

Roughing It Smoothly®

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Beaver Coach Sales and Service: A Storied History



Beaver Coach Sales and Service in Bend, Oregon, has a storied history whose trail leads back to the Beaver Motorcoach Corporation, founded in 1968 by Jim Hogue and Frank Storch. Today, the present company, owned by Ty and Jodie Kelly, occupies the same buildings that Beaver Motorcoach used for its sales and service operation after its luxurious diesel coaches first rolled off the production line 33 years ago in the building next door.

In fact, when we visited the dealership in late July of this year, several Beaver coaches were in the shop for service, drawn back to their home state like the swallows to San Juan Capistrano. And, believe it or not, nearly a dozen employees who had once worked for Beaver Motorcoach are still there today.

Matt Perlot, a key player in Beaver's development, left the company in 1988 and started Safari Motorcoach Corporation. In the early 1990s, Beaver Motorcoach Corporation faced financial problems it could not overcome. It went into bankruptcy and was acquired by Perlot in 1994. Monaco bought Safari in 2001 and the Beaver Motorcoach brand name passed to Monaco. In 2006 Monaco moved the Beaver Motorcoach assembly plant to Coburg, Oregon, but three years later it also had to file for bankruptcy. A year later Navistar bought Monaco, but decided not to purchase the Beaver Motorcoach brand name, leaving the

brand in a strange limbo. In 2013 Navistar sold its RV assets to Allied (REV Group).

Two years ago Ty Kelly, geographically snared in the nostalgia of the iconic brand of Beaver Motorcoach, approached Jim Jacobs at the REV Group and bought the rights to Beaver as a word, brand, and logo for a nominal sum. Beaver Coach Sales and Service (BCS) now supports the Beaver Ambassador Club which held its first rally at its Bend origin last July.

Ty and Jodie Kelly have a great story to tell. They are far from



by Fred Thompson

P R O F I L E

being Bend natives. “Scott (Shu) Shaver, his wife Paula, and my wife Jodie were on the same cheerleading team at Hazen High School in Renton, Washington,” Ty began. “In 1978 Ty was looking for a job and wandered into a waterbed store where he met Rick Kenaston, the warehouse manager.”

Ty chimed in to finish the story. “I was just 17. Rick hired me for one day to unload trucks. We were together for 15 years at Waterbed Warehouse.”

“After Jodie and I married, I got Shu a job in the warehouse,” Ty continued. “Shu eventually became sales manager over 28 stores including Waterbed Center, Mattress Center, and Kid’s Castles. There was a lot more training required in the furniture business. Shu set up a training center and visited each store to do more training. Rick was our buyer for all 28 stores and I was the distribution manager. We were based in Kent, Washington, and Eugene, Oregon.”

The waterbed craze began in California in the early 1970s. Modern technology made the waterbed possible with the invention of vinyl that could be sealed to reliably hold water. In the 1980s, the waterbed made the leap from the bachelor pad to the suburban bedroom. By 1987 one in five mattresses sold in the U.S. was a waterbed. By 1990 the popularity of waterbeds began to wane.

“We saw a marked decline in our business in the early 1990s that pointed toward bankruptcy,” Shu said. “One of our associates jumped to the RV industry and helped me transition in 1995 to a position as finance manager with Tveten RV in Fife, Washington.”

“Shu introduced me to the sales manager,” Ty said. “I began my career in RV sales later that year. We were selling Beaver and Newmar motorhomes and Terry and Airstream towables. We signed up with Tiffin in 1997. Dan Blanke was our Tiffin rep. I enjoyed selling Allegros and won three Tiffin cruises, but I



gravitated toward the Beaver after I sold my first one at a FMCA rally in August 2000.”

“In early 2001, Beaver Coach Sales and Service facilities in Bend went up for sale,” Ty said. “Five other salesmen and I took a leap of faith and bought the dealership! Organized as Beaver Coach Sales of Oregon, Inc., we had no idea how to run a business so we hired a general manager to whom we all reported.”

I raised my eyebrows as I listened. “That’s right. The owners reported to their employee,” he continued. “Since we had the best Beaver service facility in the country, securing the dealership was no problem. Matt Perlot put up a bond to guarantee the business. Beaver was building thirteen coaches a week at that time. We called our company Beaver Coach Sales of Oregon and brought the name back to Bend.”

Sean Lakin came on board as the service manager, bringing a depth to the young company’s service operation. Sean had started in Beaver Motorcoach’s service department in 1993 when he was 17. He is now 42. Scott Shaver, who got Ty a job at Tveten, joined the company as the finance manager, a position

With 30 years of experience in the RV industry, Ty Kelly is a talented marketer of diesel pusher motorhomes, but he emphasizes that service drives sales. BCS boasts 14 service bays, two of which are shown at left. Above: Greg Clarke (kneeling) is the sales manager for the company. His staff includes (standing from left) Rod Lemond, Rick Kenaston, Travis Truma; (seated from top) Eric Shaver, Dustin Allen, Ryan Kelly.





The service team, including service advisors, technicians, and prep team, obviously make up the largest segment of the employees at BCS, emphasizing management's philosophy to place service above sales. *Standing from left:* Brad, Oscar, Patrick, Kevin, JC, Steve, Charles, Jeremy, Paul, Burt, Carl, Larry, Nicole, Matt, Freddy, Max, Dave. *Kneeling from left:* Pohn, Joel, Sean, John, Dan, Lee, Jim B., Jim P., Nick, Dillon. *Sitting from left:* Megan, Becke, Noemi, Amber, Rachel, Laura, Isidra, Maria.

he still holds today. Jodie took over as office manager.

When the recession hit in late 2008, two of the partners sold their shares of the business to the remaining four partners. The general manager left for a position in Portland. Hanging on through the bleak business climate, the partners decided to bring in an auction company in 2011 to liquidate their inventory.

"In December 2011, we dissolved the company and reopened on February 1, 2012, as Beaver Coach Sales LLC. By February

While touring the service bays, we found Sean Lakin visiting with Kevin Dodd, a 22-year technician. Sean heads up the service advisors team, the service department, and the parts department.



12 we had sold all but three motorhomes," Ty said. "I bought out my three partners and found a silent partner, Ben Tuma, to provide the working capital we needed. We then began working with three consignors, eliminating our floor planning expense, and continuing to draw strength from our service operation.

"Shu and I did all of the sales, consignments, and leases. Sean Lakin and Ken Carpenter ran the service. Scott Dysen handled the parts department. We were a lean operation," Ty said, excitement still coming with retelling the story.

The strategy worked. In 2012 the fledgling company racked up \$8.9 million in sales. Sales growth posted an upward curve of \$12, \$17, \$25, \$35, and \$45 million through 2017. By the end of 2013, bankers were happy to provide capital for floor planning that made standard dealerships possible again.

"We got a Thor dealership a couple of years later," Ty noted. "Adam Gudger, the national sales manager for Thor, recalled my success with Beaver and knew I could sell highline coaches. We went to Louisville in 2013 to discuss a dealership with Bob Tiffin, but it did not materialize that year.

"Entegra did not offer us a dealership in Fall 2013 when we were in Middlebury to see Thor," Ty continued. "Then we made an unplanned stop at their plant and they gave us an after-hours tour. Later at the Redmond-Central Oregon RV Show, we invited them to visit our Bend store. The Entegra rep was impressed with our service facility with 14 bays. They needed good service in the Northwest and that probably sealed the deal. We became a full-line Entegra dealer in Spring 2014. In 2017 we were one of their Top Five dealers."

Bob and Judy Tiffin often visit northern California and southern Oregon in the summer. Bob scouts RV dealerships while Judy visits the quilt shows and demonstrations in Sisters, Oregon. "Bob kind of found us by accident in 2016 and, of

course, we were not expecting him,” Ty related. “Eric Shaver, Shu’s son, showed Bob around our service facility and the sales area. Bob later remarked to me, ‘We had always heard that Bend was not a diesel market.’ Eric noted that Bob counted the Entegras in our inventory. It wasn’t long before we were a full-line Tiffin dealer.”

Beaver Coach Sales and Service became a dealer for Tiffin in November 2016. “We agreed verbally to be a dealer and shook on it,” Ty said. “Before we had signed the paperwork, we saw that TMH had already put us on their website as a Tiffin dealer in Bend, Oregon. Of course, we were pleased. In the 2018 model year ending June 30, we sold 63 Tiffin coaches. Bob called to tell us that we had set the record for the most units sold by a first year Tiffin dealer.”

At a recent RV rally in the Northwest, Tiffin showed a Zephyr that did not sell at the rally. “Our rep asked if we would like to take it,” Ty said. “Four days later two Zephyrs showed up at our store and we sold both of them in two weeks. We are definitely good at selling highline coaches. There are only two dealers west of the Mississippi that sell Zephyrs and we are one of them.”

The company provides coaches each year for the stars in the Oregon Jamboree, staged in Sweet Home in August. “Other than giving us tickets for the shows, we don’t receive anything for the service. It is a non-profit fundraiser for the town and we are glad to help. Of course, it does have the benefit of putting our name before a large public,” Ty related.

“Last summer Bob spent five days here in our dealership. We timed his visit for our Customer Appreciation Day and Dinner,” Ty said. “We also hosted a Beaver Motorcoach rally with 100 members in attendance. A noteworthy moment during the rally was a roundtable with Bob Tiffin, Frank Storch, Jim Hogue, and Ron Estes (#1 Beaver salesman for many years). They talked about the histories of the two companies and then opened the floor for a great Q&A. We videotaped the session to share the stories with our customers.”

There is a great synergy that is easy to see and feel when you visit Beaver Coach Sales and Service. Friendliness, smiles, and greetings let a seasoned RVer, a newcomer to the lifestyle, or a curious, first-time visitor really feel welcomed to Beaver Coach. It is a really genuine atmosphere of sharing and helping. For an assured confidence level, RVers should read BCS’s Yelp, Google My Business, and Facebook reviews.

No wonder, really! Solid relationships and experience run 40 years deep. Scott Dyson, Beaver’s inventory manager, has been coming to work at the same address for 44 years. Scott’s mother, Betty, was a one-person public relations team. She encouraged and inspired everyone. At the company’s annual dinner, the “Coco Betty Award” is given in her honor, a recognition of the employee who inspires the whole BCS team.

“Going the extra mile” builds a company’s reputation as well as the technician’s. Not long ago the owner of an Allegro Bus broke down late on a Friday afternoon just a few miles from Bend. He found Beaver Coach on the Tiffin website and called



Jim Peters brought 27 years of experience in the Beaver factory to his job at Beaver Coach Sales & Service where he has worked for five years.

for assistance. Sean was working late and took the call. He went to his location, got him started, and loaned him the company tow car for the weekend. The service department made the repairs he needed on Monday. The owner called Sean later for advice on other issues and invited Sean to his ranch in Wyoming to hunt antelope. Tiffin heard about the incident and called to thank Sean and Beaver Coach Sales. When Ty retold this story, he added, “This happens pretty often here.”

“We try to help owners who break down within a fairly wide radius from Bend,” Sean said. “Some dealers will not service motorhomes they did not sell. We take an opposite approach—provide good service to everyone because it’s a ‘good Samaritan’ policy. We do believe, however, that service drives sales. Those who are most grateful are owners who did not anticipate needing service. But when they did, we got them in and took care of them.”

After Ty put the word out that Beaver Coach was looking for a sales manager, a mutual friend provided Greg Clarke with an introduction. A veteran manager in the recreation industry, Greg came to Beaver Coach in 2016 as sales manager after 14



Ponh Thanh, automotive and RV paint specialist, has 22 years of experience. Ponh is a native of Cambodia.

years with Lazydays. “The veterans from Lazydays still help each other. We are a fraternity,” Greg said.

“Ty told me he needed a sales manager who was a cultural fit with Beaver Coach and thoroughly understood the company’s core values,” Greg began. “We spent several hours discussing his career and mine to see if there really was a cultural fit. Ty is a good man—he lives it, but he doesn’t preach it. Long story short, I started here June 16, 2016. We signed with Tiffin Motorhomes on November 16. I came at the right time because Shu was really stretching himself thin over two jobs: sales manager and finance manager. It’s good to be here.”

Greg is excited about his sales team. “We have six salesmen. For three of them, this is their first job. I am impressed with their drive and motivation. You can’t teach that. But we will do a good job with sales training and teaching product knowledge,” he said. “Our sales team includes Travis Tuma, Ben’s son—Ty

and I trained him; Ryan Kelly, Ty’s son, who was hired in April 2016; Eric Shaver, Shu’s son; Rod Lemond, Dustin Allen, and veteran Rick Kenaston.

“Currently, we have 70 motorhomes in inventory, new and pre-owned. We will carry a max of 110 units,” Greg stated. “We are one of the largest highline dealers in the U.S.

“I emphasize product training more than sales training,” Greg noted. “I rely on our factory reps to cover product training on all of our brands. We are not regimented in sales training. We take a very relaxed approach and pride ourselves on giving our customers a good experience in learning about the lifestyle and the unit that will best serve their plans. My guys know our inventory so well that they know which units to show after they complete the customer interview. I would put my sales team up against a store twice this size. They love helping the customer get into their perfect fit.”

As Greg mentioned, Shu Shaver now fully devotes his time to the company’s financial management with a special focus on making F&I a smooth, no-stress process for the new owner. “Only ten percent of our sales are cash deals, so we expect to work for the customer to find the best financing package available based on his credit and financial ability,” Shu said.

“We do a fair amount of our financing with US Bank in Oshkosh, Wisconsin,” he said. “Rates as we speak (July 30) are running in the high 4’s and low 5’s. We also do financing with a variety of local and national banks and credit unions. A buyer’s long-term relationship with an industry-related credit union usually will render a good rate.”

For RV insurance, Shu favors HiSage Marketing, Inc. in Escondido, California. “They write insurance with eight to nine companies, all with A or A+ ratings,” he said. “HiSage was founded by John Ihrig who was a pioneer developer of insurance policies specifically designed for recreational vehicle coverage.”

Sean Lakin has been with Beaver Coach Sales and Service for 17 years. His breadth and depth of technical and service knowledge is probably unmatched in the industry by anyone his age. “I began with Beaver Motorcoach in 1993 when I was 17, performing building and lot maintenance and changing oil,” Sean began. “I enrolled in the automotive program of a community college, moving into full mechanical maintenance and chassis related heavy duty work. Several years ago Beaver had a run of coaches where the gloss coating cracked like glass. I put together a team that worked through 60 coaches to correct the problem, all the while supervising the structural and mechanical work being done in our service department. Beaver also had over 100 coaches in which the sidewalls delaminated. I was promoted to shop foreman in 2004 when I was 28,” he said. Today, Sean is the supervisor of the parts department, service advisors, and the service department.

“I started with Ty as a technician in 2001 and earned my master certified tech rating in 2003. Since that time I have done every job in our service center: service writing, assigning work to the techs, shop foreman, and sweeping out the bays when no



Dan Defebbo designs the software for a single remote that controls standard antenna, cable, and satellite reception on all four TVs in a motorhome. On the Allegro Bus and the Zephyr, he includes shades and lighting, heating and cooling.

one was available to do it," he smiled. "If you are supervising and directing the work, you need to know how to do the job yourself. I supervise 17 techs and two painters. The average tenure of our shop technicians is 13.7 years."

Kevin Dodd, for example, has 22 years of experience. "I have been here at Beaver for three years," he began. "I started my career in Seattle at Tveten where Ty was working on their sales team. Then I went to Arizona for 10 years and later to North Trail in Fort Myers where I specialized in Newmar coaches. It's good to be back in the Northwest."

The technicians in Beaver's service center are organized into four teams, with no more than two non-certified techs on a team. "We balance the talents and skills to make each team effective. Every day is different. There is one thing that is really important about our approach to service," Sean noted. "Our techs check in our units personally after the service advisor finishes gathering the reasons for the visit. This builds a direct relationship

Katie Molby, far right, is director of marketing for BCS. From left, her team includes Amy Hogan, content strategist; Jarod Gatley, photographer; and Josh Cantu, multi media specialist.



between the technician and the owner. The returning owner will usually ask for the same tech who has a knowledge base about his coach."

"Our biggest challenge is finding and recruiting 'basic ability' for the service department," Ty said. "Our hiring process is rigorous. We are fortunate if a qualified tech applies, but here in Bend that's not likely. We look for basic ability, good character, and motivation to be here on time every day. Sean will place a new hire on a team with a seasoned technician. On-the-job training and the online RVIA courses work well for us."

"We depend on the training offered by our vendors and motorhome manufacturers," Sean added. "We use RVIA's online training programs for techs to earn 'Certified' and 'Master Certified' ratings. RVIA also sends vendors here to do four- to eight-hour training sessions. We often coordinate with other dealerships who send their techs here to take advantage of that training. I would really like to see us develop a dedicated training facility to pass along our knowledge to new hires. Every time someone retires, we lose part of our knowledge base. If talented service techs and service managers could teach in a training facility a few years after they retire from a dealership, we could transfer that knowledge and create a reservoir of capable new technicians."

Beaver Coach depends on "specialists" who offer skills learned from years of experience. Dan Defebbo brings 20 years of experience to Beaver Coach's owners. He has built highline car audio systems, home theaters, and the entire electronics package for law enforcement vehicles. "One of my regular jobs is changing out old televisions for the current flat panel smart TVs," Dan said. "I began working on RV entertainment systems in 2001 when I designed and installed the electronics for new Beaver coaches that were manufactured next door to this building. When manufacturers began installing several TVs in each coach that required an equal number of remotes, owner frustration went up immediately."

For every Tiffin sold at Beaver Coach, Dan can provide a single remote that controls standard antenna, cable, and satellite reception on all four TVs. On the Allegro Bus and the Zephyr, he includes shades and lighting, heating and cooling. The first remote costs \$2,650 and a second is \$455.

Ponh Thanh specializes in painting motorhomes and has 22 years of experience. With a family heritage in both China and Cambodia, Ponh made his way out of South Vietnam at the end of the war, escaping first to Malaysia and then to the Philippines. He entered the U.S. in 1982. He returned to South Vietnam to visit with his family in 1999-2000.

"Since our company is part of a Spader 20 Group, I have visited a lot of service facilities to analyze how others operate," Sean said in concluding our interview. "I have tried to incorporate at BCS the best operational methods that I found in the service departments of the companies I visited. Likewise, we share our methods with Spader members when they visit our facility."

Beaver Coach employs four service advisors (SA): Nicole

Gannon, Amber Judd, Maribeth Bohn, and Becke Schrader. "As soon as owners arrive, we get their coaches into our database which can recognize and take care of most any brand," Nicole explained. "If the owner comes in for a LOF (lube, oil, filter), we use the software to explore other service possibilities the owner may have overlooked, such as generator and Aqua-Hot service, DEF, tire pressure, and all other fluid levels. We encourage our customers to schedule service appointments the good ol' fashion way, over the phone."

After the initial service interview, the advisor calls for a service tech who arrives to do a walk-through with the owner. The tech observes and makes notes about what needs to be done. He passes the walk-through notes to the SA who inputs the information into Lightspeed, a software program that generates the work order. Scheduled customer arrivals begin at 8 a.m. and walk-throughs are completed by 9 a.m.

"When the tech finishes, warranty coverages are addressed by our specialist, Rachel Santoro," Nicole said. "If something new is discovered in the servicing and repair process, we call the owner for approvals. Customer updates are done periodically as needed." Extended warranties, insurance claims, and customer payments are handled by the SAs.

Each service job has a technician worksheet for time and info entries that are kept current through the day and entered by the SA into the system. Techs email iPhone shots to the SA that are incorporated into the system records for that job. The SA

can send images to the customer for approval to proceed with repairing a newly discovered problem.

The BCS parts department is operated by J.C. Finney and Matt Liska who have years of experience helping owners find and install parts or accessories on their RVs. While the department is engaged daily in supplying standard parts and components to the service center and ordering non-carried parts from manufacturers, they also make it a priority to serve RV owners who are making their own repairs. Owners may contact them online through beavercoachsals.com and get a pricing quote.

Advertising could be called the process of making yourself more visible and better understood. Ty Kelly had that idea in mind when he put together a team of four bright minds, all in their twenties, to promote Beaver Coach Sales and Service to a national audience.

Ty has a friend in the local Vistage Group (non-competing businessmen who meet occasionally to address and solve local issues) who introduced him to Katie Molby, suggesting she could be an asset to BCS's advertising and promotional campaigns in the digital world. "Ty contacted me, described his company, and asked if I might be interested," Katie began. "I was intrigued about promoting a local Bend company and agreed to an interview. What I didn't know was how well I would get along with them," she explained.

Katie Molby is now BCS's director of marketing. "I was working for a website company building search engine optimized

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Ty and Jodie Kelly began their association with Beaver Coach Sales and Service in 2001 with five other partners. They took a leap of faith in 2012 when they bought out their remaining partners and reorganized the company as Beaver Coach Sales and Service. ♦ Shu Shaver, his wife, and Jodie have known each other since high school days when they were on the cheerleading team. Ty and Shu have worked together in several businesses. Shu is now finance director for BCS.

(SEO) websites and digital marketing consultancy when I was offered the position,” she said. On the marketing team, accompanying Katie, is Amy Hogan, content strategist; Josh Cantu, multi media specialist; and Jarod Gatley, photographer.

“Everything that describes what we sell, how we operate, how we serve our customers, and in general how we communicate

Below left: The administrative staff at BCS includes Debbie Boedder, accounting; Lisa Bach, reception; Kathleen McDonald, business development center; and Kristina Whaley, rentals manager and office manager. ♦ Dominic Clanin is delivering a 2019 Allegro Bus 45OPP to Ted and Eileen Kunze of Canby, Oregon. “We spend as much time as it takes to teach our new owners to be completely comfortable with the operation of their Tiffin motorhome,” Dominic emphasized.

with them comes across my desk. I confer with employees, do my own research, revise what others may have already written, and then create the content for our target audience. I analyze what types of content are most successful and beneficial to the BCS brand, and then piece together those ideas into the digital world. It’s a wonderful job and I enjoy coming to work every day,” Amy said.

“We have a great marketing team here,” Amy continued. “We focus on telling customers BCS’s story, finding unique RV destinations to capture footage, and creating content that adds value to our business and more importantly, our customers. We produce our own video content for our website, YouTube, Facebook, and other social pages. We have produced radio advertising, as well as local TV commercials to attract the public for upcoming sales and events. Right now we are getting our promotional material ready for the Welcome Home to Bend Rally.”

Josh Cantu serves on their team as the videographer. He puts action and life into their videos. “Music drives the video,” Josh said. “It creates a flow that draws the viewer into the action. I love this job because there are no boundaries to using



our ingenuity. We can experiment, revise, start over, or try a completely different approach. When you are having fun, you become more creative.”

The team also includes Jarod Gatley, a still photographer whose backpack full of equipment would make him the envy of a National Geographic photographer. “My brother-in-law, who is a professional photographer, got me interested in photography and now I couldn’t imagine doing anything else. I shoot the interiors and exteriors, usually 40 frames or more for each RV.”

Katie organized the team’s work to create content that inspires their customers and that allows them to visually sample the RV lifestyle. The team also launched their new website which provides a sleek and simple user experience. A website visitor can easily access their current inventory, request parts, view the service menu, access their Yelp and Google reviews, and keep up with their philanthropic sponsorships on social media. “Our mission is to set all of our customers up for success by getting them to our dealership,” Katie said. “BCS makes advertising easy for us because the business itself is already a wonderful place, so all we have to do is demonstrate that.”

The marketing team also plans campaigns, designs ads, and leverages paid advertising for BCS and Happy Campers RV Rentals, both locally and nationally. “We do print advertising in newspapers and magazines. We also advertise in guides published by RV resorts and continually look at new options,” Katie said.

When I returned to Ty Kelly’s office late in the day to conclude the interview, he placed a book on his desk: *Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business*. “This book and its managerial principles have made the difference between success and failure for this company,” Ty said. “The author, Gino Wickman, teaches something that he calls EOS, which stands for Entrepreneurial Operating System, eosworldwide.com. It is a set of simple concepts and tools that help the leadership team get really good at three things—vision, traction, and healthy team relationships.

“Every Friday morning the leadership team meets for 90 minutes. We discuss each person’s Weekly To-Do List and their Rocks,” he explained. “A rock is a project that takes a quarter to complete. A leader can have three to seven rocks. Something that can be completed in a week goes on the To-Do List. Then we discuss ‘Process Issues.’ A process issue can slow down your rock or it could affect another person’s rock. Every department could be affected by a process issue, so everyone can address solving the issue. Meetings start on time and end on time. This is a very brief description, but I recommend it to all small business owners.

“We know that service drives sales,” Ty continued. “Delivering the best product every time is our goal, whether it’s an RV or a service event. As a culture, we strive to create and maintain ‘family bonds,’ both with our customers and within our company. We take care of customers first and the customers take care of us.” **RIS**

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