1997. At the time, he was part-time, summer help for the maintenance department and did mostly painting. After high school, he was offered a full-time job in the export packing division. Bradley's father is the shop foreman, and he says he really enjoys the job because it is always something different—it's not repetitive. He says he also enjoys meeting new customers and doing whatever it takes to meet their expectations. Bradley says it's especially important to him to enjoy the people he works with and know that the company he works for is going to take care of him.



Tom Jackson
Driver–EQ United
Years at company: 7
Industry years: 7

A delivery driver, with various other duties in the shop, Jackson has been a recipient of a perfect attendance award and is a dedicated company worker. Jackson said he was looking to get out of retail and his brother used to work for EQ United (he is now retired). Jackson prides himself on customer satisfaction, is always courteous and feels it is important to get customers their products in a timely manner. Jackson plans on staying with the company until he retires, and said he is, “more than happy to be an EQ Systems employee.” He has been married to his wife, Kristi, for 21 years, and they love to spend time together.



Kevin Hutchinson
Transportation Manager–EQ United
Years at company: 8
Industry years: 30

In 2014, Hutchinson started at then Days Distribution & Logistics, now EQ Logistics, to drive trucks and make local deliveries. He was subsequently asked to move to dispatch and be a lead driver. Hutchinson says he enjoyed running the delivery operations while learning as much as he could on the warehouse operations side. That added experience and ambition led him to the operations manager position and now transportation manager, leading the daily operations and future growth of delivery services at the main campus in Elkhart, Indiana. The people are the most rewarding aspect of his job, Hutchinson says. Whether it be the owners, staff, or the customers, the people he works with every day make it enjoyable, he says. He describes the company as a family and enjoys getting up and coming to work every day because of what he does and who he does it with.



EQ UNITED



Kevin Beasley

Director of Administration—EQ United

Years at company: 20

Industry years: 20

Beasley started with EQ Logistics over 20 years ago as a sales and marketing manager. He later became the customer service manager, and now is director of administration. In 2008, Beasley earned a master's degree in business administration from Indiana University-South Bend, with honors. He is involved in all areas of company operations, including sales, rate development, cost accounting, software systems, account processes and customer service. Beasley has been instrumental in driving the use of technology in the processes at EQ Logistics, including the adoption of RF scanning processes, data import systems and communications systems. He has also been instrumental in driving the culture of the organization, including how the organization values its customers and its people. Beasley says what attracted him to EQ Logistics was the opportunity to work for a company that values people and values quality in the services and products it offers. He says working with a diverse group of clients has provided a lot of perspective—client size ranges from single individuals running a company to multinational conglomerates. Beasley says it's been rewarding to form close relationships with customers and to be a part of their approach to their markets.



Ben Reinoehl

Vice President—EQ Logistics, EQ United

Years at company: 24

Industry years: 24

In 1998, Reinoehl started with then Days Corporation as a warehouseman. He has worked his way through many positions/titles, gaining experience and responsibilities—from warehouse supervisor to division director, and now vice president. He takes pride in his work and believes his experience in operations provides strategic planning for a positive tomorrow. Reinoehl says his position provides challenges but is also rewarding because he sees both the personal and professional growth of the people around him. He says he firmly believes that coming up through the ranks of this organization has provided him with a grounded, but driven attitude that has helped him succeed. He says he has been blessed to work with some amazing people and have seen many changes over the years. He says the attitude and efforts of the employees are unmatched, and it shows by the service we provide.



Duane McClellan

Warehouseman—EQ United

Years at company: 19

Industry years: 25

McClellan started off as a warehouseman handling a few accounts and, as his knowledge of the accounts grew, he began to take on additional accounts and responsibilities, learning more about the job and the company daily. Today, he is a lead warehouseman, overseeing 10 accounts, each with different processes for location tracking, product scanning, and internal and external account representatives. McClellan says that, as with any job, he has good days and bad days, but overall, EQ United is a good family-oriented company to work for. He says he feels like he works with and alongside his managers and supervisors, and not necessarily for them. One of the most rewarding parts of his job is loading and unloading trucks. He says loading a truck is like putting a puzzle together—determining what product can go where, how it will fit, visualizing the best possible arrangement of the puzzle pieces, and then seeing it all fit together is a challenge he enjoys. McClellan says spending time with family and friends is important to him, and helps him be a better employee. The camaraderie that he has built with other long-term co-workers and the friendships formed is something he will continue to enjoy, even after retirement.



John lavagnilio

Warehouseman—EQ United

Years at company: 23

Industry years: 40

lavagnilio has been in shipping and receiving for over 40 years. He started with a company that bought and sold parts and accessories for RVs, trucks and vans as a warehouse foreman. His job was to ship and receive all the products, from many different companies. He then came across Days Distribution & Logistics, now EQ United, EQ Logistics and EQ Systems. lavagnilio said one thing that appealed to him was he is very accurate when it comes to counting, which helps when doing/checking inventory. He enjoys being able to do his job to the best of his ability. He said he has stayed with the company for so many years because he likes the people he works with, he has learned a lot over the years, and he's gotten to know so many people.



Sheila Oiler

Outside Sales—EQ United

Years at company: 20

Industry years: 20

Oiler started at the company in administration when it was Days Machinery Movers division, and then moved to Days Corporation (now known as EQ United), also in administration. She currently works in outside sales for EQ Systems. Oiler says when starting with the company, it had a family-like feel, which was important to her. She says she has grown at the company and gained invaluable knowledge throughout her career.



Trisha Hively

Purchasing Agent/Harness—EQ United

Years at company: 9

Industry years: 10

Hively says she's responsible for ordering products for the company by preparing purchase orders and verifying price and all specifications for each item ordered. She says she loves her job and has most enjoyed the opportunity to grow with the company, learning several positions already in the nine years she has been with EQ United. She says she is ready to explore more of the company's growth in years to come. Hively has also earned the Jim Sproatt Stewardship award for her commitment to the community.

**Cody Berg****Industry Manager—Samlex****Years at company: 14**

Berg started his first role at Samlex as the company's sales specialist for the RV industry. He is now the industry manager for mobile power, with a focus on commercial fleets. One of Berg's fond memories at the company is when he attended his first trade show in Anaheim, California, with his dad, Earl Berg, founder of Samlex America. Earl was a great mentor for him in his early years at Samlex, which allowed him to learn the ins and outs of the business much faster. Berg says he is energized by meeting new people and helping customers understand how Samlex products can benefit them. Travelling for work is also something that he enjoys as it allows him to create long-lasting, trust-based partnerships with customers. Berg is known for his positive and uplifting attitude at work and, in 2020, he was recognized by his fellow coworkers with the prestigious Sammy Award.

**Mike Berg****Industry Manager—Samlex****Years at company: 10**

Berg started at Samlex in the warranty department where he got the chance to learn the importance of putting the customer first and working at a company that prides itself on providing an unmatched level of customer service. He is now the industry manager for the alternative energy and electrical markets. Berg's favorite Samlex memory is his first trade show experience in Niagara Falls where he worked with Cody and Earl Berg to manage the company's booth. Growing the business is what motivates him to get up for work day after day. What keeps him happy and energized at work is the positive team morale and culture that has been nurtured. In 2016, Berg received the Sales Target Buster Award for his achievements in the sales department. He believes in the quality of the company's products, which allows him to sell with confidence.

**Aida Guerrero****Channel Account Manager—Samlex****Years at company: 14**

Guerrero started her career as a bilingual sales assistant shortly after immigrating to Canada with her family from Mexico 14 years ago. At the time, she was tasked with translating the Samlex website to Spanish for the Latin American markets. Guerrero is now a channel account manager for Latin-American and Caribbean customers. She has received three sales achievement awards so far for her hard work at the company. Guerrero says she is motivated by and proud of her meaningful work bringing alternative energy to remote areas to improve people's lives and empower them to do their daily tasks more efficiently. One of her favorite memories at the company is her first big sale when she sold portable solar kits. The kits were purchased by a geophysical surveying company overseas to further support their explorations.

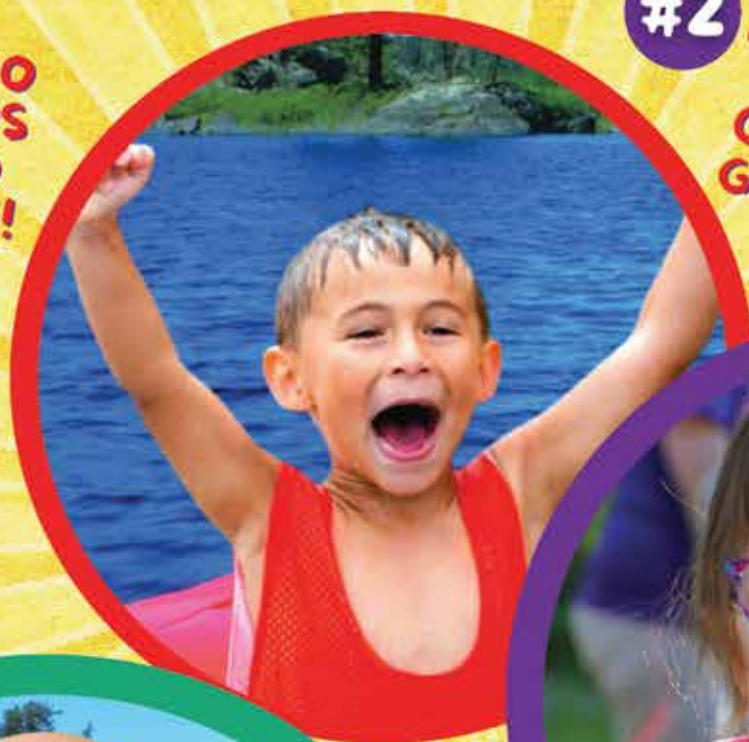
**Jason Eckert****Senior Sales Coordinator—Samlex****Years at company: 12**

Eckert started his career in the industrial and manufacturing sales sector after high school and, prior to joining Samlex, he worked at a family-run RV dealership, where he worked his way up to becoming the Parts Manager. With close to 30 years of experience in sales, he has been an important member of the company and recently won the Sales Target Award for closing the largest deal for the company in 2021. Eckert says the most appealing part of his job is the impact that it has on reducing the consumption of fossil fuels, which helps to slow down the rate of climate change around the world. This collective contribution to the environment, plus the family feeling that exists in the company, is what made him remain and grow there with for the past 12 years.

Help Kids with Cancer Get to Camp!

3 EASY Ways Your Business Can Help:

#1 BUILD A
DONATION TO
CARE CAMPS
RIGHT INTO
YOUR PRICE!



#2 ADD AN OPTION
FOR YOUR
CUSTOMERS TO
GIVE DURING THE
PURCHASE



#3
JUST CUT A CHECK AND
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Care Camps helps kids with cancer experience the healing power of the outdoors! Will you join us and help a child with cancer find hope, happiness, and the healing power of nature?

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RV INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION (RVIA)



Karen Redfern

Chief Marketing Officer, Go RVing
33 years



Bill Baker

Vice President, Membership
and Research
30 years



Alice Wang

Sr. Director, Human Resources
20 years



Curt Richardson

Director, Inspection Services
33 years



Sharonne Lee

Vice President, Education &
Operations, RV Technical Institute
33 years



Craig Kirby

President & CEO
28 years



Kevin Smith
Sr. Accounting Assistant
34 years



Jay Landers
Vice President, Government Affairs
32 years



Kent Perkins
Senior Director, Standards
37 years



Bob Schmitt
Vice President & General Counsel
24 years



Kelly Smith
Operations Manager
33 years



Dana DelVecchio
Senior Manager, Programs &
Experiential Events, Go RVing
24 years



Greg Wischmeyer
Chief Inspector, Standards
22 years

COACHMEN RV

10+ years:

Florencio Albarran
Jose Albor
Jose Antonio Bucio
Alice Armstrong
Brian Baker
Patricia Baldridge-Gose
Raul Ballines
Fred Barnes
Bruce Barone
Tara Bates
Michael Baumer
Richard Beck Jr.
Benedict Beck
Nicholas Beckham
Devon Beechy
Richard Bellis
Timothy Bidlack
Pamela Bigelow
Dixie Bills
Jerry Bils
Michael Birrell
Debra Black
Catherine Blankenship
Trevor Bloom
Jeffrey Bol
Kraig Bontrager
Andrew Bontrager
Dwayne Bontrager
James Bontrager
Lavern Bontrager
Karen Bontreger
Lyle Bontreger
Kenneth Brackett
William Bradley
Jason Brewer
Joshua Brewster
Teresa Bridges
Steve Brown
Wilard Bueno
Donald Burkholder
Eric Burns
Wesley Burnworth
Christopher Carmer
Ramiro Carmona
Robert Casey
Rick Chapman
Jeffrey Chupp
Jerry Cole
Wesley Combs
Michael Cowles
Jerry Crider
James Crump
Alejandro Cruz
Jose Cruz

Stoney Cunningham
Lori Cypret
Lawrence Davies
Kim Demerly
Freddie Demetz
Charlene Deters
Debra Detwiler
Travis Devlieger
Cindy Diethrich
Kay Doty
Marcus Dreger
Derrick Dunn
Justin Ebersole
Michael Edmister
Robert Edson
Sidney Ellis
Kyle Embler
Debbie Engle
Keith Ernst
Douglas Fisher
Dale Fisher
Robert Foreman
Judith Fox
Michael Frankowski
Jonathon Frey
John Frey
Faron Frey
Kenneth Fry
Alex Fulton
James Funderburg
Marcelino Garcia
Martiniano Garcia
Ramiro Garza
Jerry Gillespie
Steven Glick
Nelson Graber
Andrew Graber
Gary Grigsby
Kerry Grimm
Josh Grounds
Javier Guzman
Tara Haberstick
Peter Hagenbuch
Tina Hahn
Ryne Haller
Jerry Hamilton
Karen Handshoe
Alvin Handshoe
Lucas Handyside
John Haney
James Harris
Charles Harris
Derick Heckaman
Nate Hedges
Barry Heidom

Kevin Hendrix
Melissa Hendrix
Ruben Hernandez
Norbert Hess
James Hill
Anthony Hochstetler
Gerald Hochstetler
Stephen Holland
Mark Hollingsworth
Julie Hooker
Carol Hooley
Leona Hormann
Kurt Huckendubler
Loren Hull
Katherine Hums
James Huser
Jeff Huth
Nickolas Iannarelli
Tina James
Lana Jeffrey
Jeremy Jellison
Cindy Johnson
Mark Johnson
Jason Johnson
Arrel Jones
Joshua Jordan
Sharon Jordan
Kimber Kalb
Thomas Kaylor
Ksandra Kenevan
Jason Koller
Calvin Lambright
Raymundo Lara
Jamee Laskowski
Greg Lebold
Chelsea Lederman
Michael Lee
Erin Leer-Rumfelt
Timothy Lehman
Todd Lepper
Timothy Levernier
Julio Lopez
Mark Lott
Christopher Lower
Larry Luther
Donald Mann
Troy maples
Benjamin martin
Warren Martin
David Martinez
Luis Martinez
Jane Mauck
Shawn Mccollum
Gerald Mcgrath
Kevin McKay

Glenn Mckee
Timothy Mcnair
Mike Mcpherson
Bernice McPherson
Juan Medina
Dario Mendoza
Simon Micolav
Furstenrecht
Michael Miller
Richard Miller
Angela Miller
David Miller
Steve Miller
Glen Miller
Bowling Miller
Laverne Miller
Lee Miller
Mervin Miller
Orvan Miller
Brian Millirans
Benjamin Moncivaiz
Michael Monhollen
Adam Monrial
Mahaley Moord
Joshua Moore
Eric Morris
Eric Morris
Andrew Motz
Donald Mullen
Jerome Music
Chad Myers
Vance Neubert
Matthew Newcomer
Patrick O'Connell
Nathan Oliver
Charles Osbon
Cesar Oviedo
Brock Palmer
Nancy Palmer
William Pixley
Mitchell Pleasant
Aaron Raffel
Mark Randol
Leilani Rapp
Abdul Rashid
Mary Reingardt
Michael Rife
Brian Robinson
Michael Robinson
Tyge Romig
Virgil Ropp
Ronald Ross
Melissa Rouse
Edward Salomon
Anthony Sampson

Galdino Santillan
Allison Saunders
Patricia Scafaria
David Schelstraete
Freeman Schlabach
Joseph Schueneman
Ryan Schwalm
Scott Shannon
Donald Sheliga
Dallas Sigler
Gregory Sirpilla
Brian Sizemore
James Smith
James Smith
Billy Smith
Sharon Smith
Sheryl Smith
Eric Smith
Brent Smith
David Snider
Rhonda St Louis
John Steele
Davanee Steider
Danielle Stevenson
Thomas Stillely
Jerry Strauss
Anthony Strickland
Kerry Stringfellow
James Stump
Edward Switalski
Timothy Terlep
Candy Tetzloff
Richard Thomas
Brian Thompson
Gary Tobolski
Manuel Tovar
James Troyer
Jerry Troyer
Kevin Turner
Vicki Vanover
Jesus Vasquez
Charles Vorhis
Seth Wagers
Anita Walton
Robert Walworth
James Weddell
Devin Weeden
Matthew Wentworth
Jeremy Wenzel
Brandelynn Whately
Jeremy Whitcomb
Brian Wilkinson
David Williams
Chris Witman
Merle Yoder



LAND 'N' SEA

25+ years:

Sandy Allen
Betty Alvarez
Marjorie Anderson
Marianne Ascani
Eduardo Avila
Sharon Bagnati
Tom Balza
Brian Belisle
Deb Bellantoni
Daniel Berry
Mark Blackfield
Greg Blamer
Joseph Brearman
Don Cairns
Ronald Cappello
Gerald Ceckowski
Sanford Cohen
Michael Connors
Patrick Cooney
Darrel Counard
Sheila Couter
Ken Dixon
Renita Edwards
Joanne Eschbach
Joe Farnan
Yves Fenelus
Patricia Flanagan
Patti Flemming
Gregory Forest
Scott Gerken
Gregory Glaszczak
Marc Grey
Brenda Guadron
Cesar Guadron
William Gutekunst
Doug Hegenbarth
Connie Herrera
Mike Johns
Beth Jones
Dernes Joseph
Randy Keel
Shad Kernen
Alicia Kerr
John Kwak
Kevin Lipinski
Robert Macaluso
Jeff Magaziner
James Malott
Calvin Mapp

Robert Markin
Carl Mayo
Joseph Mcelroy
Doug Metcalf
John Meyer
Teresa Miller
Kevin Nagot
Lola Nolasco
Scott Olson
Tony Paigo
Terry Palmer
Richard Pascali
Steve Pavey
Luis Pellot
Lyle Phillips
Liz Pothier
David Prater
Javier Rathbun
Candace Rodriguez
John Rogers
Heather Smith
D'Oyen Solly
Kenneth Strelchun
Jeena Tomasheski
Brenda Torres
Bob Tremonte
Sarai Vazquez
Aimee Vera
Amy Verrastro
Stephen Walker
George Walla
Michael Ward
Dennis Whalen
Richard Wittel

20+ years:

Steve Alden
Paul Andrusz
Anita Atwood
William Beard
Michael Belfi
Allen Bellantoni
Clara Bernal
Theresa Blake
Ramon Brown
Florentino Cabais
Brian Casady
Aldemar Castillo
Sue Comire
Gerard Conlon

Tammy Cosby
Timothy Danner
Troy Davis
Gregory Devries
Paul Dexter
Cindy Dey
Pat Doyle
Robert Elliott
Denise Emede
Ken Ferleger
Christine Flanagan
Jason Glenn
Linda Guthrie
Richard Handly
Timothy Hobson
Dena Hodson
Tom Hofford
Richard Holibaugh
David Isham
Jeffery Jones
Ralph Katherman
Lisa Kent
David Knowles
Kerry Kruer
Bryan Landon
Henry Lantvit
Eliezer Marquez
Kelly Miner
Zoran Novkovic
Rob Oloski
Donald Olson
Patricia Partin
Aaron Pauley
Rodney Pitt
Sara Price
Robin Rankin
Angie Rickner
Tricia Riley
Phyllis Rothemeyer
Isidro Sandoval
Manny Santos
Matthew Sheppard
Robert Simonian
Ernest Smith
Alison Sperlongo
Diana Stone
Ken Tobias
Chris Williams

A Change on the Horizon

As Blue Ox embraces expansion, automation and a move into big box retailers, the fourth-generation company holds onto its core mission.

By Mike Harbour

The more things change, so the saying goes, the more they stay the same. For Blue Ox, it's a fitting description.

After all, the nearly 100-year-old company is still owned and led by a member of the Hesse family, and towing products remain the focus. Everything with a Blue Ox label is still built in Pender, Nebraska, too, and almost every component is made in the United States, just like they've been for decades. At the same time, things are definitely changing, according to Mike Hesse, CEO and chairman.

"We like to drive our own destiny, and we feel that we can do that through automation and through producing as many products in-house as possible. That way, we're only reliant on ourselves versus being reliant on a number of other suppliers," says Hesse, who bought Blue Ox in 2017 after returning to the family business three years earlier. "Now with that being said, we've got great suppliers, but the last two years

have proven to be extremely challenging in regards to getting supply in."

Thankfully, Hesse, the fourth generation of his family to run Blue Ox, and his senior leadership team already had a plan in motion to make more of its well-known hitches, tow bars and flat tow brakes.

"Over the course of the last five years, we have invested a lot in capital expenditures for robotics," he says. "We have a great workforce, and we have multigenerational employees at our facilities with that great Midwest work ethic. But Pender, Nebraska, is a town of 1,000 people, so for us to continue to expand, we just don't have the workforce to be able to do that. So, to offset these great employees that we have, we started getting into more robotics."

Robots are now welding, stacking and laser-cutting steel in a fraction of the time their human counterparts could do the work, he says, and they operate constantly.

"What Blue Ox does is build extremely





A manufacturer since 1925, Blue Ox's factory in Pender, Nebraska, is undergoing a multimillion-dollar expansion that will sport 185,000 square feet once completed.



CEO Mike Hesse (right) is the fourth generation of his family to head Blue Ox, alongside the company's chief operating officer, Ronnie Merchant.

high-quality products,” Hesse says. “The equipment that we have and the investments that we’ve made not only allow us to be able to produce more products, but also allow us to make the products easier for our dealership partners to install. It’s a dual opportunity there where we’ve been able to increase our business and actually provide, in my mind, better service for our customers.”

The expansion effort that began in 2017 grew threefold in 2020, according to Hesse, and is by far the most expensive in company history at \$15 million. By the time the dust settles, the company’s manufacturing plant in Pender will almost double in size to 185,000 square feet.

“It’s not the cheapest time in the world to be building, but it is the right thing to do as we continue to expand our footprint, not only in regards to market share on our core products but in regards to expanding our product portfolio as we go into the years to come,” he says. “That’s what the expansion is all about.”

The biggest, and perhaps most critical, part of the expansion is a fully automated paint line that Hesse is anxious to get online. “From the time we placed the order last year, it’s taken a full year to deliver that paint line and then it’s going to take 17 weeks to install,” he says. “This is the same paint booth that the Ford plant has for the undercoating of all the new Broncos. It’s an

unbelievable system. Right now, our paint line is our bottleneck. We run that thing 24-7 and we have 10 employees doing that, so now we’re going to be able to take those workers and apply them into other areas of the plant. Now we’ll have an e-coating system which, again, is going to enhance the quality of our finished products and allow us to get into new products.”

Blue Ox runs both a day and a night shift each weekday in Pender, plus a lighter shift on weekends, even as automation has been implemented in the facility. That’s a reflection of how much the company has grown in the last five years, according to Hesse, amply justifying the multimillion-dollar project.



“Five years ago, the primary welding that had to be done is on the heads of our weight distribution hitches. A human welder can do six of these an hour. We now have rows of machines that can do 60 an hour,” he says. “When you’re limited in regards to your workforce and your numbers and what you can get, automation is your only route. It’s the only way you can ramp up throughputs. You could never do that with welders because we’re talking about welding. It’s such a great craft, but it’s a craft with fewer and fewer individuals getting into it.”

As Blue Ox expands its manufacturing capabilities, it’s also ensuring people know how to use its products.

“We now have five total trainers and we have four trainers that travel around with these Blue Ox trailers and we’ve got another one of those on the way. We’re everywhere. Every time we bring on a new dealership or new dealership group with our products, we go out and we educate. We don’t want to just educate the parts staff or the service staff. We want to educate the sales staff as well in regards to why they’re utilizing Blue Ox and why Blue Ox is so important for their end customer,” Hesse says. “Part of sales is going out, obviously, and getting a customer to want your product, accept your product, and allow it to be utilized, but the other piece is to make sure their team that’s implementing it is educated across the board. We put a ton of time, energy and resources into educating our customers.”

It’s part of the legacy passed on from Hesse’s father, Jay Hesse, who led Blue Ox into the RV industry in the mid-1980s and helmed the company, started by his grandfather, as president from 1987 until he passed in 2014.

“One thing I get from my dad, and we’ll never stop doing this, is we continue to go to every rally that we possibly can. Why? Because we’re trying to educate the customer,” he says. “That’s how my dad built the business. That’s what we’re trying to do now, especially as we develop more and more new products and get into more new industries. We’re trying to create that bond

with that customer and that customer is not just the end user, it’s also the dealer as well and the distributor who’s selling our products to the dealer for the dealer to sell to the end user. So, we’ve got a chain, and we feel that education is paramount.”

Blue Ox continues to roll out new products, too, and Hesse is looking forward to the release of a fifth wheel hitch that’s been testing in the field for more than a year.

“I think we’ve got a big win to get into that space. Again, that’s just one of many new products that’s in the pipeline at Blue Ox,” he says. “I’d like to think that we’re good listeners. We like to listen to our customers and what they’re desiring, and honestly, that is how we’re developing.”

According to Hesse, product rollout is a balancing act. In addition to customer input, management must consider its manufacturing capabilities, both present and future, as well as the potential value add Blue Ox can offer to the market. Sometimes, the company has to say no to some suggestions.

“However, the constraints that we’ve had in the past to making some products are quickly coming to an end as we ramp up our plant expansion. That’s where we’re excited for new products from 2023, 2024 going on,” he says.

“Here’s the view that I take: I don’t live in the here and now. I have great people who are managing that day to day. Where I live is where are we going to be at two



A tight labor force in Pender turned Blue Ox's eye toward robotics to help manufacture its towing products, such as the pictured SwayPro hitch heads.

years from now, where are we going to be at five years from now, where are we going to be at 10 years from now?"

The importance of market share, especially among the crowded weight distribution hitch space, is top of mind for Hesse.

"We started with the SwayPro over a decade ago, and it has very much started to gain traction, but it was that premium level, so over the course of the last couple of years, we launched the TrackPro, which is an extremely high-quality hitch but at more of a medium-tier price.

"We also launched an entry-level hitch on the weight distribution side," he says. "This gave us that good-better-best program, which has allowed us to come in and really start taking market share out there. Those have been huge for the company as new products over the course of the last couple of years and where a lot of our automation has geared us."

Hesse is especially excited about what he is calling a "plethora of new products" set to debut during the next 12 to 18 months that are geared toward the automotive industry. Not only that, but they'll be showing up on the shelves of big-box retailers. That's new ground for Blue Ox, but one he says is possible thanks to the expansion plan.

While at least one industry analyst recently claimed the red-hot demand for RVs is cooling down, Hesse has a more positive view on the subject.

"Everyone started appreciating the experience, and there's so many great places to visit just in this great country alone. So, RVing—what a great way to get there. I think, in general, COVID has heightened and increased that demand for people wanting to go on vacations," he says. "I think the RV industry will remain strong."

Headwinds, of course, still exist, Hesse notes, in the form of high interest rates and record fuel prices, but even if RV production slows slightly, that means hundreds of thousands still are being produced.

"We very much monitor the retail sales. We want to know what the retail sales are, so we know now that the dealerships are getting stocked up, which is great, and there's a lot of RVs on order, but again, at the end of day, our opinion is the industry goes up, the industry does down. That doesn't matter. If we're going out and producing more and capturing more market share, that's how we're going to grow our business."

As Blue Ox nears its 100th birthday, Hesse says it needs to keep adding more dealers to the fold and maintain new product rollouts, but customer retention remains equally vital.

"What I care about more than anything in regards to driving our business is how we're educating that customer to love Blue Ox products and then, long term, become loyal to our products." **RV**



Maria Rosas, who works in assembly, is part of the company's team that CEO Mike Hesse says has a "great Midwest work ethic."

Made in the USA

Like the stars and stripes, American-made products and the RV industry often go hand-in-hand. At a time seeing shifts in supply chain and material sources, many manufacturers are proud to offer homegrown, high-quality products. This month's showcase includes all things made in the USA that help keep the world on the road.

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



SWAY CONTROL HITCH

Progress Mfg., Provo, Utah, presents the Equal-i-zer Sway Control Hitch that has kept families safe on the road for more than 75 years. Manufactured from 100% American-made steel, the hitch has Integrated 4-Point Sway Control resulting in sway control performance, weight distribution, high quality and ease of use. The Equal-i-zer Sway Control Hitch gives one confidence, peace of mind and the best protection for a journey.

equalizerhitch.com/store/hitches/the-original-equalizer-sway-control-hitch



HYDRONIC HEATING SYSTEM

Aqua-Hot, an Airxcel brand, Frederick, Colorado, offers the 125 Hydronic Heating System.

The 125 is a thermal fluid heat and hot water on-demand system designed specifically for Class B vehicles with gasoline and diesel models. The innovation of the 125 lies in its compact, all-in-one design that produces moist, even interior heat and continuous hot water at 110 to 120 F at 0.8 gpm. The 125 is a complete hydronic system for kitchen and bathroom applications in campervans.

aquahot.com



WATER SERVICE PANEL

Anderson Brass Co., Hartsville, South Carolina, offers the MANRV102 RV Water Service Panel. The product features an inlet 4-function, low-lead brass valve used for filling the holding tank, which pressurizes the fixtures for water supply, pumps from the tank during dry camping and helps with winterizing and sanitizing a unit. It also includes a 3-function water heater bypass valve—normal when the unit needs hot water to fixtures. Bypass maintenance on hot water heaters, and third position for sanitizing a freshwater tank.

abcbrv.com



STEERING CONTROL

Safe T Plus, Tallapoosa, Georgia, presents the Safe T Plus Steering Control device designed to help improve driver control by reducing road wandering and improve driving safety on all Class A, B and C motorhomes and tow vehicles. Safe T Plus helps reduce wandering and over-steering caused by the effects of side winds, passing trucks and driver fatigue. Safe T Plus also helps drivers during front-tire blowouts, providing a more enjoyable driving experience and peace of mind.

safe-t-plus.com



SUSPENSION ENHANCEMENT

Torklift, Sumner, Washington, offers the StableLoad Suspension Upgrade. Check out the new StableLoad suspension enhancement made proudly in America by Torklift, with USA-sourced stainless steel. Similar to the current Stainless-Steel StableLoad, the suspension enhancement dramatically improves vehicle handling by "pre-activating" the stabilizing effect designed for rear springs by keeping them actively under-load, the way vehicle engineers designed them to operate. The suspension enhancement can turn on and off. The newest design fits 2017-plus Ford F250 and F350, where previously drilling was needed.

torklift.com

SHORT BED TRUCK HITCH

PullRite, Mishawaka, Indiana, presents the OE Puck Series SuperGlide. PullRite offers the most complete lineup of OE Puck Series hitches for short bed trucks. With six different hitches that attach directly to the OE Pucks, PullRite has a fit for every OE Puck-equipped truck. Because the company's mounting posts aren't fixed and work independently of one another, the user can maneuver the hitch over the puck mounts. Simply install one handle at a time at opposite corners to square it up.

pullrite.com





MULTIPURPOSE ADHESIVE/SEALANT

Sika Corp., Lyndhurst, New Jersey, presents the Sikaflex-221—a multipurpose, one-component polyurethane adhesive/sealant that bonds well to a wide variety of substrates like metals, metal primers and paint coatings, ceramic materials and plastics. It is suitable for making permanent elastic seals. Sikaflex-221 is resistant to aging and can be sanded and painted. It is listed under NSF/ANSI 61 for Drinking Water System Components (aluminum gray, black and white). Sikaflex-221 is noncorrosive, low odor and ideal for all RV repair needs.

usa.sika.com



HEAT TRANSFER FLUID

Century Chemical Corp., Elkhart, Indiana, offers the Century Heat Transfer Fluid—a propylene glycol-based product that is ideal for use in RV floor heating systems, as well as solar, hydronic and HVAC units. The ingredients in this product are “generally recognized as safe” (GRAS) by the U.S. government and offer the following benefits: high boiling point, stability over a wide temperature range, high specific heat and thermal conductivity, extremely low toxicity and noncorrosive. Century Transfer Fluid products are available in many locations throughout the U.S.

centurychemical.com

DROP-IN DEODORIZER

Walex Products, Leland, North Carolina, offers the Porta-Pak. Walex is a pioneer of drop-in deodorizers, and Porta-Pak is the company’s flagship product. Porta-Pak is a rapid-dissolving pod that contains a powerful formula designed to provide weeklong odor control in the heat of summer. Porta-Pak is biodegradable, free from bronopol and formaldehyde, and is packaged in a convenient zipper bag for easy storage. Simply drop one pod in the toilet and add water.

walex.com



HEAVY-DUTY FIFTH WHEEL HITCH

PopUp Towing Products, Chanute, Kansas, presents the ET Air Ride Fifth Wheel Hitch, which is designed to be a heavy-duty fifth wheel hitch for heavy RV haulers. With the air ride technology, PopUp included an auto leveler valve to ensure the hitch is always riding at the proper height. Designed with the RVer in mind, the ET pushes all vertical and horizontal forces caused from chucking in the downward direction providing the smoothest ride possible.

popuphitch.com



ILLUMINATED TOW BAR

Roadmaster, Vancouver, Washington, offers the Nighthawk illuminated tow bar. The Nighthawk is the world’s first illuminated tow bar. In addition to increased safety and visibility, the American-made Nighthawk offers an 8,000-pound tow rating and incorporates internal channels for the included power cord and safety cables. Nonbinding, solid stainless-steel inner arms are the longest ever produced, and are housed inside a sleek, matte-finish powder-coated body with built-in LED lights. Weighing in at just 35 pounds, Nighthawk is available to fit Roadmaster, Blue Ox or Demco baseplates.

roadmasterinc.com



UNIVERSAL STEP RUG

Prest-O-Fit Mfg., Chandler, Arizona, offers the Outrigger Universal Step Rug. The rugs fit most curved and straight 24-inch wide steps. The micro-ribbed texture provides better traction and helps to keep an RV interior clean. Each rug is made of high-quality outdoor carpet and is UV-protected and mold and mildew resistant for all-weather durability. The rug is easy to install with included springs hook-and-loop fastening strips fitting manual and electric steps, and easy to clean—simply hose off and dry. Made in the USA.

prestofit.com



CARGO CARRIER

Let's Go Aero, Colorado Springs, Colorado, offers the GearSpace Cargo Carrier. The GearSpace Enclosed Slide-Out Cargo Carrier is an automotive-grade 34-cubic-foot, 500-pound gross weight hitch carrier with super-sized 68-inch by 33-inch by 40-inch interior dimensions to hold bikes, luggage, pet crates, travel and living furnishings for the RV lifestyle. The GMC award-winning TwinTube platform is RV towable approved, with a slide-out feature platform that provides access for RV slide-outs, Sprinter van doors and rear storage compartments.

letsgoaero.com

BUMPER PLUGS

JR Products, Clarence Center, New York, presents the Bumper Plugs. The plugs fit most 4-inch RV bumpers, with two different styles: with tabs and without tabs. These bumper plugs are constructed of high-impact rubber that won't shrink or fade. The collar is 3 3/4 inch. Tabs fit in pre-drilled bumpers or add holes. Both styles come with a lifetime warranty and are manufactured in the U.S.A. Both styles come two per package. With Tabs Part number: 208-A. Without Tabs Part number: 358-A.

jrproducts.net



CARGO STRAPS & ACCESSORIES

Tie Down Supply/TDS Representatives, North Providence, Rhode Island, offers tie-down supplies for all types of cargo control, including tie-down straps, tow-dolly straps and accessories from 1 inch to 4 inch. Custom straps are TDS' specialty. TDS offers RV and trailer locks and accessories for all applications, including towing vehicles. A complete product line of interior LED replacement bulbs, headlights and taillights for all makes and types of RVs is available with a lifetime warranty on all bulbs. Dealer programs and packages are available, as are P.O.P. and display materials.

tiedownsupply.com



DISH SATELLITE TV

KING, Bloomington, Minnesota, offers the DISH Tailgater Pro. with KING's next-level satellite antenna technology. Bring the entertainment to any outdoor event with the completely reengineered DISH Tailgater Pro. This fully automated, premium HD satellite TV antenna starts scanning and completes the scan quicker than ever. Ideal for RVers, sporting/outdoor enthusiasts, tailgaters, long-haul truckers or anyone with an active mobile lifestyle, the Tailgater Pro allows DISH satellite TV service anywhere in the continental U.S.

kingconnect.com



RV SOFT STARTER

Micro-Air, Allentown, New Jersey, offers the EasyStart 364-X20. Micro-Air's products are wrapped in the American flag and made just 20 minutes from Asbury Park, New Jersey. EasyStart 364 is the gold-standard soft start for RVs, with close to 70,000 in the field and a 2019 RVIA/RVB RISE Award for Innovation and Excellence finalist nod. The company's telephone is supported by two fulltime installation techs and three engineers.

microair.net



DAY/NIGHT ROLLER SHADES

MCD Innovations, an Airxcel brand, McKinney, Texas, presents the Day-Night Roller Shades. MCD Innovations produces roller shades, including the popular American Duo Day-Night Roller Shade. The day shade offers outward visibility and UV protection, while the night shade was designed for privacy with 100% blackout material. Both day and night shades are available in multiple colors and are custom made to fit an RV. American Duo Roller Shades are available in manual, switch electric, remote electronic models or a combination thereof.

mcdinnovations.com

VOLTAGE BOOSTER

Hughes Autoformers, Anaheim, California, presents the Hughes Autoformers Booster. The original, patented voltage booster starts out as an empty metal can and a transformer and is assembled all the way up to finished product: a voltage booster with built-in surge/spike protection and circuit analyzer. Each one is manually built, tested and calibrated before being shipped out to customers. It is not uncommon for these high-quality units to last many, years.

hughesautoformers.com



RV PUMP

Remco Industries, Alexandria, Minnesota, boasts CSA certification for the Remco Rebel pump, which is engineered to withstand rigorous duty cycles. Remco has created low-flow cycling using FloIQ technology. It offers flow rates of 3, 4 and 5.3 gpm and can be customized to match industrial and commercial needs. Using high-quality American-made pump components, this PowerRV Series pump delivers a new level of performance.

remcoindustries.com



BUNK BED SAFETY NET

ObeCo, Elkhart, Indiana, offers the Bunk Bed Safety Net. Keep children safe while on vacation with Organized Obie's Bunk Bed Safety Nets. The industrial-strength nets can handle restless teens and adults. The net mounts to the top and bottom of the bunk and safely tucks away under the mattress when not in use. Easy setup and storage, with a 17-inch by 45-inch mesh net and 31-inch adjustable straps. Includes a reinforced fiberglass rod, seat belt buckles and 2-inch footman loops. Included hardware attaches permanently to top and bottom of the bunk.

organizedobie.com



TOW BARS

NSA RV Products, Iola, Kansas, presents its Tow Bars with components and final assembly done in the U.S. The product can be purchased as a tow bar only, or as a tow bar and tow brake combination. Available in steel or aluminum. Capacity up to 12,000 pounds. Clevis sold separately. Lifetime warranty.

readybrake.com

RAIN PROTECTION

Maxxair, an Airxcel brand, Wichita, Kansas, presents the Fanmate. Fanmate offers rain protection with less than 5% airflow restriction and allows for the use of the underlying fan in inclement weather or when in transit. EZ Clip system offers tool-free installation fitting over the molded, waterproof mounting tabs on a Maxxfan Standard (hardware with clips included for mounting on other fan models). Optional bug screen and choice of three colors (white, black, smoke).

airxcel.com/rv/maxxair



WATER FILTER

Camco Mfg., Greensboro, North Carolina, offers the TastePURE XL RV/Marine Water Filter that provides two-times the filtration and capacity compared to the company's standard water filters. It reduces bad taste, odor, chlorine and sediment in drinking water with a 20-micron sediment filter. Also features GAC (granular activated carbon) filtration in combination with KDF to prevent undesirable bacteria growth when the filter is not in use. Durable in-line, exterior mount filter has a wider body for increased flow. Includes a heavy-duty flexible hose protector. Made in the U.S.

camco.net



ENTRY DOOR SHADES

United Shade, an Airxcel brand, Elkhart, Indiana, offers the Curved Entry Door Shades. The new product from United Shade provides complete privacy and enhanced climate control for more comfortable RV interiors. The state-of-the-art materials and curved design block the view in for incomparable levels of privacy and peace of mind. The sleek design of the Curved Entry Door Shade fits inside RV door window frames for easy installation. Made in Elkhart.

unitedshade.com



HITCH MOUNT STABILIZER

MORryde International, Elkhart, Indiana, presents the X-Brace Hitch Mount Stabilizer. The design provides stability from excessive or unwanted movement for fifth-wheels, Class C, Class A motorhomes and truck campers. The stabilizer needs a 2-inch hitch receiver.

morryde.com

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TAILLIGHT

Creative Products Group, Elkhart, Indiana, presents the LED Hot Line Tail Light-Red, with low-profile stop and turn. The taillight is molded in durable polycarbonate and can be mounted in the horizontal or vertical position—for mounting to side rails of cargo trailers. The taillight has a 100,000-hour rated life and is supplied with three straight wire leads. It is sealed water-resistant, SAE approved, FMVSS-108. Dimensions: 15.25 inch by 0.5 inch by 1.25 inch. Made in the USA.

cpgbrands.com



RV CARE & CLEANING LINE

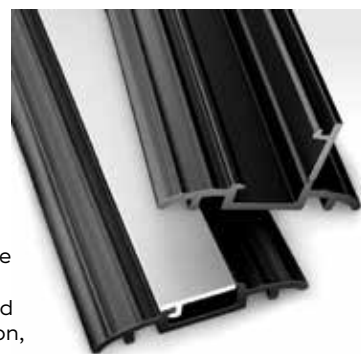
Dicor Products, an Airxcel brand, Elkhart, Indiana, offers its RV Care and Cleaning Line—a complete RV Care Line by Dicor with cleaners and brushes to keep the exterior of coaches and trailers spotless. Includes the exterior wash, black streak remover, bug and tar remover, awning cleaner and mold and mildew remover, as well as three different brush heads and a universal extension rod. The Dicor RV Care Line is safe for use on a variety of surfaces and roof types to remove unsightly stains or grime. New complete plan-o-gram available.

dicorproducts.com

HINGED SCREW CAP COVER

Trim-Lok, Buena Park, California, presents the All-in-One Hinged Screw Cap Cover, designed to replace the traditional two-piece aluminum rail and vinyl cover insert. Made of durable, nonfading, UV-resistant TPO, the attached cover offers easy installation, and the hinged cap design means it is guaranteed to stay in place. Plus, there is no need for pre-drilling. Consumers can use “self-tapping” screws when installing and a grooved channel makes centering screws easy.

trimlok.com



PERFORMANCE FABRICS

Richloom, New York City, New York, presents the Fortress Clear Fabrics. Richloom's Fortress Clear Performance product is woven in High Point, North Carolina, utilizing the latest technology in domestically manufactured yarns. Durable and easy to clean (including bleach cleanable), Richloom's textures are perfect for sofas, chairs and even bedding. Available in a wide range of textures, patterns and colors, Richloom's Fortress Clear line is perfect for an RV and home.

richloom.com



LEVELING SYSTEM

Quadra Mfg., White Pigeon, Michigan, offers the Bigfoot 'Bolt-On' Levelers. The leveling systems are American made, hydraulic leveling systems that require zero welding to install for Class C motorhomes built on the Ford Transit, Ford E-450 and Mercedes Sprinter 3500 chassis. It features one-touch fully automatic leveling, one-touch auto-retract, audible safety alarm, all-up indication, emergency retract feature and more.

bigfootleveler.com



RV TOILET TISSUE

Valterra by Dometic, Mission Hills, California, presents the Softness RV Toilet Tissue—designed and tested to rapidly break down to ensure a clog-free RV waste tank. Softness toilet tissue is also safe for use with marine waste tanks, portable toilets and septic tanks. The unscented two-ply toilet tissue is available in a single 250-sheet roll, 4-pack 250-sheet/roll, and a 4-pack 500-sheet/double roll. The toilet tissue is made in the USA.

valterra.com



LEVEL & STABILIZING KIT

Stromberg Carlson, Traverse City, Michigan, offers the Level and Stabilizing Kit. Stromberg Carlson has put together a 14-piece starter kit with everything needed to stabilize a single- or double-axle trailer. The Travel Trailer Level & Stabilizing Kit includes one Base Pad Peak, four Base Pads, two Base Pad Levelers, two Wheel Chocks and a handled storage bag to keep everything together. These products provide reliable support, stability and leveling of an RV base. Made in the USA.

strombergcarlson.com

The MANRV102 RV Water Service Panel features an inlet 4 function (4 position) low lead brass valve that is used for filling the holding tank, pressurizing the fixtures when you have a water supply, pump from the tank during dry camping and help you with winterizing and sanitizing your unit. The MANRV102 also includes a 3 function (3 position) low lead brass water heater bypass valve. Normal position when the unit needs hot water to fixtures. Bypass position for maintenance on hot water heater and third position for sanitizing your fresh water tank.

MADE IN THE USA
WWW.ANDERSONBRASS.COM



FOAM GRIP HANDLE/BRUSH

Adjust-A-Brush, Clearwater, Florida, offers the Foam Grip Handle & Brush. Since 1980, Adjust-A-Brush has manufactured handles, brushes and related accessories for RVs. In the company's veteran-owned/operated facility, there's a molding operation as well as handle and brush production. Adjust-A-Brush is the original manufacturer of the Flo-Thru telescopic handle for the RV industry. The FG4848FT H&AAB telescopic handle is made of aircraft-grade anodized aluminum tubing with a 48-inch foam sleeve, a built-in water control valve in the swivel connector that attaches to a garden hose, and the All-About soft wash brush.

adjust-a-brush.com



RV/AUTO WASH AND WAX

Diamond Shield, Rochester, New York, presents the Advanced RV & Auto Wash & Wax, a highly concentrated vehicle wash shampoo designed for use on paint, graphics and Diamond Shields. The scented formula breaks down and lifts dirt and road grime with ease. The company recommends washing a Diamond Shield monthly. Advanced RV & Auto Wax has a blend of advanced polymers that leave the surface slick and protected to allow dirt and bugs to slide off a vehicle. The company recommends waxing a Diamond Shield every three to four months.

diamond-shield.com



TOILET SEAL CAP

Pure Essence, Boerne, Texas, presents the new, patent-pending OUTHOUSE Toilet Seal Cap with Conditioner for use with Dometic 300, 310, 320 toilets. This is a product that lubricates and conditions the seals for the Dometic toilet models, helping to prevent the seal from drying up during RV storing. It prolongs the life of the toilet seal and will keep the valve lubricated for smooth opening and closing, preventing any sticking issues. This conditioner is a proprietary silicone formula that is freeze resistant down to -55 degrees F.

pureessence.life

HEAT BARRIER

Thermo-Tec Automotive, Greenwich, Ohio, presents the Adhesive-Backed Heat Barrier that protects parts and components from radiant heat. It can be used in applications to protect painted surfaces, plastic parts or any component from the damaging effects of radiant heat. It is made up of woven silica with a flexible aluminized finish. The highly reflective surface of the material is capable of withstanding radiant temperatures up to 2,000 F. The adhesive-backed side handles direct and continuous temperatures up to 300 F.

thermotec.com



PERMANENT JACK PAD

RV SnapPad, Fontana, California, offers the new XTRA XL Lux 6-Pack—the latest from RV SnapPad. A permanent jack pad, XTRA XL Lux 6-Pack, upgrades a fifth-wheel with the latest permanent jack pads from SnapPad, made in Indiana, California and South Carolina.

rvsnappad.com

Back in the Game

After a years-long absence from dealership ownership, an industry veteran and his team launch hometown Premier RV.

By Rob Merwin



Brad (far left) and Brandy (inner right) Thompson with their sons Dalton (inner left) and Payton (far left) in front of the new site of Premier RV.

After a hiatus of just a few years, husband-and-wife team Brad and Brandy Thompson are back in the game. Owning and operating a business is nothing new for Brad, who was previously a part owner of an area dealership that was sold a few years ago in his hometown of Blue Grass, Iowa. After buying land in the city in December 2021—and a year-and-a-half of construction delayed by COVID disruptions and challenges—Premier RV launched with a grand opening followed by an open house in early May.

Along for the ride are many of Thompson's industry veteran former team members, including vice president Jason Rettler, whose 30 years of experience was tapped to assist in facility planning and building a staff based on "culture first."

"We've had fun putting staff in place and building our culture," Thompson says. "Everybody knew the 'why' when it came to doing something and how one department affects another. It brings the team together and it really shows when a customer walks through the door and they see how we all work together for them—the customer is our 'why.' We're very fortunate to work with some of the best people."

Premier RV began putting together its crew early on, slowly establishing its management team as facility construction experienced setbacks. "We worked out of our house, interviewed people and began to bring management on," he says.

Thompson eventually had his core of 15 people working out of



an apartment, while the sales crew operated from trailers during the winter months. Today, the dealership employs 30 people, all of whom receive benefits that include full medical and a 401(k) with company match.

“We take a lot of pride in being able to say that we have more than 360 years of combined RV industry experience,” Thompson says, “which not only includes our management team of 10, but also our technicians. From a new dealership standpoint, it’s much easier when you have people with that kind of experience.”

“We really empower our managers to lead, and there’s a lot of transparency with our business financials so that there’s true and serious buy-in throughout all departments. When an employee gets dialed in, the profits will come—team first, and everything else will follow.”

Up & Running

Construction was completed in March, which was made possible by partnering with a local bank for financing and a business plan based on previous experience. The new 25,000-square-foot facility sits on a 9-acre facility—with nearly 5 acres available for expansion—and houses a state-of-the-art 53-foot paint booth and 14 service bays. Total cost was more than \$4 million.

“In addition to being a great-looking building, we also wanted its design to be very efficient,” Thompson says. “When someone walks through the front door, it has a very open and modern feeling, and our showroom, parts store and service desk are visible within 2 feet of entering. It’s a very customer-friendly layout and large enough to feature more than 20 units for in-house winter shows. We kept the design simple and inviting, based on ‘what our customers want and deserve,’ which is our slogan.”

Starting a dealership without any former experience in the

business would be a tall task, Thompson says, but even for industry veterans, one can’t predict the unpredictable.

“Jason and I have talked about this often. There are a lot of things you can pre-plan for, but there are always challenges, too, that are encountered. I’ve looked at probably seven different potential sites for the dealership and many hours only to find out they wouldn’t work for different reasons, including zoning concerns. COVID, people getting sick and labor force issues have been out of our control—the construction delays, too. You just have to have faith that God has a plan for you and that everything’s going to work out.”

“The decisions that we’ve made throughout the entire process, staffing and procedures are all based on what’s best for the customer.”

Building Inventory

Premier RV presently has 160 units, which range from KZ, Venture, Keystone, Ember and Dutchmen. The dealership’s game plan is to sell between 350 to 500 RVs for its first year. While there have been supply chain challenges, Thompson says previous manufacturer relationships have helped stock the lot.

Due to the supply chain issues and scarcity of RV inventories, Thompson and his team began stocking units in August of last year. However, inventory access appears to have made improvements, he says, noting that within the past few months inventory levels have improved to the point that they are close to what they were five years ago.

“What’s been really eye-opening for me are the different price segments over the past four or five years, which have changed and evolved. For the used market, many that we sell are sold within a day or two, largely because there aren’t many units for sale out there, but also because the newer segment of an entry-line coach, for



example, is 40% to 50% higher in price than what it was before. I believe the used market will continue to be strong into the future.

"We're right where we want to be in inventory going into the season. Our manufacturer partners knew the type of dealership we've run in the past as a customer-focused and service-based business, which helped picking up new and ongoing lines—we're happy to say we're a full-line venture in Keystone. And we just recently added Dutchmen and Ember to complete our line-up. We want to cover all bases and have something for each customer demographic."

Manufacturer warranties and value-add services were litmus tests for Premier RV partnering with them. "Those are big, important keys—we didn't want to commit to a line without knowing that they're fully committed on parts and service. We were very excited to have KZ and Keystone because we know what they offer on the backside of things. It's critical that we make our customers happy when there's an issue with their RV."

A Focus on Service

As the RV industry has experienced record-busting sales in recent years, all those units still must be serviced, which is an area that Premier RV chooses to intently focus on.

"We've already had requests for larger service and repair estimates come our way," Thompson says. "Just like everyone else, we try to find the balance between servicing our customers and offering great products. We're very excited about our staff of six technicians, including a body tech."

Two of Premier RV's techs are master-certified and another two are close to obtaining their certifications. "We have a great mentoring group so that as we grow, we can bring new technicians in and spend time to train them properly," he says.

As dealerships vie and compete for new service and repair talent during an industry-wide technician shortage, Thompson and his team take the long view and intend to "grow their own" techs with an eye for adding to the team—not with just a job, but a career.

"Hiring a certified tech in today's market is very difficult. But we've had success in the past by developing a technician career chart—or tiers—so that an entry-level tech starts off in our prep department and, as they become more seasoned and their skill sets increase, we 'mentor them up' with a senior technician. Not only do we want them to get certified, but master-certified, within a five-year span."

Additional training is received through online resources for certifications as well as training for techs to remain master-certified, either via in-house or with a vendor.

Throughout the training and mentoring process, Premier RV lays out a basis of compensation that can "make for a very exciting career with us," Thompson says, noting that obtaining technicians has "become more competitive than ever" in the last five years.

As a new dealership, he estimates that half of its service is internal and warranty work, while the remainder is external with large repair tickets. "If someone has an issue, our goal right now is to have them scheduled for an appointment within two weeks. We'll diagnose the unit, order parts and our service team will update the customer twice a week."

Parts & Retail

The 5,500-square-foot parts and retail department is stocked largely with "must-have" parts for most common repairs, more so than accessories at this point, and numbers approximately \$150,000 in inventory.

"One of the surprises for me getting back into the industry is



the customer demand for solar—not just one panel, but numerous panels—that allow them to be totally remote and not at a campground or site. It has really taken RVing into a whole new direction, and it’s definitely a trend that we’re seeing throughout all customer demographics,” says Thompson, adding that trailers 25 feet and smaller, particularly from Ember, are popular with off-the-grid campers, and now he’s seeing the same with fifth wheelers.

To stock inventory, he has had a relationship with NTP-STAG for numerous years that now continues with Premier RV. “They were instrumental in setting up the retail store for shelving and merchandising—they provided guidance throughout the entire process. They’re phenomenal.”

What’s Next?

“We ready to go for the season,” says Thompson, noting that leveraging social media throughout the construction process helped get the word out about its opening. “Facebook, in particular, helped build our clientele.”

While consolidation is an industry trend, he says independent dealerships are an important and vital part of the industry’s fabric. “There’s still a place for a dealership like Premier RV that’s locally owned and managed. Customers can come in and recognize faces—we don’t want turnover here. More than two-thirds of our facility is dedicated to service and there’s a reason for that, because we want to keep the customer happy and do things that hopefully some of the chains can’t.”

Where does Thompson see Premier RV five years from now?

“We’ve designed a very good-sized facility on land that we can grow into—we want to be much larger. If we do things right, and we’re able to service the customer with our management style and focus on our culture, then we’re right where we want to be.” **RV2**



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Experienced employees have value that far outweighs any downside.



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.

How many of us have an old refrigerator in the garage? The one I'm thinking of is 54 years old. And the shiny one inside the house has been replaced at least three, maybe four, times in the same period. They just don't build 'em like they used to... It's a phrase that everyone knows and accepts to some degree. When it comes to long-term employees in your business there can be big payoffs in having a stable, long-term workforce.

Cultural Stabilization

In an organization that is thriving, having a cadre of time-tested workers keeps a lot of routine tasks on an even and dependable path. Notwithstanding the "7 deadly words" of an organization—"we never did it that way before"—it is easy to understand that having folks working with you who know the routine adds stability to your culture.

Here are three reasons why:

1. A stable workforce creates a form of corporate inertia. That is shown in the company's daily, weekly and monthly routines. And these aren't regularly revisited. They just happen seemingly in automatic and effortless consistency.
2. Employees, having invested significant time in your business willingly, almost automatically enforce conformity to the culture. An old Japanese proverb says "the nail that's sticking

up gets hammered down." Your long-term employees are likely to call out nonconforming performance on the part of a new hire long before you or a manager even take notice.

3. Institutional memory is brought to bear. I personally love this one. There is high value to having someone who has lived through the fires we typically fight in business and who knows what was done in the past to extinguish them. It is valuable to go to an office manager or a tech who remembers what worked in the past.

Support Accountability

In the times I've been asked to serve on boards, one of the items I ask for is a "digest of decisions." It's a list of prior questions that have been raised and the decisions leading to the answers. The digest is particularly useful in the neighborhood or homeowners association (HOA) board, which turn over regularly. New members come in ready to change the world, but all too often, the issues they raise have been duly considered by a prior board. Sometimes that same decision is reached several times by subsequent boards. The point is: a long-term employee can fulfill the role of keeping that corporate memory. As I mentioned above, it's helpful to be able to tap into the collective memory of long-term employees to recall what has worked in the past.



Long-term employees may come with a higher payroll, but they save companies the cost of hiring and training new hires.

While we're on this topic, here's something to consider. The group of long-term employees, particularly if they are in senior management, can provide the function of a de facto board member. They give the dealer an opportunity to consult with those who have a demonstrated stake in the success of the business.

This is a good point to bring up another of my favorite topics—"axioms" (a statement accepted as true as the basis for argument or inference, according to Merriam-Webster). A long-term employee can help to inculcate items that are axiomatic into the company's culture. There are always a group of problems that have been resolved on prior occasions that someone still wants to prosecute. Axioms help to solve that problem, and long-term employees, with their corporate memory, can usually cite what those axioms are. They keep the sayings and aphorisms that make up the corporate culture.

Not Without a Cost

It is not without a cost that you build a team with depth. Using a sports metaphor: the deeper your bench, the higher the payroll. But it may not be so much when you consider the cost of turnover.

A long-term employee saves vast sums in the hiring and training associated with new hires. According to Employee Benefit News, the cost of replacing an employee averages 33% of the annual compensation. So, an employee who earns \$60,000/year costs about \$20,000 to replace. The "long-termers" may be more expensive but are well worth it.

Added Cohesion

Another point that's possible, although not likely to occur without grooming, is the cohesion that develops in a workforce that is well led. If you and the leadership team take on the role of setting the tone and expectations of the culture, it can pay dividends in your long-term employees. They become the first responders in holding the culture together.

You may recall from high school chemistry that cohesion is the attraction of similar molecules. It works in organizations, too. It won't happen without taking the time and care to grow it, but when your employees have a clear understanding of the "way things are done" in your company, the employees work together to maintain that consistency and the result is cohesiveness.

Leadership Development

Don't ignore the role of long-termers in leadership. These are folks who have stood the test of time and lived through all of the whims and changes you've made over the years in the name of improving the operation. They've stuck with it. They've paid their dues to have a voice in the future success of the company. It's likely many of them have grown into the leaders in the company regardless of title. It may not say "manager" behind their name, but they are, in fact, leaders. And that can be for good or for bad.

On that point, it pays to make sure the ones you keep are the ones you need. Longevity in and of itself is not guaranteed as an asset. If you've made the right investment in your people in training and development, you are likely in great shape. If you ignore them and leave their development to chance, you deserve what you get.

One last consideration: long-term employees are a core of proven "doers." These are not people who simply show up. For them to achieve longevity, they must have performed satisfactorily along the way. If that's not true, you have another issue. Given that they have proven themselves up to the assigned tasks means a lot.

Your long-term employees are likely to call out nonconforming performance on the part of a new hire long before you or a manager even take notice.

‘The Vibration in my Feet’

My friend Nate works in the mission field with an outfit that flies into the jungle in turboprop aircraft. He tells me a Pratt and Whitney engine costs around half a million dollars. Also, the routine overhaul of one of those engines is about a quarter of a million. And they are routinely swapped out for overhaul as the hours accumulate. That’s a lot of money in any organization but particularly so in a nonprofit. Having just mounted a newly overhauled engine, he noticed a “shiver” at around 67% throttle. The mentioned site is halfway around the world and ship-

ping something the size of an engine is a mammoth undertaking.

Not able to identify the issue with the staff on-site, the overhaul facility sent a team of techs and, likely, useful parts halfway around the world to fix it. You might imagine, knowing how we repair RVs, that it was difficult to duplicate and isolate the problem. The decision, for the sake of the safety of pilots and passengers, was made to ship the complete engine back stateside to the overhaul facility. On its arrival, they swarmed over the engine trying to determine the issue. Their tech with the longest tenure voiced the obser-

vation, “I can feel the vibration in my feet through the concrete.”

Independent of all the meters, sensors and test equipment, the isolating observation came from the soles of the feet of someone who had vast experience with that type of engine. As a result, the problem was isolated to a specific support bearing and the issue was resolved.

That’s my case in point: Having an employee with the depth of experience to recognize, remember and resolve a seemingly new challenge is something you don’t need to explain to someone who has lived through it. **RV**



Having long-time employees with depth of knowledge are valuable assets for any company.



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SUPPLY CHAIN UPDATE

Citi Research strategists reported in early June:

"Bottom line, we find that supply chain pressures have proved to be more persistent, and apparently deep rooted, than we had expected even a few months ago. And the Russia-Ukraine conflict seems to be further amplifying the stresses. Given these realities, any hopes of near-term improvement in supply chain conditions have been shattered. The challenges in the months ahead look to be as acute as at any time over the past two years."

"The beauty and charm of the wilderness are his for the asking, for the edges of the wilderness lie close beside the beaten roads of the present travel."

– Theodore Roosevelt

Heard Online

@NationalMallNPS

Thank you to all of the amazing volunteers taking part in our wall washing program. From March to November, 30 groups numbering more than 400 people #volunteer their time to carefully scrub & rinse the Veterans Memorial on the National Mall. #WashingtonDC



\$140B

Overall annual economic impact of the RV industry to the U.S. economy

Source: RV Industry Association

680,000

Jobs supported by the RV industry

Source: RV Industry Association

\$4.624

Average U.S. gasoline price as of 5/30/22

(up 1.597 from the same day a year prior)

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration

KOA's Top Camping Picks



Earlier this year, KOA released a list of top camping sites, including these 5 spots:

- 1. Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina**
- 2. Buena Vista, Colorado**
- 3. Blue Ridge Mountains, Georgia and North Carolina**
- 4. Phoenix, Arizona**
- 5. Washington, D.C.**

What's your favorite camping spot?

Emails us at: jdking@cahabamedia.com.

Send Us Your Pics!

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