

Auto From Page 4E

• **ROE MOTORS.** The Roe Motors dynasty dates back to 1983 in Grants Pass, when the family pulled up roots from Sault St. Marie, Mich., and bought the local Bartle-McKee dealership.

Ross Roe, the patriarch, now 87, got his Michigan dealership in 1967, after starting with General Motors in Illinois in 1950. He describes himself as a “South Dakota farm boy.”

The dealership is a family affair — middle son Steve is general manager, daughter Lori Boquet is sales manager, and her husband Joe is a salesman. Ross still comes by the office, but is semi-retired.

“I show up more than I should, but everybody knows Steve and Lori run the operation,” Ross said.

Ross credits his wife, Annette, for much of the family’s success.

“She stayed home, and if we made any money we put it back in the business,” Ross said. “She was the ultimate single mom.”

Annette’s father was also a national service manager for GM.

“We have gasoline in our veins,” Steve said.

“The family is a strength,” Steve added. “All of us have different interests and passions, and that’s what keeps us together as a family.”

Steve and Lori’s brothers Jim and Brad are also in the car business, Jim with General Motors in Detroit and Brad at a dealership in Gresham.

In 2015, Roe Motors’ family focus earned them the Family Harmony Award, part of Oregon State University’s Excellence in Family Business awards

The Roes are deeply involved in the community, much of it behind the scenes, Steve said.

Steve became chairman of the board of Asante Health Systems on Jan. 1, after serving on that board for 24 years. He’s made three trips to India with a church group to help the Dalit population, once known as the “Untouchables.” He’s on the board of the Josephine County Grants Pass Chamber of Commerce, and heavily involved with Gateway Rotary.

“If it wasn’t for our employees, I wouldn’t be able to do what I do in the community,” Steve said.

Of those employees, the Roes have a couple dating to the early 1980s — Pete Simonsen the parts manager, and Bob Hollenbeck, customer relations.

Aramis Taylor, on the other hand, has been in sales for seven months, after working his way up from washing cars, then to lot manager.

“They want you to be happy here. They want you to succeed,” Taylor said.

Steve Roe said much of that success is owed his sister Lori.

“She’s incredibly bright, wicked smart, good with people and very logical,” he said. “You couldn’t have a better sibling.”

Steve said his father brought passion and caring to the business. “He has a good heart,” he said.

Ross said his son and daughter “have a tremendous memory of names, faces and technology,” and added “this family has very strong morals on how businesses should be run.”

The only glitch at Roe over three decades came in 2009, when General Motors went bankrupt before the government came to the rescue. Everyone was on pins and needles at Roe, wondering if they’d be on the list of closed dealerships.

But they were one of the 5,000 survivors of the 5,900 dealerships before the bankruptcy.

“It definitely affected us,” Steve Roe said. “Our customers were very concerned about us.”

When the Roes decided to move West in 1983, they spent nine months looking for a dealership, with Ross and Steve doing



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Jim Sigel Jr., left, and his brother Jeff. Below, some of the cars on the Sigel lot.

most of the traveling.

“That’s when you find the strength of the family,” Steve said. “We had nest eggs, but you burn through cash.”

The timing was good, with the two youngest children Lori and Brad just out of high school, and Steve and Jim still single.

“We came here as a family,” Steve said.

A dealer in Portland advised them to talk to Dick Bartle in Grants Pass. Steve remembers talking about the dealership in beautiful Riverside Park, and staying the night at Patrick’s Creek Lodge on the way to Crescent City, Calif., which imprinted the beauty of the area on the family.

After buying, for a short time the entire family lived in a trailer on Leonard Road.

Over time the business thrived, and after the tough times last decade, thrives again. The company hasn’t budged from its downtown location, but has expanded to nearby lots, including the former Gospel Rescue Mission. Two more old structures will be razed in the coming months as the business spreads to D Street.

The Roes are fond of Grants Pass, their home of 34 years.

“We love it. The people are so good to work with,” Steve Roe said. “We have our problems, but there’s an effort to make things better.”

• **JIM SIGEL AUTOMOTIVE.** Chevrolet, Nissan and Honda — those three heavyweight automakers, give the Jim Sigel dealership on the north end of town some clout.

“We’re very fortunate to have the three lines we have,” said co-owner Jeff Sigel. “That’s very unusual now.”

Kelt Chevrolet became Jim Sigel Chevrolet in 1968, at Seventh and J Streets, in the building that now houses the Purple Parrot, Liberty Tax and others.

Jim Sigel, who died in 1996, worked his way up in Portland with Marv and Ron Tonkin, becoming general manager for Ron Tonkin Chevrolet.

Jim Sigel Jr., 68, remembers it wasn’t an easy transition when he came down to work for his dad.

“I drove down here and thought, ‘You gotta be kidding,’” he said. “This is nowhere.”

The location of the current dealership, opened in 1978, looked more like a farm in 1968.

“Dad had to get the city to run water and sewer up here,” said son Jeff, 63.

Jim Jr. and Jeff are co-owners today.

In the early days, down at Seventh and J, within a couple of blocks you had Kanger’s Body Shop, and a gas station owned by Clay Leonard, father of Lonnie Leonard of Caveman Towing.

Jim Sigel Sr. bought out Tonkin’s share in five years, and by then had become a Honda



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Cars at the Mock’s Ford lot.

dealer.

Jeff was still in high school when the family came to Grants Pass.

Younger brother Joel, 58, was known for football exploits, at Grants Pass and at Portland State. He also worked with Nike in Asia for years, before coming back home to sell cars for a few years before retirement.

Jeff’s two children, Jessica and Michael, work at the dealership, extending the Sigel lineage to three generations.

The Sigel relationship with

Honda goes back to when Tonkin was still partners in the business, Jeff Sigel said.

“Ron was a visionary. He went to Japan a couple of times, and got all excited,” Jeff recalled. “Dad’s thinking was just Chevy. He said ‘What’s a Honda? That’s a motorcycle.’”

But the Honda 600, with a two-cylinder engine of all things, came to Grants Pass in 1971.

“When the first load came in, all the Chevy guys said, ‘Serious-ly?’” Jeff remembers.

It only took about 10 minutes



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to sell one, though, at just \$1,395.

Pretty soon the Honda Civic arrived, about the time of the big fuel shortages starting in 1973, and the fuel-efficient Hondas took off.

Sigel also got more into the imports when it bought out nearby Auto Martin in the late 1980s, giving it Nissan, Mercedes and Volvo, and started up Sigel Imports. The import store closed, but Sigel retained Nissan.

The family feeling extends to employees.

Jim Hubbard has been with Sigel for 35 years. Jeff Hornbeck is the parts manager since 1991.

Chris Carpenter’s been in the body shop for more than 18 years.

“It’s nice to be part of a big outfit. I love it here,” Carpenter said.

Sigel’s community contributions include donating to Crossing Bridges, a therapeutic riding center, and to Hearts with a Mission, a shelter for troubled youths.

When General Motors — which makes Chevrolet — went bankrupt in 2009, Jeff Sigel remembers how it all seemed surreal.

“I remember a time when they were talking about the government declaring GM a monopoly,” he said. “To think of a company going from that to bankruptcy, that was unthinkable.”

Dealerships in Klamath Falls and Bend closed, and the Sigels were nervous.

“There were several months of anxiety,” Jeff Sigel said.

But today Sigel plugs along as smoothly as it did when the founder “J.J.” ran the show, his sons said.

“Dad always wanted to be a dealer, that was his dream,” Jeff said. “After that he wanted to build a nice facility and have it be something special. He was able to do something not everybody gets to do, achieve his dream.”

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Two auto dealers now part of multi-state organizations

By Jeff Duewel of the Daily Courier

The other two new car dealerships in Grants Pass started out as family businesses, but through growth and mergers are now part of multi-state organizations.

Lithia Chrysler Jeep Dodge, 1421 N.E. Sixth St., is one of the more than 100 Lithia dealerships in 14 states.

The Lithia car empire began in 1946 when Walt DeBoer opened a Plymouth-Dodge dealership in Ashland, and named it after the famous springs near town.

Following Walt’s death in 1968, Walt’s son Sid along with Dick Heimann, grew the business to include five stores and 19 franchises in Southern Oregon, according to the company website. In December 1996, this collection of dealerships was transformed into Lithia Motors Inc., a publicly traded company (NYSE stock symbol-LAD).

“We envisioned a company that would continuously grow, provide great customer service, and opportunities for employees,” the company wrote.

Lithia is one of America’s largest automotive retailers featuring most domestic and import franchises. It now operates 139 stores in 17 states.

Grants Pass Toyota, 375 Redwood Highway, is part of the Rydell Group, based in Grand Forks, N.D., which purchased Wheeler Toyota in 2016. Rydell has 68 dealerships in 11 states.

It all started with Leonard Rydell’s Chevrolet business in Grand Forks in 1954. The dealership enjoys a sparkling facility in Grants Pass that was built in 2007.

The founder of Wheeler Toyota, Fred Wheeler, died in April 2016. Fred and wife Dorothy purchased Caveman Motors in 1963 and moved from Portland to start Wheeler Motors, selling Ramblers.