

June 2022

# RV PRO

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 **Cenla RV CENTER**

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### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- Palomino: All Decked Out
- Go Power! Powered Up
- Newmar: 'Simply the Best'
- Dealer Trends: Now What?



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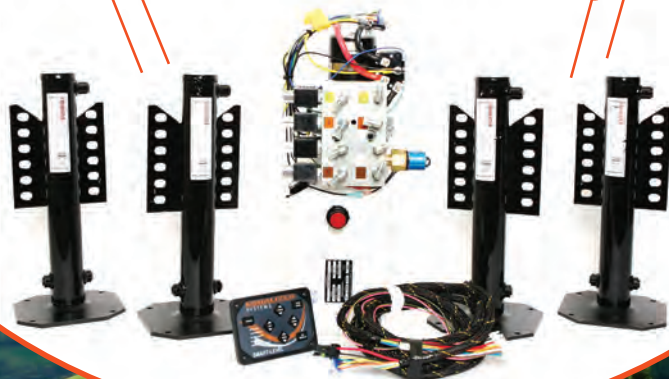






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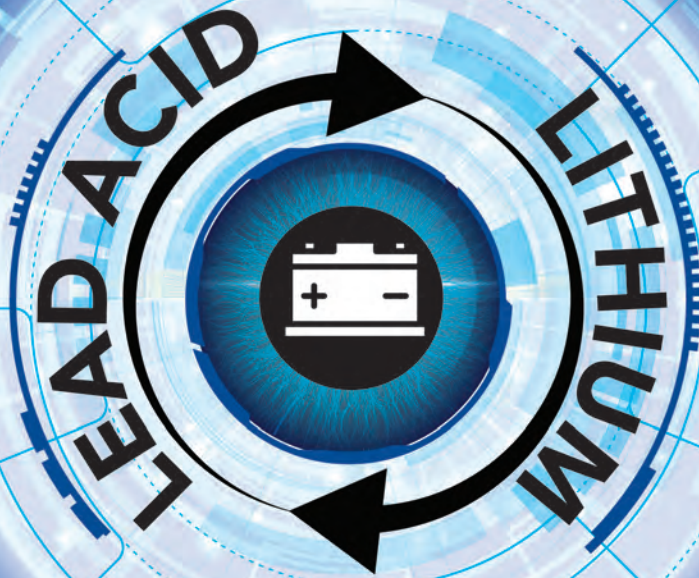
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RV AFTERMARKET

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**ABOUT THE COVER:**  
Cenla RV Center owner Justin Hicks (left) and General Manager Shannon Lear are pictured in front of the dealership. Thanks to the dealership's strong focus on service, it has been able to significantly grow its RV sales operation in recent years. (Photo by Elliott Racca)

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# Heading for New Horizons



**Jordan Benschop**  
MANAGING EDITOR

*RV PRO* is hitting the road.

If you haven't heard the big news, your trusted source for all-things RV has a new home.

Alongside sister publication *THE SHOP*, we are saying *adieu* to National Business Media – the company that has published each since 2005 and 1998, respectively.

Both brands were acquired by Cahaba Media Group this month, a privately owned company based in Birmingham, Ala., with a growing lineup of B2B publications serving multiple markets.

As part of our new adventure, *RVP* is bidding a warm farewell to former Editor-in-Chief **Brad Worrell**, who shares his parting thoughts below. The editorial team, including **Tony Kindelspire** as associate editor and myself as managing editor, is welcoming **Jennifer King** as our new head. King is formerly the editor of Cahaba's Pumps & Systems brand, who will also head *THE SHOP*'s edit staff.

Cahaba's **Greg Meineke** will lead the brands' sales staff, including *RVP*'s **Chris Cieto** as associate publisher and **Rebecca Tittel** as account executive.

So, what does this mean for *RVP* readers? Expect the same great taste with a (slightly) new look. Our magazine, daily newsletter and website will continue to be your go-to for industry scoops and top-notch stories – with opportunities for “bigger and better” looming in the future.



**Bradley Worrell**  
EDITOR

## Goodbye and All My Best

This will be my last issue as editor-in-chief of *RV PRO*.

It's a bit bittersweet, but mostly I'm extremely grateful for the 18 years I got to be a part of this amazing industry. I've made friends that will last a lifetime and I've had the honor to meet and work with some absolutely amazing people.

Honestly, I'm a bit reluctant to call out individual names because there just isn't space to list everyone who I would like to recognize, but I'm still going to try. So, here I go:

Many thanks to industry consultants **Chuck Marzahn**, **Lee Berryman**, **Jan Kelly** and **Don Reed** for sharing your expertise and insights over the years. Many thanks also to those always willing to take a phone call on industry matters, including **Scott Stropkia** with Statistical Surveys, **Bill Baker** with the RV Industry Association, dealer **Mick Ferkey** with Greenway RV, **John Hawkins** with supplier BAL, **Scott Later** with supplier PullRite and THOR President **Bob Martin**, who despite being the chief executive of the largest RV manufacturer in the world, is one of the nicest, down-to-earth guys you'll ever meet.

Many thanks also to all of the *RV PRO* teams I've worked with over the years, including my most recent one, comprised of Publisher **Chris Cieto**, Managing Editor **Jordan Benschop**, Digital Content Editor **Tony Kindelspire** and Account Rep **Rebecca Tittel**, plus regular contributors **Steve Bibler** and **Mike Harbour** – two of the finest writers it's been my pleasure to know.

Also, I would be remiss not to thank *RV PRO* longtime owner **Bob Wieber** for sticking with the magazine during some very lean, trying times, and a very special thank you to **Mike Wieber**, the first publisher of *RV PRO*, for taking a chance on me all those years ago to head up the magazine's editorial coverage. It is not forgotten and sincerely appreciated.

Finally, thank you to all of *RV PRO*'s faithful readers. As always, thanks for reading. **RVP**

# RVPRO

#### PUBLISHER:

**Chris Cieto**  
(800) 669-0424, ext. 253  
ccieto@nbm.com

#### EDITOR:

**Bradley Worrell**  
(800) 669-0424, ext. 299  
brad@nbm.com

#### MANAGING EDITOR:

**Jordan Benschop**  
800-669-0424, ext. 284  
jbenschop@nbm.com

#### DIGITAL CONTENT EDITOR:

**Tony Kindelspire**  
800-669-0424 ext. 213  
tkindelspire@nbm.com

#### MULTI-MEDIA CONTENT MANAGER:

**Drew Cooper**  
(800) 669-0424, ext. 230  
dcooper@nbm.com

#### MEDIA CONSULTANT:

**Rebecca Tittel**  
(800) 669-0424, ext. 256  
rtittel@nbm.com

#### SALES SUPPORT:

**Brooke Anderson**  
(800) 669-0424, ext. 225  
banderson@nbm.com

#### ART DIRECTOR:

**Linda Cranston**

#### ADVERTISING DESIGN/PRODUCTION:

**Iveth Gomez**

#### PRINT & ONLINE PRODUCTION

**COORDINATOR:**  
**Alison McDonald**

#### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

Darian Armer, Lisa Dicksteen, Mike Harbour, Dani Messick, K. Schipper, Linda Cahan and Tom Morin

**SENIOR ADVISOR:** Mike Wieber

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Dave Pomeroy

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#### VICE PRESIDENT, CONTENT

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**AUDIENCE & EVENTS**

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#### DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

Wolf Butler

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Robert H. Wieber Jr.

10170 Church Ranch Way, Ste 400,  
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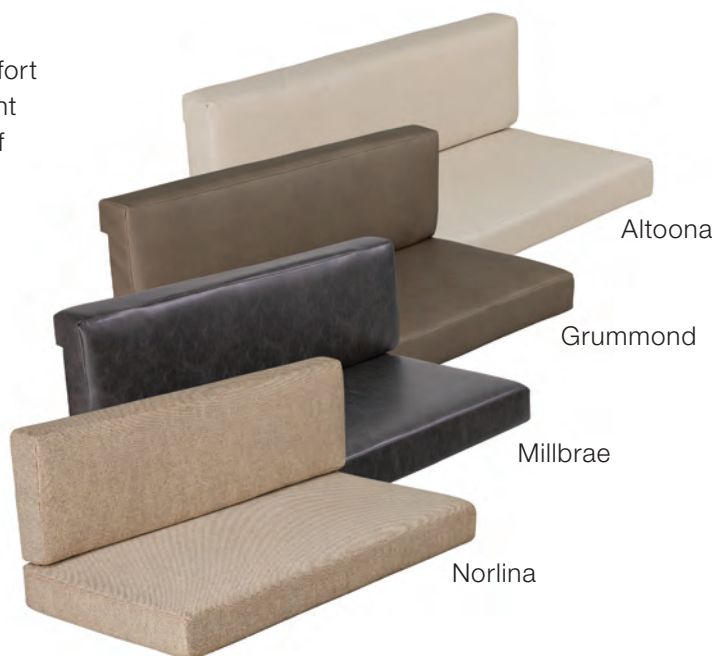
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# Cenla RV Known for Service

By Mike Harbour

The dealership's solid reputation for parts and service has served as a springboard for greater RV sales and overall growth.



Cenla RV General Manager Shannon Lear (left) and owner Justin Hicks are pictured in front of the dealership's store in Alexandria, La. The dealership's long, strong reputation in parts and sales has helped grow its overall operations, including RV sales, in recent years.



PHOTOS BY ELLIOTT RACCA

After outgrowing its previous location, Cenla RV now operates out of a 16,000-square-foot facility located on a good-sized property to retail RVs. The dealership has gone from selling about 150 RVs a few years back to 400 to 500 units a year now.

Since the late 1950s, the slogan on Louisiana's license plates has been "Sportsmen's Paradise" – and Cenla RV Center has been a fixture in the Pelican State for nearly as long.

Business at the Alexandria, La., towables dealership really picked up in the last six years, following the promotion of veteran employee Shannon Lear to general manager and with new owner Justin Hicks.

"With his vision, we built a brand-new store and just grew our inventory and our production tremendously," says Lear, who joined Cenla 16 years ago as a technician. "We went from selling 150 units a year under the previous owner to 400 to 500 units a year and went from three service bays to six service bays, plus four PDI bays."

It's his belief the store's success has been based on its sales, service and parts teams working hand in hand.

"We preach here service after the sale means everything. Anybody can sell you a trailer, but the service department always sells you your second trailer – because if you're not happy with the service, you're never coming back. We were always a real big over-the-counter retail store and the only one in town for many years," he says. "We still are to this day. It's amazing."

"We had a pretty good-sized parts store. We're the biggest parts store in town and always have been, but once we moved into our new building, which has been about three-and-a-half years now, we tripled the size of our parts department," he adds.

Cenla previously operated from a 2,000-square-foot structure set on 6 acres near I-49 and U.S. Route 71. By contrast, the new facility – built just a stone's throw away – measures 16,000 square feet.





The sales and parts departments share a large space, with room to display three units by the front doors. Behind them sits a quartet of 16-foot-long gondolas with endcaps; along with additional shelving on a back wall, the combination makes for the largest parts store north of I-10, the east-west interstate that runs through southern Louisiana, according to Lear.

The old building, or rather its foundation, lives on as the base of a demonstration pad complete with a roof and open sides, he says. Electrical connections were placed throughout, so air conditioners and lights can be kept running during central Louisiana's hot and humid summers.

In addition to those improvements, Cenla also stepped up its advertising efforts. Lear even began appearing in Facebook videos featuring new units when they hit the lot. He says he believes the videos help boost sales because viewers see, not just how good the units look, but how they make camping more enjoyable.

### Service is Cenla's Lifeblood

Still, it wasn't too long ago that Cenla, which today employs 24, didn't move nearly as many RVs.

"Service was our lifeblood. That's the only way we survived. We didn't have enough sales to keep the doors open," Lear says, noting Cenla's near perfect online reviews. "We're not perfect, but I guarantee you we care – that's the difference. When customers leave here, we tell them they're family, because they are. You're selling them something where they can make their memories with their families for a lifetime. If you do a crappy job of that, they're never coming back and they're going to tell everybody they know. We've



**Receptionist Donna Kerry is always ready with a smile and offers of assistance when customers enter the dealership. Lear says making sure all customers are greeted upon entering the dealership is a top priority.**



**Parts Manager Kenneth Nettles is pictured with parts reps Brittany Lear (center) and Madison Smith in the dealership's expansive parts department, which the dealership says is the largest parts showroom in southern Louisiana.**





**Cenla RV Center has six service bays to work on customers' RVs, plus four PDI bays.**



**Service Manager Stewart (left) and Service Advisor Eric Marler stand ready to assist customers in getting work done on their RVs. "We've always been a big service-oriented business, and as we've grown, we haven't forgotten about that," GM Shannon Lear says of the dealership's focus on RV service.**



**Sales rep Melinda Bordelon guides customers into a travel trailer. The dealership is a longtime Jayco retailer primarily focusing on towables, but also carrying units from Forest River's Rockwood and Prime Time lines, plus Keystone's Alpine, Avalanche and Arcadia models.**

always been a big service-oriented business, and as we've grown, we haven't forgotten about that. It's been a struggle because we've grown faster than we can find people and train them."

One thing Lear says he's learned is available – and hire-able – RV technicians simply don't exist.

"You're not going to go out there and find somebody with 10 or 20 years of experience. If they're looking for a job, you don't want them," he says. "That's the truth, because there's too much business in this industry for somebody that has experience to be looking for a job."

With that in mind, management looks for high school graduates or college students with some mechanical background. Once on-board, the new hires are trained by shop veterans, as well as through RVIA courses. Certification is the goal and, if all goes according to plan, that's followed by a long career at Cenla.

"When my parts and service director, Stewart Bodden, hires somebody, he tells them, 'Our GM was you 20 years ago. Through hard work and determination, look where he is today,'" Lear says.

He especially enjoys tackling a common interviewee question.

"We get asked all the time: 'Is there room for advancement?'" he says. "We wholeheartedly believe in promoting from within, because I've been at other dealerships and I've worked in corporate America. I worked at a big Ford dealership straight out of high school and thought I wanted to be a Ford technician. That was my dream and I learned real quick they didn't even know who I was or if I existed. A lot of corporate America dealerships these days don't even know their employees' names, whereas I know every one of mine."



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**Bodden, Hicks, Lear and Nettles have decades of experience in the RV industry between the four of them.**

*“Anybody can sell you a trailer, but the service department always sells you your second trailer – because if you’re not happy with the service, you’re never coming back.”*

**– General Manager Shannon Lear**



**F&I Manager Keith LaGrange assists Cenla RV customers with all of their financing and ancillary product coverage needs.**



**Parts rep Madison Smith assists a customer. In addition to the usual fare, such as hitches and cleaning products, the dealership reports selling a lot of K2 Coolers, Blackstone griddles and Firman generators.**

Dealership camaraderie is built via several employee events; a camping trip is held each year as is a fishing tournament. The gatherings reinforce the Cenla family culture, according to Lear. There’s also a 401(K) plan, plus health, dental and vision insurance, as well as paid vacation. As for compensation, Cenla provides a blended pay plan for its techs that consists of a base salary plus flat rate.

“It kind of gives them a little cushion where they’re safe, but it also makes them work hard to get that extra off production. We all know you sometimes get crap jobs. The book’s going to pay you two hours but you know a superman couldn’t do it in two,” Lear says of the plan Hicks created at another dealership before he bought Cenla. “We have all the things the big dealerships offer in a small town.”

### **RV Parts Play an Important Part**

While a staff of four techs, plus a helper, take care of service customers, there are four people on the parts staff. According to Lear, his only real parts competitors are Amazon and Walmart; the nearest big-box RV stores are located south near the Gulf Coast and north in Shreveport.

Perhaps the most important instruction he gives his parts people is simply being courteous – a lost art in Lear’s mind.

“One of my pet peeves is not greeting a customer as soon as they walk in,” he says. “So, one thing we do – and I know other dealerships and businesses don’t – is when somebody walks in our parts department, either I get up, because I can see the whole parts department from my window, and I walk out and say, ‘sir’ or ‘ma’am’, do you need some help?’ or somebody in my parts department goes and greets them immediately and offers to help them with their selection – whatever they may need.”

Accordingly, Cenla has a wide-ranging inventory that’s chosen by Lear and Bodden. In addition to the usual fare, such as hitches, vent fan covers, water and sewer hoses, chemicals and cleaning products, there’s also an area of the store for cold drinks and snacks, as well as a soft drink dispenser.

“We set our own shelves, we put out our own product, and we designed our whole showroom,” Lear says. “We kind of put our heads together and say, ‘Hey, what if we move this over here’ or ‘Let’s try this product and see how it takes.’ Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t.”

Among gear, Cenla does a brisk business with products from Louisiana-based K2 Coolers as well as Blackstone griddles. Satellites, both over the counter and installations, are popular, as are Firman generators.

Each employee responsible for customer walkthroughs upon delivery also describes camping necessities and accessories, Lear says. As a result, insect screens and surge protectors also are quick-turning items.

Once upon a time, Cenla gave new customers a gift bag containing a few essentials – a popular gesture among dealerships large and small, but because many buyers already had some or all of that merchandise, they now receive gift cards. With Cenla’s large inventory, there’s sure to be something for everyone.



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Dealership team members gather in the parts department for a quick photo. Pictured from left to right are: GM Shannon Lear, Parts Manager Kenneth Nettles, Service Manager Stewart Boddien, receptionist Donna Kerry, sales rep Brandon Tyson, parts reps Madison Smith and Brittany Lear, sales rep Dustin Kelone, warranty clerk Sara Manuel, sales rep Steve Walker and Justin Hicks, owner.

### Obtaining Inventory a Challenge

Since Cenla's founding more than a half-century ago, it has been a Jayco dealer, Lear says. However, it also offers Forest River's Rockwood and Prime Time lines, plus Keystone's Alpine, Avalanche and Arcadia models.

"Right now, I've had more inventory than I've had in two years. We're blessed right now. The last two years have been a struggle," says Lear. "We've missed so many sales from not having enough product, not having the right product or the right floorplan."

Once COVID-19 began straining the supply chain and, as a result, inventory, Lear took action.

"I was able to reach out to several dealers and buy some of their product that they were struggling to move, so that helped us at the beginning," he says of the effort that netted about 25 units. "At one point, we sold everything on our lot and we didn't have a single trailer."

Shortly afterward, inventory began showing up, Lear recalls, then Cenla had a big sale and the lot dried up again. Eventually, though, new units arrived once more. The dealership also made a Facebook post asking followers to sell Cenla their RVs. It worked well, but Lear and his sales team were careful to make reasonable offers – not inflated ones that could cost the dealership later.

"We will not do that, because what goes up must come down," he says. "There's nothing worse than stuffing a unit, then the book (value) falling."

As Cenla has grown its sales, expansion has been a constant consideration, he says, and before COVID-19 struck the globe, a second location was being planned. It's on the backburner now, as Lear says it would be more prudent to expand Cenla's service capabilities.

"The only way I can do it is by building another shop and having the personnel to put in it, because our shop is putting out everything they can. We're blessed with good technicians that are great people that you love to be around. They do their job, they don't miss work," he says.

To help deal with demand, Cenla has followed the practice of other dealerships and turns away service requests on units purchased elsewhere, he says. Just five years ago, it wasn't that way and Cenla took all the work its service advisors could handle.

Today, with so many more RV sales, coupled with what Lear says is declining quality control from the manufacturers, there's little choice.

If staffing wasn't an issue, Lear's remedy would already be a reality.

"I've always wanted to have one shop that was strictly warranty and one shop that was strictly retail," he says. "That way, I could start bringing in all those customers that didn't buy from me but want to have their roofs coated or have a satellite dish or solar panels installed." **RV2**





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# The Inspectors

By Darian Armer

*Husband-and-wife team Lisa and Jason Carletti find their career calling as NRVIA master-certified RV inspectors.*

**I**t was a fateful dinner in 2016 with some friends who were full-time RVers that forever changed Lisa and Jason Carletti's lives and career paths, although they didn't recognize it at the time.

The dinner with RVer friends went so well that it prompted the Carlettis to try out full-time RVing for themselves, to see if they were cut for it.

"We wanted to test the waters and see if we were going to kill each other in the RV," Lisa Carletti laughs. Jason Carletti's parents had owned a camper and Lisa Carletti had tent camped as a child, but neither one of them had much experience with RVing. Still, they took the plunge and bought a Class A motorhome to live in.

At the time, Lisa Carletti had been in the health care field for 22 years and had spent the past five years as a traveling certified surgical technologist; her husband was working an AV tech job.

"I was taking three-month contracts at hospitals," Lisa Carletti says. "Jason quit his AV tech job and wanted to figure out something to do while working on the road. It happened to be an ad from the NRVIA (National RV Inspection Association) that I saw on Facebook. Jason looked into it and decided to try it."

So, Lisa Carletti took a technologist contract in Texas so her husband could attend the NRVIA certification course from the National RV Training Academy (NRVTA), which is based in Athens, Texas. He graduated on Aug. 3, 2017.

Meanwhile, Lisa Carletti's next contract took them back to Florida.

"I started the contract the week that Hurricane Irma hit the Florida Keys. Jason got a call from the association (NRVIA) and (they) asked Jason, 'How would you like to do a FEMA project down in the Florida Keys?' He jumped in with both feet. He worked down there for basically two-and-a-half months," Lisa Carletti says.

She worked at her hospital job Mondays through Thursdays, driving down Thursday evenings to help her husband on Fridays through Sundays.

The work appealed to Lisa Carletti – prompting her to become a certified RV inspector and RV Technical Institute registered technician in January 2018, even as she continued to work in the health care field.



**Lisa and Jason Carletti, owners of My RV Inspection.com in Tampa, Fla., are the first-ever husband-and-wife team of inspectors and Lisa Carletti is the first woman to become a master-certified inspector, according to the National RV Inspection Association.**





Lisa Carletti surveys a roof, looking for any signs of possible damage or leaks. The couple have performed more than 700 inspections since they began their business.

“I was now an inspector, too, so I did inspections while he performed repairs,” Lisa Carletti says. “We came back to the Tampa area at the beginning of 2019, when Jason was in a bad rear-end accident that halted all the repair work he was doing. We’ve solely been doing inspections ever since.”

Around that same time, Lisa Carletti says she determined working in the health care field was taking its toll on her, prompting her decision to do RV inspections full-time, too.

“I was burnt out and looking for something else to do, which is why I became a traveling technologist. It’s easier to take health care in small bites,” she says. “I’m thankful with everything going on in the world today that I’m not in it anymore. I’m so happy to be out of health care.”

As the couple focused entirely on the RV inspection business, they went on to achieve master-certified status in July 2021. According to NRVIA, the couple is the first-ever husband-and-wife team of inspectors and Lisa Carletti is the first female to become a master-certified inspector.

RV inspectors in the Tampa area since 2017 and the owners of My RV Inspection.com, the couple has performed more than 700 RV inspections to date.

### Becoming RV Masters

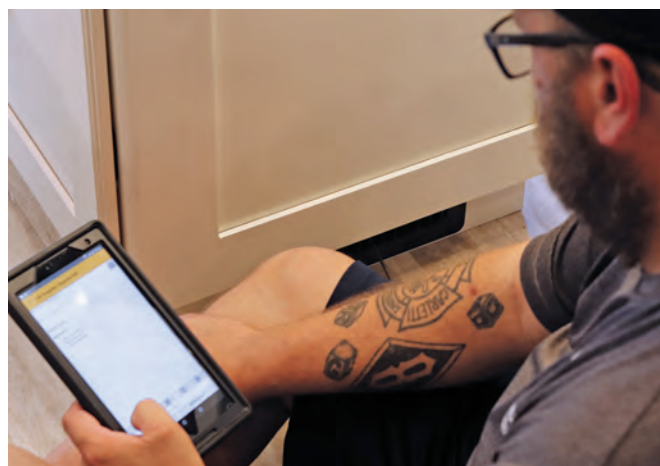
Becoming a master RV technician isn’t simply performing lots of inspections, although that is a requirement, according to the Carlettis.

“You have to prove to NRVIA that you’ve had insurance for at least two years; that you’ve had your business up and running properly for at least two years. You have to have a website and you also have to be a certified or registered technician,” says Jason Carletti. “You have to send the association a set number of inspection reports to be peer reviewed and graded. They give you feedback and determine if the inspection followed the code of ethics.”

Being an NRVIA master-certified RV inspector means that a person has excelled not only in their own inspection business, but also for their work within the RV industry. In order to become



Jason Carletti uses his cell phone to take pictures inside the baggage compartment of a fifth wheel.



Jason Carletti uses the HomeGauge software program on a tablet to log any issues he finds during an RV inspection.





**Jason Carletti examines an electrical box in an RV for any potential issues.**



**Lisa Carletti positions herself under a fifth wheel to begin an inspection. She is pictured holding a tablet equipped with the HomeGauge software she and her husband helped perfect to make it more useful for RV inspectors doing detailed inspections.**

*“There are five large dealerships within 20 minutes of us, so we can usually stay close to home for inspections. We perform third-party, unbiased inspections for customers. Dealers here in central Florida are accommodating for us to perform our inspections.”*

**– Lisa Carletti, co-owner, My RV Inspection.com**

NRVIA master certified, the Carlettis had to meet a specific list of requirements, including:

- Operate an active and insured inspection business for at least two consecutive years.
- Complete 50 verifiable advanced RV inspections. Evaluations performed for warranty or repair verification, life-safety only or for the Federal Emergency Management Agency do not count in that total.
- Possess active credentials as a registered or certified RV technician from a sanctioned training school.
- Obtain at least 10 verifiable reviews from clients with a satisfaction rating of 80 percent or higher. The reviews must be listed on a third-party platform such as Google, Yelp, Facebook Business Page, HomeGauge, etc.
- Inspectors must have either published an article in an industry publication relevant to RV inspections or RV systems training, or presented a similar topic at an industry rally, conference or expo.
- Maintain a professional business website promoting RV inspection services.

In addition to NRVIA master-certified inspectors, Jason and Lisa Carletti are also both certified RV Technical Institute Level One technicians, which they make use of.

“We do our own repairs on our unit. We also just helped both neighbors on either side with some repairs,” Lisa Carletti says.

As part of maintaining Level One certification, the couple are required to earn 24 credit hours of training and education per year.

“You can get hours by watching educational videos, going on factory tours, attending the association convention and presenting,” Lisa Carletti says. “Keeping up to date with everything is really what it’s all about.”

Meanwhile, the couple gives back to the RV industry by teaching other certified RV inspectors in the proper use of HomeGauge, a



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**The Carlettis received their training as RV inspectors from the National RV Training Academy, which is based in Athens, Texas. Training takes place in the distinctive 20,000-square-foot Big Red Schoolhouse.**



### Performing Inspections

Lisa Carletti says many inspectors may travel more than 100 miles to perform an inspection. However, because of the area where they live, Lisa Carletti says the couple usually doesn't have to travel very far.

"There are five large dealerships within 20 minutes of us, so we can usually stay close to home for inspections," she says. "We perform third-party, unbiased inspections for customers. Dealers here in central Florida are accommodating for us to perform our inspections. We hear that in other parts of the country they can be less accommodating, but we haven't had many negative experiences."

Lisa Carletti says she and her husband typically tag team an inspection, with one of them performing the outside inspections and one performing the inside inspection. She says the most common issue discovered during inspections is that the rubber grommet, on the exterior behind the water heater, is not sealed.

"It's supposed to be sealed so carbon monoxide can't get into the coach. Quite often, it's unsealed," she says. "And there is almost always something with the roof. On both brand-new and used units, I'd say 95 percent of the time has issues."

"In brand-new units, sometimes the lap sealant isn't cured or there's gaps in the lap sealant. It's the nature of the beast," she adds. "On used units, if the previous owners haven't maintained them, then the lap sealant usually needs to be reapplied or scraped and redone."

Jason Carletti says the couple also uses a local fluid analysis lab as an extra inspection point, for an additional fee for motorized units. The inspectors can take 3-ounce samples of up to five different fluids, submit them to the local lab and have results ready the next day.

software program used for generating inspection reports, and by offering advice on RV inspection report writing.

"We became the gurus of HomeGauge," Lisa Carletti says. "With NRVIA, we tweaked it and perfected it to make the processes better for all RV inspectors who use it. We also recorded video lessons that are available on our website. We presented at the 2018 inspector conference and for a whole day at the 2019 inspector conference."

The husband-and-wife inspector team – who traded their Class A motorhome for a Highland Ridge Open Range fifth wheel for more living space and storage – primarily live in an RV park in Tampa but have taken their RV on trips to Texas and the Carolinas for training and the occasional family reunion.

As Florida residents, the Carlettis are members of the Florida RV Trade Association, attending monthly meetings and taking exhibit space at the annual Florida RV SuperShow.

"The public has been really receptive to what we had to say. We participate in three shows a year and now we have a second booth. At this last show, there were about 7,000 attendees, and I gave away 900 business cards," Lisa Carletti says.



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The Carlettis are pictured in front of their two booths at the Florida RV SuperShow in Tampa. In addition to their own inspection business, My RV Inspection.com, the couple also own My RV Resource.com, which they describe as being like the Yellow Pages for RV services, including things such as training, inspections, mobile RV repair, RV detailing and more.

“We mostly perform the fluid analysis for units that are a little bit older. If the unit is too new, fluid issues will show up in its break-in period,” he says. “The analysis tells us the different metals in those fluids and can tell us what components in the motor might be wearing. We can see if there are needed concentrations to be added to coolants, if there is a wrong fluid, or if there is watered-down coolant.”

Lisa Carletti says one of the benefits of the HomeGauge software is the ability to create a punch list. She says there are usually more than 100 pages and 100 pictures in an inspection report. That can be overwhelming to a potential buyer, she admits.

“We usually guide our customers to do a CRL (Create Request List). In layman’s terms, we tell them to make a punch list that points out the issues. They can then take that and negotiate with the private seller or dealer,” she says.

To assist customers even more, the couple has been working to create a website, My RV Resource. The online directory boasts more than 6,000 company listings across 15 categories, including RVs for sale and RV-related job postings. The website will offer many resources, as implied in the name, including classified ads, information about where to get repairs and more. (The inspector’s code of ethics states that an inspector is unable to perform repairs on a unit for one year after the inspection, so it won’t be a conflict of interest.)

“As far as training, we’ll leave the formal training to the NRVIA and the NRVTA. What we would like to do is to help mentor people and build a community of those individuals to give them support after training,” Lisa Carletti says. “As an inspector, you not only get training, but you get camaraderie and a family-feeling. We’ve spent two disaster relief efforts living in an airport with peers.”

Jason Carletti says that if anyone is looking for a career, being an RV inspector is a great option.

“I’m thankful to NRVTA for everything they’ve given us,” he says. “It’s a great opportunity to start your own business – to go out there and do what you love.” **RV2**

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## DEALER TRENDS:

## Now What?

By Lisa Dicksteen

"I see 2022 shaping up as a good year. Dealers are getting inventory. There's still lots of interest in camping. Gas prices will make a difference, but only in that people will camp closer to home instead of doing cross-country trips like last year. It's interest rates that are the big potential problem.

— Frank Roberts, owner,  
Long View RV Superstores

*Not yet halfway into the new year as of this writing, some things are better than last year, some still need improvement, and some things are not only different from state to state but even within different parts of the same state. We talked to dealers recently to see how things are going and might yet go this year. Here's what they told us:*

**Frank Roberts, owner**  
Long View RV Superstores  
Windsor Locks, Conn.



"Inventory levels are still not great, but they are better than they have been in the past six to 12 months. Last summer, we had nothing to sell, so now is definitely better. But it's far from ideal.

There is literally no motorized inventory to purchase. We can't get anything that has anything to do with any kind of chipped part. Trailers are coming out much, much better, and that helps a lot, but we need those motorized units. Right now, trailers and fifth wheels are our best sellers, but that's only due to the lack of motorized inventory. If I had motorized units, I would sell every one.


"Aftermarket access is just OK. We have to buy a lot of stuff on Amazon. I prefer to go straight to the suppliers, but we have to buy it where we can get it; we can't sell what we don't have.

"There's a huge push for roof-mounted solar panels, which, thankfully, we can get. And now, even trailers are pre-wired for them, so we just plug 'em in and wave goodbye.

"I wish it was as easy to get staff. We try to hire service techs every day of the week and everyone has some reason they can't do what's required — and that's if they even show up for the scheduled interview. They only want to work part-time, or they don't want to work Saturdays, or they have to leave by 2 p.m. every day.

"I just don't understand it. We're looking everywhere, Indeed, Zip(Recruiter), everything out there, we're on it. And it's not just us. Every industry is having the same issues.





*“Looking forward, I think that while 2022 will continue to be a good year for the RV industry, we will not continue to have the growth we’ve had for the past two years. The demographics are in our favor for a solid year – about the same as 2021.”*

**– Michael Miox, owner/GM, Miox RV McGaugh Outpost**

“All the shows that were cancelled last year are back. So far this year, we’ve attended the Hartford RV Show, the Springfield RV Show, the Rhode Island RV Show and the Mohegan Sun RV Show and traffic and sales were fantastic at all of them – better than two years ago.

“I see 2022 shaping up as a good year. Dealers are getting inventory. There’s still lots of interest in camping. Gas prices will make a difference, but only in that people will camp closer to home instead of doing cross-country trips like last year. It’s interest rates that are the big potential problem.

**Michael Miox, owner/GM**  
Miox RV McGaugh Outpost  
Springdale, Ark.

“Our inventory levels are approaching getting back to normal. There are not as many shortages in the production process and that’s making a difference.

“However, we’re still struggling on the motorized side, with manufacturers still having trouble getting chassis due to the shortage of electronic parts. But, overall, from an inventory standpoint, we’re definitely in better shape today than we were 12 months ago.

“Obtaining parts from manufacturers has also improved for the majority of items. Of course, there are still shortages. In fact, a manufacturer contacted me just this week to say they’re going to start shipping motorized units without propane tanks. Well, we can’t deliver a unit without a propane tank, so if we get any of those units, we’re going to have to source propane tanks somewhere ourselves. I’ve also heard of some manufacturers shipping units without back ladders.

“As for aftermarket parts, things have improved quite a bit. There are still some problems with warranty parts from manufacturers and OEMs, but overall, it’s much better. Among the things we sell most are Wi-Fi extenders – those are really popular – basic supplies and satellites.

This February, we went to the Little Rock RV Show and attendance was way up, so were sales. It was a really good show – probably one of the better shows we’ve ever had in Arkansas. We were

expecting a good show from the traffic standpoint, but the retail sales were much better than we expected.

“Arkansas is a really good towable/travel trailer state. We do sell some motorized units, but the majority of our business is in the towable sector. We carry Forest River and a little Keystone, but our primary products are Grand Design and Jayco.

“In terms of staffing, while we can always use good people, we’ve been fortunate in that we have zero turnover, so we’ve had really good staff for a really long time. I know this is not common. I’ve seen other dealers struggling.

“Looking forward, I think that while 2022 will continue to be a good year for the RV industry, we will not continue to have the growth we’ve had for the past two years. The demographics are in our favor for a solid year – about the same as 2021. People are looking for things they can do with their family without having to take mass transit or stay in hotels. In our world, they get to sleep in their own beds.

“On the other hand, gas prices going up will certainly have an impact on the economy, which will especially impact the entry-level (RVs) due to people buying in that price point having tighter monthly budgets.”


**Mike Boe, general manager**  
Adventure RV Center  
West Fargo, N.D.

“We’re all towables – fifth wheels, and travel trailers – nothing motorized, and while we’re still about 10 percent below pre-pandemic inventory levels, it’s getting better every day.

“We’re getting consistent deliveries from our manufacturers so, while it’s not 100 percent fixed, it is so much better. I haven’t had a lot of complaints from our parts or service depts about not having what they need, and our spring orders have all come in.

“I’ve talked to all our manufacturers in the past 30 to 45 days, just tweaking things here and there, and they all have plenty of capacity. They’re trying to right-size their businesses, see what everyone needs, and try to meet those needs. And they’re doing it much better than they were able to before; we’ve even had to slow down delivery on some things we were getting too many of.





*“Actually, my crystal ball is cloudy for the first of May. By now we usually know more. I think we’ll be down from last year. Not majorly, just at about average for a pre-pandemic year.”*

**– Mike Boe,  
general manager,  
Adventure RV Center**

*“I feel like this year we’ll be down in terms of number of campers sold, but thus far we’re well above last year in profit margins. We’ve been able to hold gross on most units – especially used ones, and we’ll continue to do so until the market turns.”*

**– Wes Thompson, general manager,  
Razorback Camper Sales**

“So, while delivery is up overall, it’s still an issue in some areas. But that’s due to transit – not manufacturing. Our freight costs are substantially higher than one or two years ago, up by 30 to 35 percent. One issue is that we’re only getting single-haul deliveries, which increases the cost to us by \$250 to \$300, and that gets passed along to the consumer. It’s just a lack of trucks and drivers. But the smaller units are more price sensitive, so that extra cost can make the difference. And fuel is an issue here; it’s up to \$5 a gallon.

“But right now, the biggest issue here isn’t inventory – it’s weather. It’s the last week in April and we just had a snowstorm. The weather needs to change in order to kick up retail.

“Our biggest show is the Sportsman Show in Fargo the first weekend in March. That’s the only off-lot show we do. It brings together camping, hunting, fishing, excursions. This year was not awesome, but not a dud.

“We had good traffic, good interest, people looking. And people walking around looking at stuff is where it all starts. They see something, they start thinking about it, then they start researching it, and that’s where sales begin.

“Our first on-lot show of the year is always the third week of January, and its success is entirely weather-dependent. If it’s 30 degrees and sunny, we get a good turnout. If it’s 8 degrees below and snowing with 20 mph wind, not as many people want to come out.

“So, it’s really not a fair indicator of what type of year it will be. Still, we had average attendance. We don’t have anything scheduled yet for the rest of the year. We have to wait until we have two or three solid weeks of 60 degrees and sunny before we can turn things back on.

“Thirty feet or less (in lengths for towables) is the meat of our market. So far this year, we’ve been selling a lot of couples’ rigs, not as many bunkhouses. But while they are different buyers, it’s really due to the weather more than anything else.

“We’ve had to increase staff in all areas. We’ve hired one new salesperson, beefed up our parts counter by one, and added two new service techs.

“As people use their units more, they need more service. When they couldn’t fly, people who had trailers used them more, which means more things backed into, run over, broken, and in need of repair. Just more maintenance overall.

“Our first quarter has been good – not great – but good. I think we’re going to go back to pre-pandemic levels, but it’s hard to assess now because we’re so weather-dependent up here. We’ve already gotten a late start.

“When spring and warm weather are late, it worries people. They





start to think, 'We've already lost a month, do we really want to buy now? Is it worth it if that much of the season is already gone?'

"Actually, my crystal ball is cloudy for the first of May. By now we usually know more. I think we'll be down from last year. Not majorly, just at about average for a pre-pandemic year. While customers do notice the increased price of gas, I think it will just cause them to take shorter trips, closer to home.

"I don't see them not traveling at all or even necessarily traveling less often. They seem positive; they're just waiting for the nice weather."

**Wes Thompson, general manager**  
Razorback Camper Sales  
Hot Springs, Ark.



"Inventory levels are definitely on the rise, because manufacturers are producing at a higher level with fewer product shortages, but also because we are selling fewer units.

"It isn't a massive decrease, but there is still a decrease. Currently, we are 13 units down from this time last year, but our profits are up due to our ability to keep holding a higher gross.

"And really, everything is better compared to last year. In January 2021, we had half the inventory we do now, with upwards of 40 retail sold campers in the backlog.

"Parts remain a challenge. In most instances, we wait weeks and months, which has left our insurance repair customers waiting for extended periods to get their camper fully repaired and returned to them. The backlog for those repairs is currently around three or four months. We try to order parts we might need well in advance to shorten the wait, but we cannot predict everything we might need.

"Shows have been disappointing. We participated in two this year and both were down significantly in both sales and traffic. Occasionally, weather can be a factor, but that was not the case for either of these.

"We're down approximately 30 percent in show sales and the residuals have not been as strong, either. I think many people have purchased in the past two years and the price increases on new campers over the last year or two has slowed the rate of purchase overall.

"I also believe that the influx of used campers will continue to deter people from buying new. Proof of that is in the numbers. Approximately 35 percent of our sales are pre-owned this year, with more than 60 percent in April alone.

"We mostly sell travel trailers and a few fifth wheels, plus a few pop-up campers. Our best seller by far is Rockwood. Between new and used, they make up close to 45 percent of our total sales.

"While I know many dealerships and other businesses are struggling with staffing, we've managed to retain our staff throughout

the years by taking care of them no matter the circumstance. Our people are loyal to us because we are loyal to them. In addition to retaining most of our people, we've made two key hires in the service department.

"I feel like this year we'll be down in terms of number of campers sold, but thus far we're well above last year in profit margins. We've been able to hold gross on most units – especially used ones, and we'll continue to do so until the market turns. I'll always take gross over number of units sold, especially when grosses are holding a 35 percent increase.

"I firmly believe that for the rest of 2022 and the next few years, the rise in gas prices, inflation, interest rates, and a lack of expendable/discretionary income will continue to negatively affect our business. Price increases have already driven people to purchase more pre-owned units, thinking they'll get more bang for their buck." *RVP*

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# All Decked Out

By Mike Harbour

**Rear deck and pop-top soft-side models bring added versatility to Palomino's truck camper lineup.**

As campgrounds and parks become increasingly crowded, truck campers are getting more attention, given that they can go places much more easily than towables and motorhomes. It's an opportune time for Palomino.

That's because the venerable manufacturer, which began building RVs in 1968 and is now part of Forest River, has made its Backpack, Real-Lite and Rogue truck campers stand out in the segment, according to Ben Meloche, general manager of Palomino's truck camper division. Between Palomino's price points, floorplans and features, there should be something for everyone.

"Our Backpacks and Real-Lites are clone products, so that allows us to have more than one dealer in a specific market. Both of those lines contain three different products, so we have soft-sides, we have hard-sides and we have hard-side Maxs. The hard-side Max is going to be our biggest truck camper and then our hard-sides are our middle level and our soft-sides are going to be our lightest, more cost-effective products," Meloche says. "Both Backpack and Real-Lite are going to have the same floorplans and Rogue is a separate truck camper line we added a couple of years ago that is geared more toward the more adventurous customer."

## Party Deck a Hit

Without a doubt, the most notable addition to Palomino was the recently introduced party deck, now available on the 2022 Backpack MAX HS-2912 and Real-Lite MAX HS-1916. While not uncommon on towables, it's the first time the concept has been applied to a truck camper, according to Meloche.

"We were definitely inspired by some of the toy haulers," he says. "That is something that's been in the works for some time and we had to redesign the truck camper for this back patio, but it's the same idea with the toy hauler. You're up off the ground and you're basically doubling your living or hangout space on a truck

camper. It's something that was new this past year. We've sent quite a few of them out. Retail excitement is there and they've been selling really well."

It's a feature that should appeal to lots of different buyers, according to Meloche, because it can be set in the middle of a racetrack, alongside a quiet stream or anywhere else owners want to enjoy their surroundings.

"There's so many different possibilities. We had a lot of feedback from people about what they thought and how it could be used," he says. "We were coming up with all kinds of stuff. It was an exciting process."

Once folded down from the unit's rear wall, the deck – measuring almost 7 feet long and 8 feet wide – reveals another exterior door exclusively for access to it. There's also a mini-fridge and a TV hidden by a second door, plus storage behind a smaller door underneath it. Rated for 1,500 pounds, the deck even has screened panels and gates around three sides for safety.



PHOTOS BY STEVE TOEPF/MIDWEST PHOTOGRAPHICS



“We love building and talking about truck campers and their capabilities. I don’t think we were able to really have a chance to try something like this until this past year, where we did have some downtime. Obviously, there was a huge disruption in life in general, which really just allowed us to breathe for a bit and talk about some things and brainstorm,” says the 15-year Forest River veteran. “Had we come up with this idea now, it’d probably be on the backburner until things slowed down a little bit. It really was a perfect storm of timing.”

The 2912 and 1916, designed for 1-ton trucks with 8-foot beds, are, unsurprisingly, among Palomino’s top truck campers (the 2910 and 1914 substitute a slide for the deck but are essentially the same) and weigh about 3,500 pounds dry. That’s the upper limit for the manufacturer, according to Meloche, and at the opposite end sits the Rogue, introduced a couple of years ago and made to fit half-ton and compact trucks.



Palomino’s truck camper division employs about 65 people, including workers Brandon Yoder and Ruby Yoder (pictured here) in the cabinet section.



Ben Meloche (left), general manager of Palomino’s truck camper division, and Josh Tyler, operations manager, are pictured in front of Forest River’s Palomino division in Colon, Mich. Tyler is standing on a party deck that Palomino first introduced in select models in 2022, which has proven popular for Palomino.





**Palomino's Real-Lite hard-sided 1806 floorplan comes loaded with amenities, including a 60-inch by 80-inch queen bed. The truck camper weighs just 2,460 pounds and is suited for being carried by a 3/4-ton truck. (Photos courtesy of Palomino)**



### Going Rogue

"The idea with these was basically weight. The most unique part to the Rogue, as opposed to our regular soft-sides, is it's hinged up front, so the only thing that raises up is the roof at the back wall," he says. "The cool thing about it is you get a lot more scenery with the Rogue than you do a normal truck camper."

Compared to Palomino's larger models, the Rogue line – the EA in blue and the EB in orange – has fewer niceties. While everything Palomino makes has aluminum framing, there are only two floorplans between the clones and neither feature a bathroom. The beds are smaller than those found in the Backpack and Real-Lite units and the hinged roof means headroom is limited at one end. Yet there's an equal – if not longer – list of advantages to the Rogue – and at the top of that list is it fits in more trucks, according to Meloche, whether it's a Ford F-150 or Nissan Frontier.

Another plus is the Rogue's ability to keep in heat, a hard task for older RVs with soft sides.

"It's pretty surprising on the soft-sides how it really does keep heat in really well," he says. "You can camp in these in some pretty chilly temperatures. The sound is going to be there, but we build a lot of soft-sides and retail sell a lot. It doesn't seem to be an issue."

In addition to withstanding a wide range of temperatures, the marine-grade vinyl material used for walls also is longer lived.

"Really, the knock on soft-sides and canvas back in the day was it would mold and rot, whereas the vinyls now, if you put it away wet, could mold, but you can wipe it off. It's not rotting away or deteriorating," Meloche says.

Another feature of the Rogue is the skylight above the bed; when combined with the three open sides of the pop-up roof, he says campers have an almost unhindered view of their surroundings.



**Justin Yoder configures wires for installation in a truck camper. Installing the wiring and water lines in truck campers is more challenging than for other types of RVs because of the tight spaces in those units, according to Meloche.**





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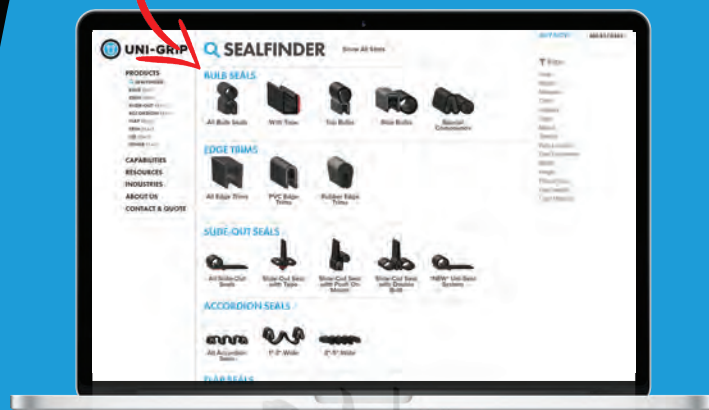
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### Something for Everyone

Meanwhile, for buyers looking at more typical, yet still lightweight units, Palomino has them covered as well.

"We have a couple of models that will work in the Ranger, Canyon and Tacoma," Meloche says. "Our Backpack SS-500 and Real-Lite SS-1600 are going to be under 1,400 pounds, loaded. It depends on the payload of the truck because there are a lot of variables, including four-wheel drive or two, gear ratio, and more. Those two floorplans are designed, depending on the truck, to fit on some of those smaller trucks."

Designing truck campers may be easier than building them, as they're simply unlike anything else in the industry.

"With a truck camper, you're basically building from the ground up; the floor, the knee walls, the sidewalls, so you don't really have a frame to start from," Meloche says. "Just getting the truck camper started is a little bit more challenging than a travel trailer.

"The other issue is you don't have a lot of room to work at each station. In a travel trailer, we could have three or four people at the same station working on different items," he adds. "Truck



**Palomino's Real-Lite truck camper lineup includes soft-side models with vinyl pop-up tops designed to create a more spacious feel inside the camper while still keeping in the heat. (Photo courtesy of Palomino)**

campers, you need more stations because you have less people working on them at a time. As far as numbers go, we've been able to change plants. We grew into a larger plant about six years ago, but we were able to change up how we had our line set up to become a little more efficient so we could build more of them."

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**Team members Taylor Burbank and Dave Hostetler use flashlights to look for gaps, seal voids or imperfections during the inspection process.**

Palomino employs a staff of between 60 and 70 people at its truck camper plant in tiny Colon, Mich., about an hour's drive northeast of Elkhart, Ind., including some talented line workers.

"If you think about the size of a truck camper and it really not having an underbelly or all this area to run wires and plumbing through, it's very compact. Our guys do a heck of a job fitting everything in a tight space," Meloche says. "Even though they're smaller than a travel trailer, it is just as complex if not more to get everything wired, plumbed and ducted in a truck camper. It's a challenge but we've done a pretty good job at it."

### **Truck Camper Market in Transition**

Determining Palomino's bestsellers is a challenge, too.

"Right now, it really depends on territory; it depends on time of year," says Meloche. "Our five top floorplans change depending on time of year. Obviously, once we get into cooler weather, the hard-sides do better, but coming into spring; it's soft-sides. It really is a little bit of everything."

"We've really seen a tremendous spike in truck camper sales this past year or two," he adds. "Right now, our biggest issue is more of a transport issue than anything else. We've continued to stay pretty steady and constant with production – it's just a matter of logistics that's making it challenging. It really just kind of depends on the day or the month what's our top seller."

One thing remains constant: the Pacific Northwest and the Midwest – longtime strongholds for truck camper sales – are Palomino's top two regions. Yet even that could change.

"We've seen a lot of growth out of the Northeast and the Southeast in this past year, with a lot more dealers wanting to stock them," he says. "The only thing I can think of is we're all looking at camping differently."

"We're hearing state parks are full, campgrounds are full, they require this and that, so we're looking at camping as outside of campgrounds more than we ever did before. Truck campers are

**Calvin Schmucker uses a power drill to assemble wood framing used in Palomino's truck campers.**







Palomino's truck camper operation is bustling with activity these days, as Meloche reports the division has seen a spike in sales during the past two years.

for the customers that really want to go off-road, and I don't care how big of a lift you have on your travel trailer or how knobby the tires are, there's some places those just aren't going to go. Truck campers really give you the opportunity to go wherever you want, anywhere your truck can get you, you can go in a truck camper."

Palomino dealers are stretched across the U.S. and Canada; there's even some international retailers. Customer interest continues to grow, including some atypical questions.

"We have a lot of Super Duty customers just wanting something," Meloche says. "We'll have a customer ask: 'I have a 1-ton truck but I just want this 1,500-pound truck camper to go in the bed of my truck. Will it fit?'"

"In most cases, it will, but in some of the smaller versions, it really doesn't," he adds. "That's not something we ever thought about. For years, it was, 'you're going to buy based on the size truck you have, so if you have a 1-ton, you're going to be looking anywhere from 2,500 pounds up.'"

"Well, now it's not like that. You get all kinds of truck camper customers with all kinds of trucks wanting whatever best suits them. It's not truck-specific like it used to be," Meloche says. "Again, I think that's just someone wanting to go somewhere where a travel trailer won't allow them to." **RVF**

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# 'Simply the Best'

Staff Reports

*At its annual dealer event, Newmar highlighted its investments in new facilities and technologies while touting its updated motorhomes, all with the goal of better serving its dealer partners and end customers.*



PHOTOS BY RV PRO

**Winnebago President and CEO Mike Happe discussed the challenges and opportunities for Newmar moving forward during the RV manufacturer's dealer event in Orlando, Fla. Happe was upbeat on Newmar's prospects during the event.**

**ORLANDO, Fla.** – Winnebago CEO Mike Happe and Tina Turner might not have a lot of common the surface. One runs a major RV manufacturer while the other is a Grammy award-winning singer.

But Happe did bring memories of one of Turner's famous songs when he said that the Winnebago family of companies didn't want to be the biggest, but simply "The Best."

Happe opened the two-day Newmar dealer event at the Gaylord Resort & Convention in Orlando, Fla., with a speech designed to get dealers pumped up.

Happe spoke of challenges that the industry has faced over the last year. After going through a laundry list of issues that included supply chain challenges and rising inflation, he reflected that the list is too long, but also referenced a phrase from a story he shared, stating, "good."

The story involved a recent NCAA men's hockey team that had faced adversity on its way to winning a championship. That team had lost its goalie and top goal scorer before the title game and the coach's response was, as it had been all season when they had faced any hardship, "good". The mentality allowed the team to move from "good" to "great".

Newmar's event kicked off on April 26 featuring several industry partners who showed up to offer support for the event, including Freightliner, Riverpark, Spartan and Industrial Finishes. Industrial Finishes GM Craig Floyd has been coming to the event for a handful of years.

"We want to support Newmar and help educate customers. They have a unique group of dealers who are primarily motorized, and we want to round out the experience from a vendor perspective," said Floyd.

Our reason for being here is: "How can we contribute to their success?" Floyd said.

Newmar Vice President of Sales John Sammut followed Happe's emphatic speech to highlight new model year changes. Sammut appeared from a side stage on an airboat, dressed as an Everglades National Park guide to emphasize that, just as waterways in the Everglades are on the move, so is Newmar.

Three of the most impressive and unique additions across many of Newmar's units were a beverage center, a Euro dinette





and lithium battery systems. The latter was brought to Newmar's lineup in 2023 by consumer feedback and demand.

Ben Hirsch of Campers Inn touted the lithium battery option.

"We've been partners with Newmar for several years and carry them in our Jacksonville, Louisville, and Madison stores," he said. "They make unbelievably good products with awesome quality. They redesigned three of their brands, including the front and back caps. And the lithium packages they are putting out are going to excite the customers."

### The Journey Forward

Winnebago and Newmar have made significant investments in infrastructure, including another 100,000-foot facility expansion investment in addition to the one at the beginning of 2020.

Newmar's programs NeWay (transport delivery), NewGle (search system), NewServ (service system) and NewPar (part system) were covered in a morning session by Matt Utley, Newmar vice president of customer service and facilities development.

Utley spoke of a significant dedication to solar power with a solar array system being placed at the company's service center. The solar panels will produce 690,000 kwh/year and it will cover 85 percent of the service centers consumption each year.

Sammut highlighted Newmar's new lead management system in his opening remarks about the Journey Forward – the theme to the 2022 event.

"Aimbase, and the company Rollick, specialize in the RV industry and have relationships with each Winnebago Industries business unit. The Newmar marketing and IT teams worked with Rollick to configure Aimbase to our unique needs. When Aimbase is soon activated, your sales teams will immediately benefit from a system that is easier to use," said Sammut.

Sammut talked of the new marketing methods Newmar has employed, including a new more efficient lead generation system. Part of the marketing campaign headed by Marketing Manager Shannon Stover has focused on Newmar owners.

Newmar owners share what they have to say about the product as opposed to Newmar hiring influencers to talk about the product. The theme of "quality" shared by Newmar owners spread across the campaign.



**Newmar Vice President of Sales John Sammut took the stage at the Gaylord Resort & Convention Center on an airboat, dressed as an Everglades tour guide to emphasize that, just as waterways in the Everglades are on the move, so is Newmar. Sammut highlighted Newmar life cycle changes and RV product upgrades and updates during his presentation.**



**Events like the recent one hosted by Newmar allow representatives for the RV manufacturer to network with dealers. Pictured here from left to right are: Don Strollo, president of RV Retailer's eastern region, Winnebago President and CEO Mike Happy and Jon Ferrando, CEO and president of RV Retailer.**





**Tom Lane, a multiplex engineer for Newmar, is pictured next to the RV maker's 2023 Dutch Star, which features an optional Lithium-ion battery system. The Dutch Star also will come with the Mobileye collision-avoidance system as a standard feature, as will some other Newmar models.**



**Newmar Director of Sales Michelle Kemp demonstrated the Euro-dinette on the 2023 Dutch Star. The dinette has a rotating functionality, where customers can have it horizontal to the coach to look out the window or pull out the table (much like a dining room leaflet).**

## New Model Year Updates

After explaining the new initiatives, Sammut delved into the details of this year's model year changes, including for Dutch Star, which became the No. 1-selling Class A diesel motorhome in 2021.

Moving forward, Dutch Star will have Mobile Eye lane tracking and departure warning system as a standard feature, as will the Ventana and Kountry Star. For 2023, Newmar has come up with two new floorplans for the Dutch Star, the 4071 and 4370. These models include a standard Euro-booth dinette facing the patio and a HWH slide-out mechanism above the floor.

A new option available in specific floorplans on the new Dutch Star, is a convertible dinette, which has a rotating table, where customers can have it horizontal to the coach to look out the window or pull out the table (much like a dining room leaflet). Users simply rotate the table 90 degrees and have it vertical to the side of the coach, fitting four chairs.

Director of Sales Michelle Kemp demonstrated the dinette.

"A couple can use the table and look out the window, or if you want to watch TV, it rotates. This is the initial concept and I see it evolving over time," she said. "Dealer feedback has been very positive. Another benefit is the customer can have more room in the galley while traveling to get to the half bathroom."

The Dutch Star also has four new interiors packages that include new backsplashes, new ceiling design, and new slide-out fascia, plus window and bedroom treatments. The exterior includes new graphics and paint design and exterior baggage seals that solve the problem of those doors slamming.

Meanwhile, the Essex offers the 4521 and 4595 floorplans for 2023. The latter has the option for a beverage center with stemware rack and wine cooler. It also features a high-quality Bosch refrigerator. The refrigerator is flanked by two storage cabinets with decorative feet to that give it a look that is reminiscent of many high-end home finishes.

The master bathroom provides a 40-inch by 32-inch glass enclosed shower, a washer and dryer housed in a cabinet, a pair of wardrobes, as well as a vanity with two sinks along the rear wall.

The lithium-ion battery by Lithionics is standard on the Essex and New Aire. The battery system has two 320-amp battery packs, with the options for third. This package also is available on the Dutch Star, Mountain Aire, London Aire and Supreme Aire.

"You can run one AC off the inverters and batteries. The high-end optional systems have dual inverters systems and a single battery management system (BMS)," said Tom Lane, multiplex engineer for Newmar.

"Depending on the load you are running at a time, the RV-C communication system will tell you how you are managing the system or how long the battery system will take to recharge. The information is displayed on the Silverleaf screen," said Lane.

He also said customers will enjoy the simplicity and consistency of the LiPo battery system.

## Other Models Receive Updates

Meanwhile, specific changes to the Bay Star model year lineup include increasing the ceilings from 80 inches to 84 inches. Seven models include an over-the-cab-bunk.





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During its dealer event, Newmar recognized its Top 10 dealers, including Independence RV Sales of Winter Garden, Fla.



Newmar's Essex 4595 floorplan for 2023 has the option for a beverage center with stemware rack and wine cooler. It also features a Bosch refrigerator, flanked by two storage cabinets with decorative feet.

Also, Williamsburg Furniture in the Bay Star has an all-new design for 2023 and there are also new fixtures and sinks in the bathrooms.

For its part, Newmar's entry-level model, the Bay Star Sport, will have vinyl tile flooring that extends all the way into the bedroom. Also standard for 2023 models are the popular dual-pane windows.

The biggest news regarding the Canyon Star, Newmar's front engine product, is that all 2023 models will have the toy hauler garage feature. The 3737 and 3957 feature 8-foot garages with a no-hump ramp, which can be converted into an outdoor patio. The 3947 will have a 10-foot garage.

Meanwhile, the Kountry Star 4068 floorplan has a desk workspace for those are working from the road. However, if pleasure exceeds work, customers have the choice to option in a beverage center wine cooler and stemware cabinet. The refrigerator features two cabinets with decorative style feet.

The Kountry Star also gets the Mobile Eye lane tracking, which comes standard. On the outside, there are new graphic packages and exterior paint options.

For its part, the Ventana also will feature the Mobile Eye system. It also has an intelligent high-beam system that will recognize approaching traffic and immediately shift to a low-beam function until the traffic has passed, and then switch back to high-beam mode.

A new app is also available that will control the HVAC system, interior lights and holding tank monitors. This app also appears on the Dutch Star and Super Star.

In the Super C segment, there is one new floorplan for the Super Star, the 3729. The 37-foot motorhome has bunk beds, while the 37-foot and 40-foot motorhomes had their bases extended to provide better balance.

The Super Star and Ventana both have a 10-inch monitor and control system. Both brands also feature Apple car play via the dash radio.

Supreme Aire is the second Super C Newmar offers, and the new 4065 floorplan provides a bunk model plan, just as the Super Star does.



*Winnebago and Newmar have made significant investments in infrastructure, including another 100,000-foot facility expansion investment in addition to the one at the beginning of 2020.*

### **Aire Models Receive Upgrades, Updates**

The New Aire will feature a standard Silverleaf Electronics system with greater functions and, like the Dutch Star, will have the Lithionics battery system with an additional 3,000-watt Xantrex Freedom Series inverter so customers can run one air conditions without running the generator.

The 3547 floorplan is a full-length slide with a bath and a half.

For its part, Mountain Aire has received the MyRozie App, a 10-inch Silverleaf function display, as well as lithium-ion battery option. The 4591 is a response in demand from customers of the Dutch Star 4328, who wanted similarities in a 45-foot model.

London Aire's 4521 floorplan will replace the 4533. The 4569 has a U-shaped kitchen. Blindspot detection with six sensors is also a new standard feature being introduced on London Aire for 2023.

The royalty of Newmar's lineup, the King Aire, continues to push the boundaries of luxury in the RV market. The 4596 has a full-wall slide on the half-bath side. In the kitchen is a walk-in pantry finished with a frosted glass door.

### **Assessing the Motorhome Market**

After communicating to the changes and updates to the 2023 Newmar dealer event, *RV PRO* had the chance to sit down with

Sammut and get his thoughts on this year's event, unit allocation, the motorhome market and the "new normal".

Comprised of two two-day events, last year's Newmar dealer event was spread out over four days to meet COVID-19 regulations. Sammut noted that this year's event was a lot different.

"There is a lot more enthusiasm and the energy level is up," he said. "It's nice to have everyone together. All seven dealerships from Canada came. It's been three years because we had to do the event in a virtual format in 2020 and then last year only one Canadian dealership was able to come. Altogether, we have about 200 people."

Kevin Ketilson from Bucar's RV is one of Newmar's Canadian dealers.

"It feels great. We're happy to have the opportunity to be here. There are so many resources here; it's not just the individual motorhomes we can see touch and feel," said Ketilson.

Ketilson compared it to be trying to do online learning which, in his opinion, is just not as good.

"The design center allows us to pick options. Working with our reps in a one-on-one basis versus a telephone call is great and there are huge benefits to be able shake a hand again," he explained.

Going back a year, a big topic from the 2021 dealer event included

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**The Newmar service team poses for a group photo during the company's dealer event. Newmar touts its hardworking team members, plus its investments in facilities and technologies, as it strives to better serve its dealer partners and end customers.**

Sammut's explanation of allocation due to component shortages. During his speech, Sammut addressed the topic head-on again, stating that Newmar didn't meet its original allocation numbers.

"Last year, we had a very optimistic number that we based allocation on and it was for the entire year. Due to challenges, we were not able to meet it. I thought the best way to address was direct with a poignant message explaining the issues. Conversations have been good, and dealers have been understanding," said Sammut.

"This year's number is more realistic, and it is based on a 24-week production cycle where we can adjust for half the year," he added.

Part of that reason Newmar has changed its allocation strategy for 2023 is that Newmar (and all motorhome manufacturers) have been allocated themselves by suppliers. One of the hardest component shortages to hit the motorhome manufacturers has been generators.

"Manufacturers are being limited access to generators based on total volume, as well as model number, so they are only able to build the number of units they have based on generator availability," explained Sammut.

Speaking of generators, California and other states are passing legislation to outlaw gas-powered generators with the goal of reducing carbon emissions. As Sammut explained, Newmar is caught up on current carbon regulations, but is still ascertaining the full and future impact of the new regulations from states.

With component shortages also including toilets and awnings, it may be time to reassess the story behind motorhome versus

trailer numbers. The last few years, towables have been seen as exploding, while motorhomes (other than Class B) have been declining, or stagnant at best.

There is no doubt that towables numbers have been skyrocketing since the beginning of the pandemic, but motorhome numbers aren't telling the whole story, according to Sammut.

He explained that, currently, 75 Newmar dealers have a volume that is about one-third of their normal inventory. Newmar would like to build more, but it's not entirely in its control due to component shortages and supply chain problems.

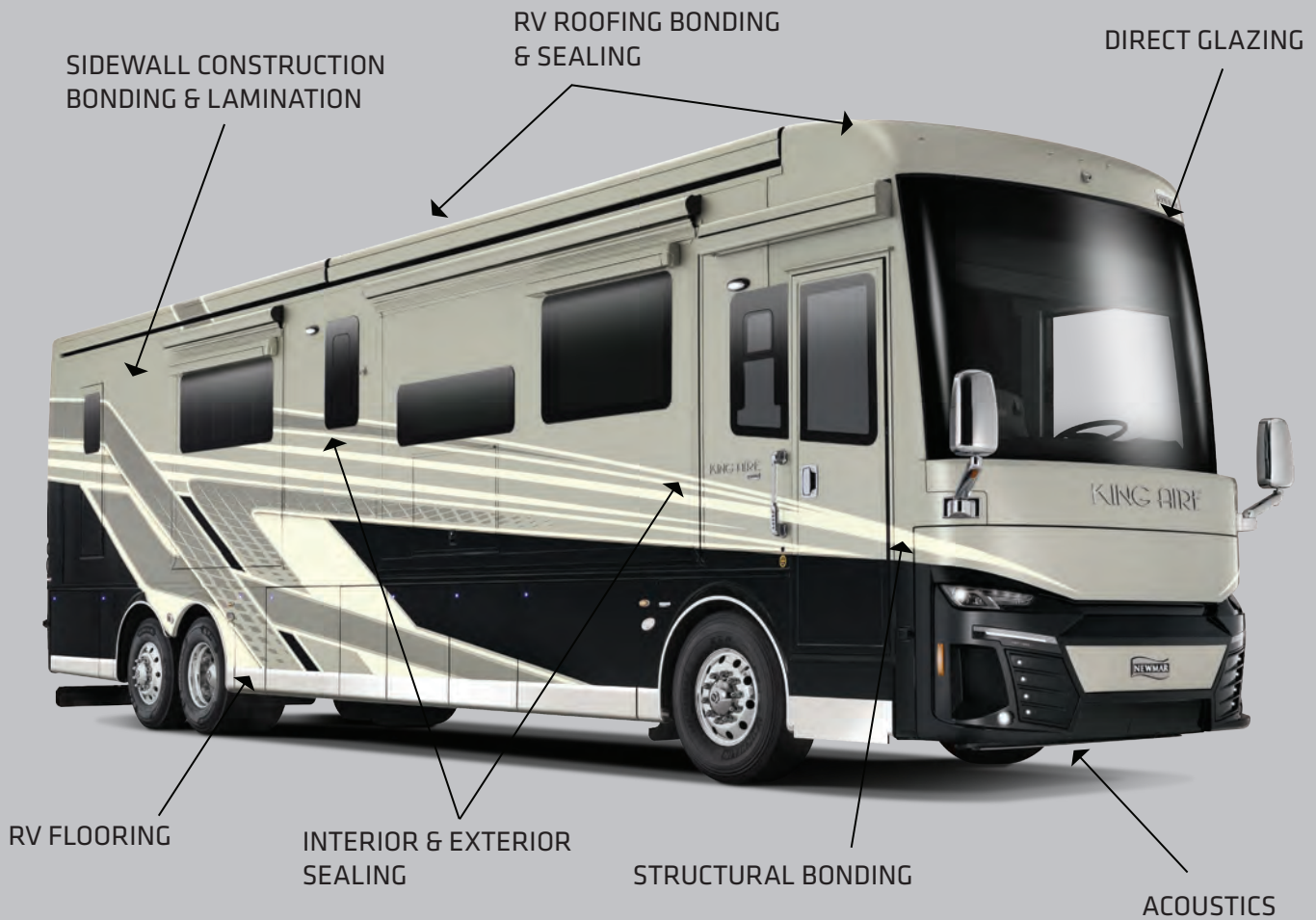
"We need to build 850 units back into dealer inventory just to see where we are at with numbers (market potential)," Sammut said. "There is now a direct correlation between manufacturing shipments and retail volume. It's like selling hotdogs and you only have 100 to sell, but normally you have 1,000. How many hotdogs do you need to make? We won't know until total availability increases."

### **Operating in the 'New Normal'**

Finally, the phrase the "new normal" has become part of the business lexicon. *RV PRO* asked Sammut to talk about what that is and what it means for Newmar.

"I am not certain what the new normal will be," he responded. "The changes we have had to make during the pandemic will set us up for the new normal and any new challenges we don't see in the future. We've always been a flexible company and the pandemic has caused us to be more flexible." **RV2**





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# Powered Up

By K. Schipper

**Go Power! is seeing strong demand for its solar energy products, particularly as OEMs are adding solar or solar prep to many of their RVs.**

Over the past two years, Go Power!, now a Dometic Outdoor company, hit two important benchmarks. Last year, the solar power supplier celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Before that, in 2020, it sold its 1 millionth solar panel.

From its modest beginnings as a distributor of solar energy products, the company that makes its home in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, has evolved into a popular supplemental power solution in both the RV and fleet markets. And, while solar panels are an important part of its success, Go Power! provides a full menu of solar-related products – from chargers and inverters to controllers and batteries.

The secrets to its success aren't particularly secret, either. Company representatives say key among them is strong relationships in both the OEM and dealer markets. Go Power! also offers solutions

for units from tent campers and teardrops all the way to luxury motorhomes.

With RV sales booming and reservations for campsites at a premium, Go Power! is happy to help both OE and aftermarket sides of the industry provide end-users with dependable and cost-effective power options wherever their travels take them.

## A Powerful History

There's no better testament to the fact that Go Power! has products that sell than that it's persevered through several different owners.

To give a concrete date to the company's history, it's possible to go back to 1996 and a company called Soltek, which for a time was Canada's larger solar supplier, serving markets from home and

Many new RVers are embracing off-grid camping, a trend for which Go Power!'s mobile solar power products are ideally suited. Go Power! has been serving the RV market for more than 20 years now.







industrial to RV and marine. In 1996, it was Soltek that began offering solar power products for off-grid use under the name Soltek Power Source (to reflect a company merger with Canada's second largest solar company, Power Source).

Mark Spilsbury, Go Power!'s RV division manager, joined the operation in 2001, at a time when the company – by then SPS Energy – had become the largest supplier to the RV dealer market in Canada.

"At that point, it was handed over to us to take it into the United States, which we hadn't done yet," Spilsbury says. "That's when we branded all our Go Power! kits and launched them. What was then Stag-Parkway was the original distributor that got our presence going in the U.S."

In 2005, Go Power! was acquired by Carmanah, another Victoria-based company with a heavy involvement in the solar industry, but for such products as lighting for marine buoys, street signs and lights, and airport runway lighting.

It was during those years that the company launched some of its best-known products, including its portable solar kits and its Solar Flex panels. In 2015, Go Power! also began partnering with some RV OEMs to pre-wire some of their units for solar.

Then, in 2017, Carmanah sold Go Power! to Valterra, where it continues to operate as a wholly-owned subsidiary.

"At first, we thought it was kind of an odd fit, but Valterra has a really amazing presence and is very respected in the RV industry," says Spilsbury. "We've paired up well, and they've helped open some doors for us to companies that we weren't working with before. It's helped strengthen both companies with aftermarket distributors."

Last year, Valterra was acquired by Dometic Outdoor, about the same time Dometic purchased several other companies in other parts of the world involved in what Spilsbury calls "the mobile power space."

"I think that strengthens us, as well," he says. "Dometic is working on the connectivity of all their products, and that bodes well for where we're going, as we want our products to talk to each other. It hasn't been a long relationship, but it's helping us drive to where we want to go."

### Improved Information

The whole idea of connectivity is big right now. Eva Mitic, Go Power!'s market manager, believes it ties back to smart-home technology and the ever-growing list of things RVers can't quite get away from.

"Go RVing did a very comprehensive market research report on the demographics for current, prospective and past RVers,



**Go Power!'s products are increasingly installed in RVs at the time they are manufactured, which is a pronounced change from several years ago, when they were almost always an aftermarket purchase. Pictured here is a Jayco travel trailer production line.**



**Solar power products from Go Power! that are integrated into RVs are capable of powering all types of RV appliances, including refrigerators and air conditioners.**

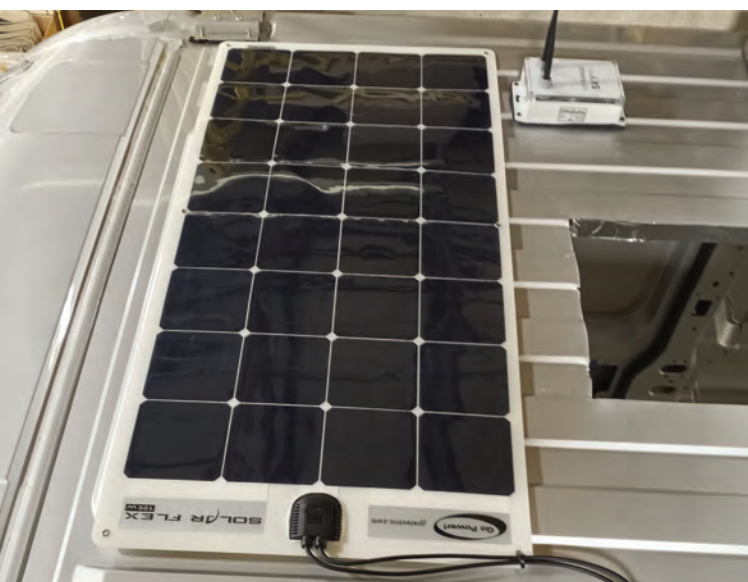




Ember RV is one of a growing number of manufacturers that install solar power panels and related power systems as a standard feature. Additionally, many RV makers prep their models so solar power can easily be installed at dealerships.

*“We don’t just do solar panels. We do everything necessary for power. We do batteries, inverters, solar converters and all the other pieces to build a complete system that works together.”*

**– Mark Spilsbury, Go Power!’s RV division manager**



and one of the things that was at the top of their list was connectivity,” Mitic says. “It’s interesting that we’ve been working on that a couple years.”

Spilsbury, who remembers when a single solar panel might generate 100 watts of power – compared to today’s 190 watts – also recalls when an RV required multiple control panels that filled a cabinet space.

“It would be overwhelming for new RVers to even know what they’re looking at,” he said. “Our goal is to make the user experience better by having one screen, showing multiple devices more clearly and giving more data at the same time, providing a better experience.”

Part of what will make that happen, Spilsbury adds, is the use of RVC, a communications protocol that is already being integrated into high-end RV models by companies such as Jayco, Forest River and THOR. Go Power! has seen particular success in connectivity with its solar controllers and inverter chargers.

Connectivity is only the most-recent part of the evolution of solar power over Spilsbury’s career. Not only has the technology improved, but he says the way both the dealers and the OEMs manage it has changed, too.

Early on, Spilsbury says it was a challenge to get OEMs to put a solar panel on some units, and then try to convince a dealer to put in a battery.

“That way, while it’s on the dealers lot, they could run things with it, and better showcase the unit to potential new buyers” he says. “However, the market kind of skipped over Lead Acid & AGM batteries and now the OEMs are installing full lithium and solar systems.”



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**Go Power! prides itself on offering complete solar power systems for RVs, which can include inverters, inverter chargers, batteries and transfer switches.**



**Go Power! has a strong presence at trade shows to promote its products. The company also makes use of manufacturer rep firms who visit dealerships to get the word out about the features and benefits of its solar power systems and ancillary products.**

In much the same way, OEMs that were once reluctant to put a single panel on the roof has gone to two panels or more. On some units, they're putting on as many as five panels, creating 1,000-watt systems – a move driven by more people taking their units off-grid.

And, where the panels aren't going on as an OEM item, Go Power! estimates one unit in three is being prewired for the company's systems at the factory. At the same time, Mitic says both consumers and dealers are focusing much more on educating themselves about the systems.

"One of the things we've tried to focus on for at least the last five years is making the information on how to size and install a unit readily available," Mitic says. "Rather than keeping our cards close to the chest, we're trying to break down this highly technical subject for people who might not really understand watts and amps. That's helped us sell a bit more product to the dealers."

That's not to suggest Go Power! isn't interested in providing training to its dealer network. The company does online seminars, training at the aftermarket distributor shows, and it also has many outside reps who go into the dealerships and provide training.

"Dealers who haven't done solar before are a little bit nervous," says Spilsbury. "They don't understand how it works. But once we go into the dealerships and do some training, and they take that first step, they figure it out and get better and better at it. Some of them sell 1,000 systems a year."

### **A Systems Brand**

There's one other attractive feature that both Mitic and Spilsbury say sets Go Power! apart from its competitors. It is – and always has been – a systems brand.

"We don't just do solar panels," says Spilsbury. "We do everything necessary for power. We do batteries, inverters, solar converters and all the other pieces to build a complete system that works together."

A key reason behind the current emphasis on internet connectivity, he adds, is that will make the company's systems work together even better and with fewer screens.

And, backing it up is a reputation for quality, support and service. Mitic notes that support comes from 700-plus dealers across the U.S., through the company's website, and also its tech support team, which works out of the head office. The goal is to give people the support they need in a timely fashion and in a way they want it delivered, including by phone or email.

The tech support team is only a fraction of the 26 people who work at the head office in Victoria, though.

"We also have two outside sales reps that are not here in the office," says Mitic. "One is in Alberta and the other is in Elkhart. We also have 25 outside aftermarket reps that work on our behalf, and 10 OEM reps. It's a team that can service everybody."

Because of the impracticalities of shipping off an island, Go Power! ships from warehouse locations in Washington state and near Vancouver.

"We're also partnered with Dave Carter & Associates, which provides us warehouse space in Elkhart," says Spilsbury. "They are also our rep group servicing OEMs."



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**Once OEMs could see how well solar power works and the freedom it gives RV owners, the idea of having an off-grid power solution has really taken off, according to Eva Mitic, Go Power's! market manager, and Mark Spilsbury, Go Power's! RV division manager (both pictured above).**

Also working out of the Go Power! headquarters is the company's engineering team, which has been expanded over the last couple of years. However, both Mitic and Spilsbury say a lot of what that team works on comes from feedback from its customers – at all levels.

"We do the prototyping here at the office," says Mitic. "In terms of how we come up with ideas, it's listening to the customers' problems and trying to think like them."

"We're talking to the dealers all the time, but we also have people in Elkhart who are talking with the OEMs," says Spilsbury. "They're also asking us, 'What if you did this?' For instance, it was the dealers who asked us to work with the OEMs to pre-wire more units for solar."

While the company has products that can take a large motorhome to 1,000 watts or more, Spilsbury says in the aftermarket Go Power's! most popular product remains its Overlander kit, which features a single panel capable of producing 190 watts of power at 9.5 amps per hour.

"It has a 30-amp controller that's digital, so people can see what's going on," Spilsbury says. "That will run all the 12-volt things in an RV. Then, if they want to go bigger – say to add household appliances – they can have an inverter that makes it a bigger system, and they can add more batteries."

And, while lower costs and improved technology had already created a trend toward more solar on RVs, the COVID-19 pandemic and its fallout has really helped boost Go Power's! sales.

"The market was just about there, and then with the parks being full at times, that really helped drive up sales," says Spilsbury. "Plus, a good example is refrigerators. There was a short supply of residential refrigerators, so a lot of the OEMs switched to 12-volt units, and they wanted to put solar on to help offset that draw."

Once the OEMs could see how well the solar works and the freedom it gives RV owners, the whole idea of having an off-grid power solution has really taken off. Mitic says market research shows that 88 percent of previous RV owners are looking for an off-grid power feature, and it has special appeal for younger buyers who want to be more "green" and leave the generator behind.

"Selling solar is mainly a matter of building systems and then managing the customer's expectations of what it's going to do," Spilsbury says. "It's figuring out where things work and options for when they don't. But, year-over-year, we're growing at a very rapid rate, which is amazing." **RV**



**The installation of additional solar panels on RV roofs – and the increased power those panels can produce compared to ones made a few years ago – enables today's RVers to spend more time off-grid.**



## SPECIAL PRODUCT FOCUS:

# Jacks and Levelers

*For trailers and tow vehicles on the road, a stabilized and balanced RV is a necessary part of the adventure. Jacks, levelers and ride control products are essential – and if presented properly, can become a solid profit center for an aftermarket retailer's parts department.*

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



## PIPE-MOUNT SWIVEL JACK

**CURT**, Eau Claire, Wis., offers the CURT pipe mount swivel jack (#28354) to promote quick setup of a trailer with its easy-to-use swivel bracket. It folds up and out of the way whenever needed and has a travel height of 10". This jack also features a capacity of 5,000 pounds. With a foot plate on the bottom, it also provides stability for the trailer. It comes with a side-wind handle for ergonomic operation and includes a weldable pipe mount for secure installation.

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



## CURVED LEVELER

**Camco Mfg.**, Greensboro, N.C., presents the Curved Leveler as a simple way to level a vehicle by giving a tire up to 4" of extra lift. The honeycomb design makes the leveler lightweight but durable. The drive-on curved design allows RVers to only drive on to as much height as needed, then chock the leveler at the exact right height. The included chock has non-slip rubber grippers on the bottom. Designed for use with trailers up to 30,000 pounds.

[www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)





### MINI SQUARE JACK PADS

**RV SnapPad**, Fontana, Calif., offers the Mini Square 5 in a four-pack. The "World's Only Permanent Jack Pad" is now available for stabilizer systems and travel trailers. With Mini Square 5 attached to a rig, experience the convenience, stability and added comfort that only RV SnapPads can provide.

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



### STABILIZER SYSTEM

**Ultra-Fab Products**, Elkhart, Ind., presents the Eliminator II. It greatly reduces side-to-side movement in trailers with scissor jacks. It automatically moves into place when jacks are lowered. It attaches to all known scissor jacks, except Low Pro. It offers permanent installation. No T-Handles, twist locks, thumb screws or other locking devices needed. Front-to-Back model is 48-979080. Side-to-Side model is 48-979081. Made in the U.S.A.

<https://ultra-fab.com>

### POWERED A-FRAME JACK

**BULLDOG**, Plymouth, Mich., presents the Powered A-Frame Jack that positions quickly with 22" of total travel. It has a 4,000-pound lift capacity, a drop leg and an integrated gearbox and motor. It deploys and hooks up easily at night with an onboard LED courtesy light, angled to illuminate coupler. It works in case of power loss with emergency manual override capability, easily accessible from the top with crank included. It retains like-new appearance with corrosion-resistant surfaces and has a limited five-year warranty.

<http://bulldogproducts.net>



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**Meyer Distributing**, Jasper, Ind., offers the Ultra Series 3500 electric tongue jack. The product has a 3,500-pound capacity.

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



### KING PIN TRIPOD

**BAL RV Products**, Elkhart, Ind., presents the Full-Timer KingPin TriPod. A hybrid aluminum and steel design reduces weight but keeps the heavy-duty construction. The product offers fast setup using individually adjustable ratchets. It is fully assembled out of the box.

<https://balrvproducts.com>





### AUTOMATIC LEVELING SYSTEM

**EQ Systems**, Elkhart, Ind., offers the EQ Smart-Level for Class A and Class C motorhomes. The company manufactures hydraulic lifting and leveling systems for the RV, horse trailer, motorsports and commercial industries, as well as electric stabilizing options. EQ Smart-Level is an automatic leveling system that can be configured for most RVs on the market – systems for diesel, Class A, Class C, Class B-plus, fifth wheels and travel trailers. Systems come with a 12-volt hydraulic pump and run up to six jacks and four hydraulic slide-outs from one manifold.

<https://eqsystems.us/>



### ELECTRIC TONGUE JACK

**Stromberg Carlson**, Traverse City, Mich., presents the JET-3755 Electric Tongue Jack, rated for 3,500 pounds with built-in motor protection to guard one's investment. It has 18" of travel with an additional 5" drop-down leg. The JET-3755 includes a built-in level and two separate LED lights for easy nighttime hookups. A removable 5.5" diameter footpad prevents sinking into gravel or soft ground. It is backed by a limited two-year warranty.

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



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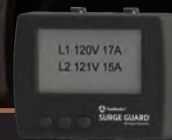
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<http://huskytow.com>

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[www.trailer-sphere.com](http://www.trailer-sphere.com)



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# RVIA: RVer Demographics Are Changing

By Dani Messick

The association's research shows RVers are getting younger and more diverse, requiring new marketing efforts to engage with them.



RVIA officials hosted a panel discussion at the Lerner Theater in April to share an analysis of current market conditions and reaching the next generation of RVers. Pictured from left to right are: ITR Economics Senior Economist Eric Post, RV Technical Institute Executive Director Curt Hemmeler, Chief Marketing Officer for Go RVing Karen Redfern, RVIA Vice President of Membership and Research Bill Baker and RVIA Executive Vice President James Ashurst, who served as the moderator for the event. (Photo by Dani Messick)

**ELKHART, Ind.** – The “typical” RV buyer is getting much younger.

That was the assessment of a panel of RV Industry Association leaders, who gathered April 26 at Elkhart's Lerner Theatre to share with industry professionals the results of the association's recent findings on current market conditions and RVers paths to purchase.

The 2020 and 2021 study presented data showing RV buyers are trending younger, with 38 percent being Millennials, 31 percent being Gen Xers, 22 percent being Baby Boomers, and 9 percent being Gen Zers. The median age for RV buyers is now 33.

“What that tells us is almost 70 percent (of buyers) are Millennials or Gen X,” said Bill Baker, RVIA vice president of membership and research. What's more, the median age of buyers was found to have dropped over the course of just two years, from a previous median age of 41 years.

RVIA research also shows about two-thirds of RV buyers were married. The average median income for those RV buyers was found to be roughly \$90,000.

According to the study, buyers spent an average of \$73,115 for their new RV. Millennials averaged about \$2,000 more, and 65 percent of them bought new RVs compared to the total average of 57 percent.

Of those buyers, 88 percent purchased an aftermarket part or accessory to enhance their RV, with 56 percent buying three or more aftermarket items, according to the market research.

Meanwhile, some 46 percent of buyers indicated they plan to list their RV on peer-to-peer rental sites.

“That does two things,” Baker explained. “One, it helps them recoup some of the cost – the investment they've made in their RV ... but the other thing it does is it expands the audience of RVs and opens up it up to even more consumers to try and ultimately bring more buyers.”



RVIA data shows today's RVers are trending younger, and those younger buyers are most inclined to purchase travel trailers or Class B motorhomes. (Photo courtesy of Go RVing)



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*“When you talk about slowing growth for 2022, this was always going to be the case. The economy could not rocket ship up like we did in 2021. ... It was always going to have this slowing growth period, and that’s what we’re doing now.”*

**– ITR Economics Senior Economist Eric Post**

Younger buyers, Baker added, tend to buy Class B motorhomes and travel trailers.

“Seventy percent of RVs are travel trailers, so people are buying those,” he said. “But I think younger buyers, those newer buyers, it’s sort of higher-end towables, motorhomes and Type B’s.”

In the study, buyers identified various reasons for buying RVs. Some 31 percent of buyers indicated they would use their RV to take road trips, while 30 percent cited the ability to travel in comfort as the top reasons for ultimately deciding to purchase an RV.

“While COVID might have pushed these folks to look at RVing – especially those folks that never would have considered it – the reason that they (RVs) often have been bought is that they want to do the same things that RVers that have done in tradition have done,” Baker said.

The study also questioned how to determine the likelihood of a potential buyer deciding to purchase. One of the biggest indicators is if they’d camped as a child.

“There are a lot of folks that didn’t have that experience and they’re very intimidated by the process,” Baker said.

The second top reason was social media.

“They really look to current owners for that information,” Baker added.

### **Changing Marketing for Changing Times**

Karen Redfern, chief marketing officer for Go RVing, further discussed this idea. Go RVing changed ad agencies two years ago, she explained, hoping the change would spark new growth in the industry.

“We wanted someone to help us convey energy and vibrancy in RVing,” she said.

Go RVing focused on marketing to high-value audiences. It also focused on two main components: recruiting and retaining. Redfern said that core marketing will target young families and young couples.

“Those are the people that we want to look at RVing in a very different way,” she said. “No matter what you want to do, you can find an RV to help you do it.”

Go RVing hopes to introduce that diversity of products to that audience.

“Like anything else, we need to make sure that our image talks to that new generation of buyers,” she said. “A lot of people base what they see of a brand based on what they see in their advertising.”

As a result, Redfern presented the revised Go RVing logo to RVIA members in attendance, explaining the symbolism associated with the open road.

“No matter what people are using their RV for, the one common denominator is you’ve got to get on the road to use it,” she said.

With an emboldened font, bright colors, and simplistic design, Redfern said she hopes will continue to draw attention.

“They will stand out when the consumer sees them, whether they’re scrolling through social media, or whether they see us on the television, or in the marketplace.”

Meanwhile, Redfern said Go RVing’s ads are shorter, bolder, louder, and simpler than in previous campaigns to display that energy and vibrancy they hope to share with potential RV buyers.

The marketing campaign also includes “how-to” consumer video series on the basics of RVing, done in conjunction with the RV Technical Institute. Those videos also teach new RVers how to travel, to go tailgating and to find lesser-known area attractions over the weekend.

“If it’s something that is ingrained in how they spend their leisure time, that’s certainly something that’s going to retain that vehicle and remain that RVer for life,” Redfern said.

Baker said the RVIA study indicated that a determining factor in whether RVers kept their unit or sold it was a matter of seven days per year. For those RVers who used their unit 21 days of the year, they were more likely to keep it, whereas those who only spent 14 days RVing were more likely to sell it, he said.

### **The Future of RV Sales**

ITR Economics Senior Economist and Econ Manager Eric Post also participated in the panel to explain how the current economy might impact RV sales.

“When you talk about slowing growth for 2022, this was always going to be the case,” Post said. “The economy could not rocket ship up like we did in 2021. ... It was always going to have this slowing growth period, and that’s what we’re doing now.”

Meanwhile, Post said rising gas prices aren’t as traumatic for the RV and travel industry as some people believe.

“To me, as an economist, the meaningful price isn’t so much the price we pay at the pump, but how much people are able to afford that price at the pump,” he said. “We’ve been here before. We’ve actually been here quite a bit. We’ve actually been well above this level a lot in history.”

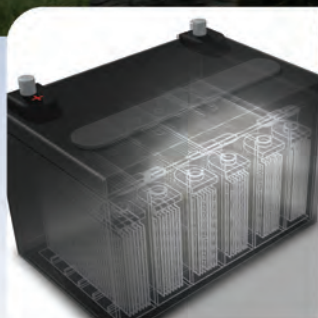
He explained that even if gas prices remained the same for



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*"We're at 11 million RV households now, and there's 1.4 million RV campsites in the country. ... That shows ... we're going to have to address this campground issue if we want to have a potential growth space."*

**– RVIA Executive Vice President James Ashurst**

the next year, the situation would still not be as dire as it was in some past years.

### **The Year of RV Tech Recruitment**

Calling 2022 "the year of recruitment" for RV technicians, Executive Director of the RV Technical Institute Curt Hemmeler explained that service and availability of campgrounds have proven to be the two biggest issues for RVers. The RV Technical Institute hopes to bring in 1,000 new technicians to the industry this year.

"This is not just dealer technicians," Hemmeler explained. "This is local techs, independent techs – we train them all."

RVTI is working with trade schools, corrections agencies, as well as high schools across 22 states to educate school counselors about the opportunities associated with a career as an RV technician, according to Hemmeler.

In 2020, RV service technician was the third fastest-growing occupation.

"That should give you some idea of how critical the need is out there," Hemmeler said.

To ensure that financing was not an obstacle for interested students, RVTI uses a host of subsidization to keep costs significantly lower than any college and most trade school training programs, at just \$300 for Level One and Level Two certifications. Facilities can

train their employees for \$1,200. Curriculum purchase is \$2,500 annually for dealers to teach their own techs.

"The vision I have of RVTI is that when I talk to someone at a high school, a high school senior, and they don't know what they want to do, I want to be able to say to them, 'It doesn't matter where you are in the United States, we have a school you can go to train. We have a job waiting for you,'" he said.

### **More RV Campsites Needed**

As the number of RVers has grown in recent years, the number of RV campsites has not kept pace, which poses problems for continued industry growth, according to RVIA Executive Vice President James Ashurst, who served as the moderator for the panel.

"We're at 11 million RV households now, and there's 1.4 million RV campsites in the country. ... That shows ... we're going to have to address this campground issue if we want to have a potential growth space," he said.

Baker added that more campgrounds and availability will benefit every aspect of the industry.

"I think that, on the private side in some circles, there's this feeling that public campsites are in direct competition with private (campgrounds). That might be true in some cases," he said, "but RVers don't distinguish. They just want to camp." **RVF**

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# Warm Up Your Parts Department

*Some simple merchandising techniques can make a world of difference for your parts department, resulting in more return visits and increased sales.*



**By Linda Cahan**

Linda Cahan is the president of Portland, Ore.-based Cahan & Co., which works with retailers of all sizes and categories to improve their bottom line through creative, affordable and appropriate visual merchandising, store design and renovations. For more information, visit [www.lindacahan.com](http://www.lindacahan.com)

**I**t's a good day – you just sold a whopper of an RV and you're doing a private little victory dance.

That's great for you. However, what is really great for your dealership is if that same customer keeps coming back for parts and service. That's the ongoing relationship that needs to happen for your workplace to stay in business.

Sadly, many RV parts departments feel like an afterthought instead of the profit generators and image boosters they can and should be.

Think of the last time you went into a really great auto parts store. It was well-lit, endcaps on the gondolas made sense, the signs told you where you needed to go and there was a selection of interesting, hard-to-find but must-have things at the checkout desk. The overall feeling was neat, clean and well-organized.

And, if you decided to do a white glove test on a shelf or piece of merchandise, it would come up clean. The guys (almost always men) at the counter were friendly, said "Hi" when you walked in – even if they were with someone – and you felt acknowledged and seen.

## No Cost/Low-Cost Merchandising Solutions

If this isn't happening in your part department, here are a few things you can do right now (almost) for free:

- Determine your "power" aisle. When people walk into the parts area, which way do they walk the most often? There is a simple way to figure this out – watch them!

Have everyone at the front desk take notes for about two weeks. Then, compare notes and a pattern will emerge. People tend to follow an easy, unobstructed route. That is your power aisle.

Once this aisle is identified, that's where seasonal, must-sell in the next few months merchandise goes to be noticed. Of course, a sign or two in this area will be the always important icing

on the cake – but signs aren't free.

- Clean out merchandise that hasn't sold in a year. Put it on a "dump" table somewhere visible in the parts area and mark it down significantly. Basically, get rid of it. Make room for new, more sellable and desired merchandise.

Yes, I know you spent good money for it – but it's dragging your sales down. Filling that space with things that sell just makes sense.

- Moving merchandise is the perfect time to clean your shelves and dust your stock. *All* people, regardless of their gender, notice and appreciate cleanliness. Plus, it makes your products look and feel new again – worth their cost.

- Make sure all your lightbulbs are working. Any dead lights kill the visuals in that area of your store. If a light is flickering, that can feel crazy to your staff and your customers. Fix it!

- If, by some miracle, you have track spot or flood lights, make sure they are trained on the merchandise, not a blank wall or on the floor.

If you're not sure, get on a ladder, hold up a piece of cardboard/magazine and place it in front of the bulb. Look at where the light fixture is pointing and remove the paper. If the light isn't shining on the merchandise, adjust it so it gives you more bang for your buck. Using the cardboard, check the light again. This is free, simple and highly effective.

- Clean the clutter. I write this in almost every column because it's the No. 1 thing you can do right now for free to make a huge difference in your parts area.

## Merchandise Solutions Worth the Money

Moving on to things that will cost you some money but are worth every penny:

- Imagine an animal entering a cave: All senses are on alert for safety. Your customers are human animals who do the same thing: People notice the light level in an area and unconsciously determine if they will be safe in that space.





PHOTOS COURTESY OF LINDA CAHAN

Here are just two examples of good merchandising signage with their distinctive blue-and-white lettering that calls attention to product categories.

If your lights are dim, older customers will feel far less welcome. Plus, they know they'll have to put on their "readers" to be able to make sense of small print on price signs and information on the products. Low lights make your merchandise feel less fresh and clean.

If you have all fluorescent bulbs, it may be time to change them out for LED fluorescents. Regular fluorescents fade over time. As they fade gradually, you won't notice because you're there every day – but a customer will. Ask someone who comes into the parts department what they think. Some of the best people to ask are family members who rarely visit. They are often honest and happy to be asked.

The better the light, the stronger your sales. If they can see it – read the print on the labels, see the price – they are more inclined to purchase the product.

- Signs sell. Not long, wordy signs with images – but simple, clean and declarative signs that tell people exactly what they need to know and where to go.

While a good image is worth a thousand words, the tendency of some graphic artists is to add more images, which diffuse the impact. If you want to mix words and images, once again, keep it simple.

For example, Wi-Fi connectivity is vital. A sign for an area with cell-signal boosters could just say "Wi-Fi" with the pie-shaped symbol of three to four curved lines on top of each other at the







*“Determine your ‘power’ aisle. When people walk into the parts area, which way do they walk the most often? There is a simple way to figure this out – watch them!”*

same distance. Anyone looking for Wi-Fi-related products will know immediately what’s under the sign.

Signs don’t have to be expensive. Vinyl letters and symbols on plastic PVC boards work well.

Sintra board is a high-quality, lightweight PVC board.

Also, sign clarity sells. For clarity, make sure the font you use for your signs is sans serif. That means a clean, simple typeface with no little extra lines on each letter. Some clean typefaces/fonts are Helvetica, Ariel, Calibri, Avenir and Gill Sans.

A font with serifs is Times New Roman, which is what you are possibly reading in the magazine. It’s excellent for print materials but not as good for long-distance reading, which is often what’s needed when someone comes into a parts area looking for a sign that will tell them where to go.

Two other ways to achieve visual clarity are slightly wider spacing between the letters and words, and good contrast between the letters and background. My favorite is white letters on a darker blue background. Blue is the color of communications and while blues are recessive colors, the contrast of bright white or slightly off-white letters make the sign pop without making it more visually important than the merchandise below.

- Endcaps sell! Endcaps – the fixtures perpendicular to the end of a gondola or floor-standing shelving unit – are the mannequins of your business. This is where to put merchandise that solves a problem: Trouble With Toilets, Quick Kitchen Fixes. Or a vendor story – all the products from one vendor that fit on the endcap.

Last, a timely suggestion for seasonal or holiday purchases: Get Ready for Spring Travel, Beaching It. Add some humor if you like – funnier than mine.

The worst thing you can do is just put random stuff on the shelves. It’s a sad waste of a great opportunity. Endcaps take some thought and creativity, but their sales are worth the effort. A sign truly caps off the endcap. Google “end cap sign holders” to dis-

cover what will work for your image and fixtures.

- Every aisle leads the eye to a focal point. Look at what’s at the end of each of your aisles. Is it something worth walking toward? The 4-foot or 5-foot aisle section of wall that shows as you walk down an aisle can have the same power as an endcap.

If you have a category of merchandise that will fit into the 4-foot or 5-foot by 6-foot-tall wall area, group it together and add a good sign on top. The sign can go on the wall fixture, if you have one, or attach it to the wall no more than 6 inches above the top of the merchandise on the top shelf. (See illustrations on page 69.)

- In the checkout desk area, if there is a product that comes with its own video, put it where a customer will see it as they are walking toward the desk. Make sure you stock the items being hawked in the video right next to or below the screen. Motion and sound are powerful influencers. Just keep the sound down, so whomever is at the checkout desk doesn’t lose their minds from the repetitive talking points.

### Additional Ideas on Merchandising

What follows should be in the “free” category, but as you have to invest in the right merchandise, it will cost you. Pick the right things and you could make excellent profits from this product placement.

Impulse buying is highest while standing at the counter or waiting on a line, so strategic product placement can pay dividends. If you’ve ever been annoyed by being guided through a long line of fixtures filled with small, affordable stuff, you know you are being played for all you’re worth. Retailers know that you’ll pick something up, either for yourself or someone else fairly often on your way to checking out.

Even more compelling is merchandise on the counter.

Thanks to Ace Hardware’s placement strategy, I now have a new flashlight I had no intention of buying. I also bought one for a friend as a birthday gift. Instead of a \$4 sale, Ace realized a \$45 sale. I was “played” – but with no regrets.

One other category to consider on or very near your checkout area is food – something that appeals to people who want sugar and those who crave salt. You may have a local manufacturer or maker of chocolates that would benefit from prime placement.

However, prices have to be right. Even with inflation, few people are going to spend more than \$1 on a single piece of candy, no matter how great it is. But, a few pieces for a dollar could sell well. Small bags of locally made pretzels are also popular.

While not local for most of you, Unique Pretzels is a 101-year-old company out of Reading, Pa., that is expanding around the United States. The company’s pretzels are addictive, and a with very few ingredients, are actually healthy.

In conclusion, out of this list of 14 “to-do” ideas, doing even just one will help. Consider implementing one idea a week, a month or possibly one a season.

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# Coping with and Managing Customer Rejection

*RV sales reps need to nurture a rapport with customers, to adjust their mindset when they face customer rejection and focus on skills management and improvement.*



By Thomas Morin

Thomas Morin is a veteran corporate executive, business owner and career coach. After joining Alpin Haus in Amsterdam, N.Y., Morin quickly became a top RV salesperson and was named trainer for all new salespeople in the dealership, and was subsequently promoted to sales manager, followed by director of employee development, training/coaching for all RV salespeople in the company. Morin is a certified career and sales coach. For more information on Morin and his coaching business, visit his website at: [www.unlockyourcareercoaching.com](http://www.unlockyourcareercoaching.com)

Possibly the single biggest obstacle a salesperson must deal with is the ability to manage customer rejection. This is true whether you sell RVs, cars, investment services or insurance.

There are other things that must be managed, such as the company's selling system, but none are as emotionally draining as the feeling of being rejected by a customer you just spent several hours with – and they still didn't buy from you.

Why is this such a huge issue in a salesperson's day?

A good RV salesperson will close about 30 percent of the qualified customers they work with, which means that 70 percent of the customers they work with will walk out the door without buying. So, despite a salesperson's best efforts for two, three or four hours, the likelihood the customer at some point will say, "I want to think it over" is extremely high.

Although it seems obvious that sales managers should be spending more time preparing salespeople for this inevitable issue rather than chasing it later, the fact is that most are so busy, they just don't have time to do it.

Among the salespeople I coach, managing customer rejection is *by far* the No. 1 problem-solving area of discussion, due to the emotional toll it takes on them. Some of the typical concerns I hear and help with is:

- Loss of confidence
- Are less capable of handling a challenging customer
- Feeling like no one will buy from them
- Begin to second guess their ability
- Have difficulty managing negative thinking
- Question if they have chosen the wrong career
- Worry they might not be able to make the next mortgage payment

Given that even a great salesperson will lose many more deals than they will close and sales

management doesn't have much time to help them get out in front of this issue, they need to implement their own steps to deal with customer rejection *before* it starts to get the best of them.

The first step is *prevention*. Managing their approach with customers to take additional steps early in the visit to the dealership and second, to adjust their *mindset* to shorten the time rejection sidetracks them when it happens. The final step is *skills management*, working on the technical things they are weak in, so their own missteps don't lead to customer rejection.

## Prevention

Salespeople must take extra effort to fine tune their approach with rapport building skills to help their customers achieve comfort before they even think about showing them a product. Too many salespeople fast forward through this step in the first few minutes and the customer never gets to the point where they feel complete rapport and trust with the salesperson.

When this happens, customers often find the RV that seems perfect for them but can't get to the decision to buy because something doesn't *"feel right"*. They can't put their finger on what it is, but they just don't feel comfortable taking their credit card out of the pocket for the down payment.

What's missing is the rapport and trust customers must have so their inner voice doesn't stop them from buying the RV of their dreams.

Preparing and practicing these techniques must be done in advance. Continued commitment to fine-tune and master these will reduce the chance of rejection and increase the odds of achieving a higher closing ratio.

## Make it about the customer

The sales procedures the company has taught their salespeople are important. Typically, though, last-minute selling steps run through a





*“Among the salespeople I coach, managing customer rejection is by far the No. 1 problem-solving area of discussion, due to the emotional toll it takes on them.”*

salespersons head in the early minutes of a customer’s visit, so they don’t forget them. That’s a mistake. From the moment customers walk in the door – whether you are in service or sales – everything you do needs to be about *them*.

#### **Initially, slow down the pace**

When customers first walk into the dealership, they are so excited, they’re willing to be shot out of a cannon through the back door to get into the lot to look at all the RVs. However, the first 10 minutes must be about the salesperson and the customer getting comfortable with each other – and this step simply cannot be rushed.

#### **Ask questions and listen**

Everything salespeople say in the first few minutes must directly be responsive to what your customer just said. The first step customers will take toward comfort is feeling sure that you are listening to them. Ask a question, listen to their response, and ask another directly related to their previous response. It does not matter what the subject is ... it just needs to be a connective, building process.

#### **ID your customers type and adjust**

Understanding the type of customer in front of you is critical. If your customer is openly expressing excitement about the fun they will have and memories camping will create for them, focus on that in questioning. If they’re asking detailed, technical questions about product and how things work, make answers to questions detailed, factual and provide documentation if available.

The best salespeople are chameleons, quickly adjusting to the style of their customer, because customers prefer salespeople who are like *them*.

#### **Mindset**

Salespeople need to make the *decision* (and it is a decision) to know that customer rejection *will* happen and to keep it in perspective when it does, so that each time it happens, it’s less of an emotional event than the time before.

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### Don't take it personally

Having thick skin is a requirement in sales. Sadly, customers do make illogical decisions at times, and that has nothing to do with the salesperson. Even in this situation, your good work was noticed. "No" doesn't always mean no – most often it means "not right now." So, move on.

### Keep emotions in check

It is certainly important to celebrate getting a sale, but within reason. It's better to not get too high when a great sale happens – but it's even more important to not get too low when it doesn't. Staying somewhere in the middle emotionally and not looking at everything as a win or a loss is important.

If you can train your mind to play the long game and accept a tie for the moment, you'll be better able to get the win when the customer stops back in.

### No carryover

There will be times when you work with the 'grinder', who drags you around the sales lot acting interested in buying for hours and then walks out without deciding. It's frustrating for the salesperson.

However, before you take on the next customer, salespeople *MUST empty their head* for eight to 10 minutes and let go of that experience. How you do that is different for every salesperson, but it must happen.

If you don't, the next customer will quickly read your negative body language and you'll kill the next deal as well.

### Support system

When salespeople go through days or weeks when they just can't seem to sell anything, there is tremendous value to having someone to share these experiences with – even if it's just to get the frustrations off your chest. It could be another salesperson, sales manager, coach, mentor, spouse or just a good friend. But you must have a system in place to unload the negative emotions and reset yourself.

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It would be great if every sales manager had the time and initiative to sit with salespeople to diagnose unsuccessful customer experiences and look for areas of improvements. However, many do not. Salespeople can still use the opportunity to learn from mistakes and make changes for improvement, but they must be prepared to take on the responsibility for being their own HR manager.

Capturing key information from customer interactions is far more important than it might seem on the surface. For every customer, regardless of whether it went well or did not, or whether they purchased or not, salespeople must take one-minute to quickly recap three things:

1. What went well
2. What didn't go well
3. Key moments

At the end of each week (or month), look for consistent issues from your notes on things that consistently worked well (so you can keep doing them) and ongoing mistakes or missteps that can be corrected. If those notes indicate specific training that might be needed, identify the possible sources where that training could be obtained and what steps need to be taken to implement that.

To truly reduce customer rejection, you must be completely committed to improving the developmental areas that may have contributed to your customer's inability to say "yes" and purchase from you.

The skill improvement plan is simple, straightforward, specific and directly improves areas that increase customer rapport and trust. The plan should have the following: What you will do? How will you do it? And when you will do it by?

Most of the things that have prevented customers from buying from you are usually situational responses that are easily and quickly fixable by writing out the situation the customer presented or question the customer asked that you didn't handle well, creating a response that solves the issue that you are comfortable saying and verbally practicing that with a co-worker or friend.

Writing it is one thing, while saying it out loud is quite another. As I say to people I train, you must get the words to pass through those lips or it just doesn't work.

Committing this plan, or one similar, will dramatically improve your ability to either prevent or deal with customer rejection when it happens. **RVP**

[illegible]

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# In Case You Missed it

Breaking news exclusives from RV PRO's website



## ATC Breaks Ground on New HQ, RV Division

Aluminum Trailer Co. (ATC) broke ground in April on a new 221,000-square-foot facility at its home in Nappanee, Ind., which will be the new location for the company's headquarters, as well as its RV division.

ATC hasn't been involved in making RVs all that long, but in a relatively short time demand for its toy haulers – the Game Changer and Game Changer PRO – has grown tremendously, according to President and CEO Robert Paden.

"It's really taken off for us. We actually got into it slowly with a toy hauler product line based on our aluminum design and construction and it's been snowballing," said Paden, who has been with the company five years. "(We) gained a lot of speed and so now it's approaching half of our business and it's constrained by capacity, so this is going to be dedicated solely to the construction of the RV product line."

Manufacturing in the new building should begin sometime in the fourth quarter, Paden said, and the space for the company's corporate offices, including sales and marketing, should be finished by the end of the first quarter next year.

The new building at 5225 E. Market St. is being built by Yoder Construction. This new plant is in addition to the other three facilities ATC has in the Nappanee area, which total more than 200,000 square feet among them. All are within about five miles of each other, Paden said.

The company's current head count is about 440, and once the new facility is completed it will create the need for another 150 to 200 employees.

ATC's growth has accelerated significantly in the past couple of years, Paden said, due to a strategic change it made in its business model.

"It's actually a very important shift for us," Paden said. "Historically, we have gained market share and customer and



**ATC celebrates the groundbreaking ceremony for the new facility in Nappanee, Ind., with company CEO Robert Paden, Congresswoman Jackie Walorski; Nappanee Mayor Phil Jenkins; and representatives from Yoder Construction.**

brand loyalty by customizing trailers. However, we reached a tipping point where it was no longer scalable. There was no leverage to be had in customizing every trailer at the volumes that were demanded of us so, about two years ago, at the end of 2019, we decided to shift our business model to be a pure OEM.

"In other words, we would design and deliver product for target customers in different market segments, whether it be cargo, car hauler or commercial on the trailer side, or the RV side, based on an intimacy with the market. In other words, understanding what the end customers' desired application would be for the product," he said. "And it has taken off. It has completely changed our business."

**Read more:** <https://rvpro.link/ilugn>

## Ohio-Based Trucking Company Tries to Stay Ahead of the Curve



**Efficient Transportation primarily hauls cargo trailers and towable RVs. Clients include nuCamp, Xtreme Outdoors, InTech RV, Sunset RV, Aliner and Braxton Creek.**

As a younger man, 28-year-old Justin Miller was an over-the-road trucker who had already been through some ups and downs when he reached a point where he was in debt and needed steady work, hopefully doing the job he loved. A friend at his church told him about Efficient Transportation in Sugarcreek, Ohio, and Miller got a job there as a driver.

Fast forward a few years, and he now owns the hauling company – and he has very definite ideas about how he wants to treat his customers and employees.

"What makes us different from other transportation companies – and why I think that we're the best to work for and the best to use to haul RVs and cargo trailers – is simply because of the service and the communication and the effort we all put in for all our customers and all our drivers," Miller said. "We all work together as a team."

Efficient Transportation primarily hauls cargo trailers and towable RVs. His trailers – company-owned – are capable of hauling three 16-footers.

**Read more:** <https://rvpro.link/a5g6i>

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