

The Mighty 3: Family-owned auto dealerships still going strong

Mock, Roe, Sigel have been in town a combined 143 years

By Jeff Duewel of the Daily Courier

Fifty years ago, a dozen or more family dealers sold new cars in Grants Pass.

Today there are three, now that Wheeler Toyota sold last fall to a North Dakota-based auto group.

The remaining family-owned, new-car dealerships — Mock, Roe and Sigel — have a combined 143 years in Grants Pass.

Here are snapshots of each of them:

• **MOCK'S FORD-LINCOLN-MAZDA.** A clipping from 1952 on the wall of Gene Mock's office shows an advertisement from the Eugene Register Guard, with Eugene Allen Register Guard, with E.A. Mock & Sons used cars where you could also buy Studebakers and REO trucks.

Eugene Allen Mock came west from South Dakota and started during the Great Depression in Eugene. That's Gene's grandfather, who had six sons and a daughter — all of whom went into the car business at one time or another.

Mock's dealerships, used and new cars, spread south to Roseburg and arrived in Grants Pass in 1957, when Sam and Clair opened a Ford dealership at Sixth and I streets.

A year later, brother Pete arrived, and he would guide the franchise until his death in 1988. His wife, Barbara, ran the Dollar Rent A Car on the lot for a time.

Today Pete's sons Gene, 57, and Don, 55, continue the Mock tradition with the longest-running dealership in Grants Pass, Mock's Ford-Lincoln-Mazda.

Gene is general manager, Don the operations manager. Their sister Gail Mock retired a few years ago after running the RV sales for Mock's for years.

The company's 13-year-old facility graces an entire block between Sixth and Seventh streets, a block from the Rogue River.

Before the big makeover in 2003, Gene said the former Mock's facility was falling apart before it



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Ross Roe, right, has had help running Roe Motors for years, including, from left, son-in-law Joe Bouquet, his daughter, Lori Boquet, and son Steve Roe. They pulled up roots from Michigan and moved here in 1983.

was razed. When it rained hard, 27 buckets had to be set in various places under the leaky roof.

"It was almost comical, there were six or seven buildings built at different times," Gene Mock said. "It didn't represent the product well for us."

Today's facility is a thing of beauty, an island on the block. "Ford was pushing facility improvements, and gave us incentives," Mock said.

Not many Ford dealers pre-date Mock's in the region, though Wilson in Corvallis and Harper in Eureka go back 75 and 100 years, respectively, Mock said.

They didn't last this long working all the time and not carving out a little time for fun. The Mock clan are sportsmen.

On this gray winter day in Grants Pass, golf aficionado Korky Daniels, Mock's business manager, fulfilled a lifelong dream by attending a PGA golf tournament, this one in Phoenix, Ariz. Gene sent him a text, and found out Korky was following PGA star Jordan Spieth.

Gene's dad Pete, whose name graces the memorial fast-pitch softball tournament during Boatnik, had his own commercial fishing boat off the



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Gene, left, and Don Mock of Mock's Ford Grants Pass are third-generation Mocks in the car business. Grandfather Eugene Allen started in Eugene, and father Pete came to Grants Pass in 1957.

Southern Oregon coast. "Dad was pretty laid back," Gene Mock said. "He didn't get too fired up about things. If I learned anything from him, it was to have fun doing what you're doing."

Gene played some college basketball and almost went into coaching in the early 1980s.

Two of Mock's long-time co-workers, Korky and his brother Lance Daniels, played fastpitch softball for many years. The Mocks also dominated some years in city league basketball.

Lance is the sales manager. "He knows the business better than anybody," Gene said. "Sometimes he has to tell the factory how to do it."

Of the approximately 50 employees, more than have been with the company for at least 20 years, "because it's such a great place to work," said Tonya Townzen, 25 years as office manager.

Virgil Cardwell and Bill Mehterian are veterans in the sales department.

"It's not even a job," Cardwell said. "It's just fun. We're all family. The best family you could ever work for, bar none."

Like all dealers, the hit from was hard during the economic swoon in 2008 and 2009, when sales dropped more than 30 percent, Gene Mock said. But things are on the upswing now.

The biggest news on the Ford front, Mock said, is the return of the Bronco in 2020.

"I get more people coming in to ask about that," he said.

Don and Gene recently sat down and realized they've been with Mock's Ford longer than their father, who made 30 years in Grants Pass.

Don grew up building hot rods, good training for his current role as service manager. He said he learned under Ted Mansfield, whom Pete Mock knew from back in South Dakota.

"Ted was selling cars before a lot of people even owned cars," Don said.

How things have changed over the decades, with computers in every car.

"I remember when we had wrenches," Don said. "Now you plug in the computer and reprogram it. I can't tell you how often people have problems with a transmission, and it's just an update on the computer."

After 69 years, things are bound to change.

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TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Sears is owned and operated by family members Marshal Fronckowiak and his parents, Doris and Michael.

Local family's Sears acquisition the latest in string of ownerships

By Edith Decker of the Daily Courier

Richard Sears and Alvah Roebuck have been gone for decades. But the Sears in our town is still a family-owned store.

After the company's catalog business was put to rest, many stores became "Sears Hometown" stores with local owners. The Sears company spun the Hometown idea off to a separate company in 2012.

The stores kept right on selling the popular Craftsman tools and a range of appliances, including the Sears brand Kenmore, DieHard batteries, mowers and other items that were Sears' best sellers.

In November, the Fronckowiak family took over the Grants Pass store. They already owned the Klamath Falls and Harbor store dealerships and just a few weeks ago, they added the North Bend store to the group.

Michael and Doris Fronckowiak took possession of the Grants Pass Sears on Nov. 27, 2016, right after Black Friday. They'd previously moved (temporarily) from their hometown, Klamath Falls, where they've owned the Sears store since 1999.

One of their sons, Marshal, worked in sales for them and other businesses. He purchased the Harbor store from his folks in 2001 and now also owns the North Bend store.

Their son Christopher is working at the Klamath Falls location and should be taking that store over from them so they can retire.

"Hopefully by the end of the year," Doris says. Their third son is not the "born salesman" that Marshal and Christopher are, Doris says. He works for General Electric training people in the use of medical equipment in Australia.

Before they tried life as Sears owners, Doris

ran two McDonald's restaurants in Klamath Falls for 26 years. Michael worked in appliance repair.

"It was a natural to get involved," Doris says. "We liked the idea that it's a small-town business that we could keep going."

The Hometown stores serve rural areas, where choices for major purchases are sometimes limited, Doris says. People may go to a larger city to shop, she notes — "You can go to the store and get a dress. But you're probably not going to pick up a washing machine and take it home."

The Sears Hometown stores offer local delivery. She adds that the Kenmore appliance brand is still going strong with more Kenmores in American homes than any other brand of appliance.

"And it's hard to walk into a Sears store and not think of Craftsman."

Working as a family has been a way of life, she says. "I think the family has the same goals in mind."

But they each have a separate job to do. "We keep out of one another's way."

Doris is the administrator, Marshal the merchandiser who makes the stocking decisions, while Michael works on deliveries, the repairs and behind the scenes to solve problems.

Their plans for Grants Pass include expanding the lawn and garden department, to respond to the popularity of gardening in our area, and to increase customer service.

"We want to help every customer — even if we have to direct them somewhere else," Doris says. "We want to say yes to the customer."

They immediately increased their work force from five to nine after taking on the store.

"We want to grow the business," she says.



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