

# Lifetime Value Award Finalists



Each year RV Trade Digest carefully scrutinizes the many dealership applications we receive for our annual Lifetime Value Award. The magazine is looking for dealers that go over and above the call of duty to transform first time RV buyers into customers that return to buy RVs again and again. While there are hundreds if not thousands of dealerships in this industry who excel at this, RV Trade Digest has identified five dealerships that define the “best of the best” out of this year’s application pool.

Each of the five finalists won a \$1,000 award sponsored by Stag-Parkway. RV Trade Digest will chose a grand winner and will present the Lifetime Value Award

during the 2009 Stag-Parkway show at the Paris Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas Jan. 20-22, 2009. The winner of the Lifetime Value Award will win an additional \$1,000 from Stag-Parkway.

In reviewing the applications, the finalists all excel at building customer relationships through a host of quality products, strategic programs and valued services. One interesting fact about the finalists is four out of the five dealerships have someone in a key leadership position with management experience from the automotive industry.

Congratulations to our finalists! Thank you Stag-Parkway for supporting dealers focused on the long range health of our industry. ■

## Empowering the Employee

*Empowering every employee to offer a resounding “yes” is Crestview RV’s strategy for developing life-long customers.*

BY DANA NELSEN

Navigating the 20-acre sea of RVs at Crestview RV in Buda, Texas can turn into selection overload for customers who may not know specifically what they are looking for. Crestview takes the guess work out by sitting them down first and evaluating their specific needs before showing RVs.

Salespeople first ask what kind of tow vehicle they have, followed by how many

people will be sleeping in the unit and what the intended uses of the RV will be – will they be taking it long distances? Will it be used in cold-weather climates? Do they need extra space for powersport vehicles when they camp? The “customer’s needs first” ideology stretches from that initial contact to every interaction the customer has with Crestview’s 55 employees.



*Crestview's newest dealership depicted here is in Georgetown, Texas.*

The dealership average customer demographic is younger than many dealerships with 75 percent of its \$45 million annual gross volume coming from customers in the 35 to 38 year age bracket. Many customers have two children and this impacts how salespeople approach customers.

“One thing we tell them is if their kids are five or six years old, you have 10 summers to spend with them. They sometimes think you’re an idiot when you say that, but it’s true,” says Mike Regan, general manager of Crestview RV. “If the children are five years old, you only have until they are 15, 16 or 17, because when they get to that age, they get their own car, their own friends and they don’t want to go hunting, fishing and camping with the parents as much anymore.”

Turning those first-time buyers in customers who return for a 2nd and 3rd RV is an everyday focus for Regan. Crestview’s current promotion offers a 5 percent bonus to sales people who sell customers who previously purchased in 2003, 2004 or 2005.

“We reward them for prospecting the customers they have already sold,” Regan says. “One of our best assets is having salespeople who have been here a long time. We don’t want to sell someone just one RV, we want to earn there business over and over again. Our goal is to capture a customer for life.”

### **Encouraging Camping**

Customers are encouraged to spend their first night with the new RV camping in the 70-site RV park adjoining Crestview. Regan says this is a huge benefit to customers because the PDI covers a lot different systems. If customers have trouble using anything in the RV, they

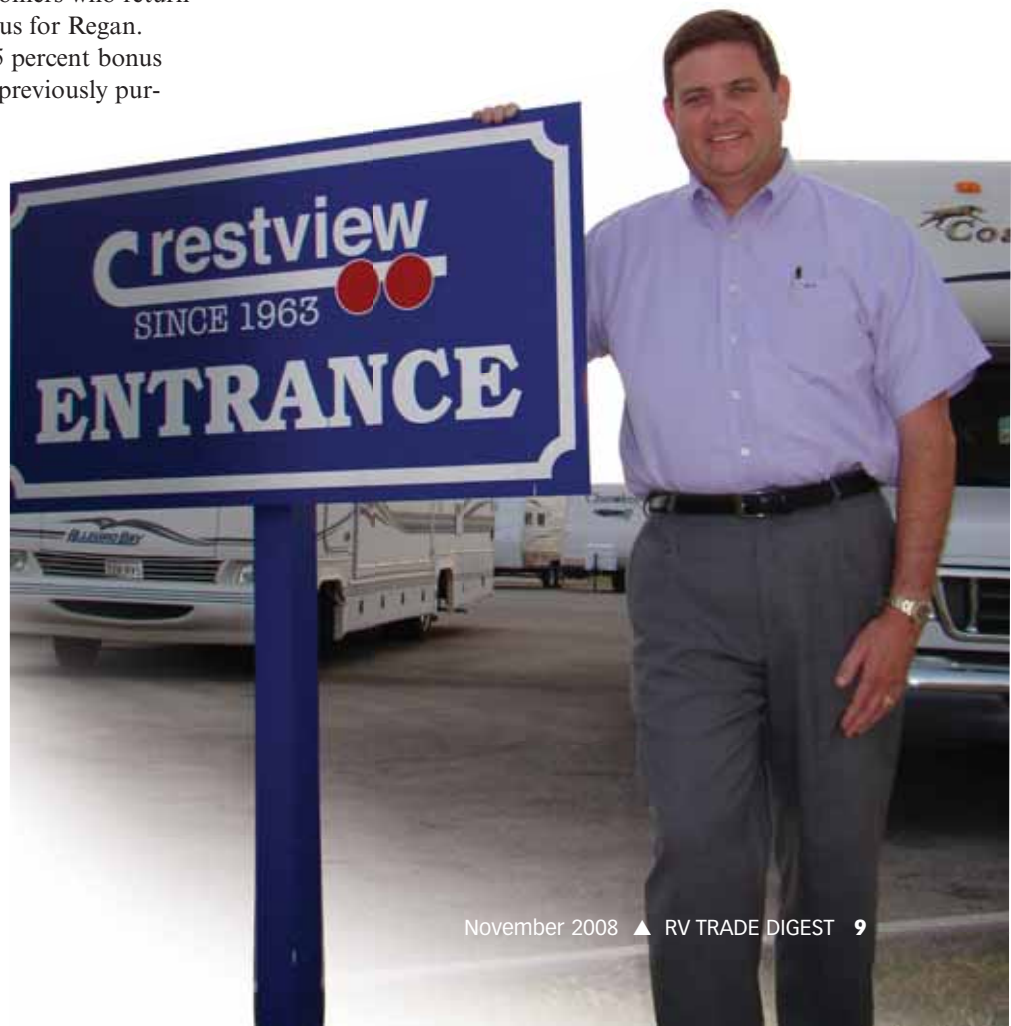
*Mike Regan, Crestview general manager, oversees the company's two locations and 70-site RV park.*

can walk over and have an employee show them how to do something again.

The dealership further encourages camping after that initial night by purchasing the majority of its customers a Texas state parks pass.

“During the RV shows and every time we run a sale, we always give them a state parks pass to get them used to going RVing every weekend,” Regan says. “There are a lot of great state parks in Texas and the pass only costs \$50 or \$60 bucks. We’ve found if they buy an RV and they use it, they will buy another one because a lot of people buy an RV and use it for a year or two and then they stop using it.”

The dealership negotiated a contract with the Texas State Parks system to sell privately-branded parts/accessories in each of the state park’s retail stores. A water hose, sewer



hose and assorted chemicals with the Crestview name will be sold in every park statewide starting in November. Stag-Parkway is facilitating the private labeling and distribution of the accessories to the park system.

Regan says the program is part of a plan to expand the company's reach and keep the Crestview name in front of customers when they are using their RV.

### Parts and Service

The employees from the 14-bay service area and 2,000-square-foot retail store are instrumental in customers buying more RVs according to Regan. Each customer who purchases an RV is given a bar-coded "customer rewards card" so the dealership can track each time customers spend money in the dealership. The card entitles the customer to an annual top to bottom, free of charge inspection of the RV to make sure everything works properly. The dealership performs 10 to 20 such inspections each month.

Twice a year, the card entitles customers to free merchandise in Crestview RV's retail store. The free bottle of anti-freeze in October and free package of toilet paper in March may seem like inconsequential benefits but Regan says the customer participation percentage is high. The program also allows the sales department to touch base with the customer and show them new product on the sales lot.

Ensuring the right parts are available for the service department and retail store is something that is closely watched. In addition to strictly enforcing inventory minimum/maximums for the retail store, Crestview has made the commitment to stock the top 100 replacement parts for the product lines of its two



*Technician David West pulled over on his way home from work to an RVer whose tow vehicle had broken down. West hooked up his own truck and towed the RV home for them when AAA refused to touch the RV.*

largest manufacturing partners, Winnebago and Jayco.

"I told them, 'Give me your 100 fastest moving parts, I'll stock them,'" Regan says. "That way if we know that this is the part that will nine times out of 10 fix the slide room, we should have it in stock. Those parts are not real expensive,

Winnebago is about \$5,000 worth of inventory and Jayco is about the same."

As a last line of defense, service advisors have a monetary threshold that they can use to goodwill product and service to satisfy the customer.

"We try to take the handcuffs off the employee to take care of the customer," Regan says. "We enable employees to make the decision. All the employees have the right to tell the customer yes instead of telling the customer no. What I find is if you give the employees the ability to do that, they are more protective than you are." ■



*Crestview houses more than 20 antique and muscle cars as part of its showroom.*