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Wakefield Pontiac GMC

“I can’t think of a building issue we’ve ever had”

The Wakefield family, owners of a Buick, Pontiac and GMC dealership in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and Butler Builder® TN Construction Company go back a long way—to 1985.

That’s when Bill Wakefield and his father moved their then 40-year-old-business into a new Butler® facility built by TN Construction, a Butler Builder® in Spartanburg. The Wakefields expanded their Buick dealership by adding Pontiac and GMC lines in 1999. When the city later changed the configuration of the adjacent roads, Bill Wakefield and his son, Jay, went to TN Construction to add a new building to their facility. This one would handle all sales for the dealership, including the sale of used vehicles.

TN Construction and the Wakefields looked at recommended design plans from GM and visited dealerships that had adopted them to see what would work for the Wakefields’ situation. The resulting 9,654-square-foot building has 4,667 square feet of showroom, 12 sales offices, a customer waiting lounge with computer stations, and a 1,820-square-foot detailing area where the cars can be prepared to be driven off the lot by their new owners in about an hour. The detailing area, where cars are cleaned and readied for their prospective owners, is an important facet of Wakefield service.

“I tell people that if we can’t get their car ready for them over their lunch hour, we’re taking too long,” says Jay Wakefield.

To provide flexible interior space and the clear-span for the large showroom, TN Construction and their architect chose the Widespan™ structural system. The visible exterior walls are the attractive StylWall® II fluted wall system, with an expanse of showroom windows on one side. The building is topped with a weathertight MR-24® standing seam roof system.

Making the building attractive and taking advantage of its site configuration were key elements in its design, explains Jay Wakefield. “It faces the road in a dip between two hills. Many dealers build two-car showrooms. But our larger showroom takes advantage of the site’s long frontage, and motorists have a good view of it from both hills.”

Jay Wakefield says that both the new and older Butler® buildings that TN Construction has built for his company need little maintenance and have been more than satisfactory.

“TN Construction is great to work with, and I can’t think of a building issue we’ve ever had with the Butler systems—and that includes the building they built for us in 1985.”
They stand on opposite sides of the street, not unlike gunfighters warily eyeing one another. Rival auto dealerships in Chandler, Arizona, their respective architectural styles evoke the Old West versus the New.

Chapman Chevrolet is a modern, glass-fronted building; Earnhardt Ford reflects the adobe Southwest.

Two very different looks. Same architect. Same builder. Same kind of systems construction.

The man who built both, Mark Carlson of M.A. Carlson Construction Co., a Butler Builder® in nearby Tempe, got a call one day from a real estate broker.

“I’d sure like to meet you,” the man said. “Why?” Carlson asked. The broker explained he was negotiating two land deals on opposite sides of the road with two different car dealers. Both buyers had told him they already had their builder and their architect lined up. And in both cases, the builder was M.A. Carlson and the architect was Barry Barcus—a longtime colleague of Carlson’s.

But the dealers knew exactly what they wanted, and Carlson and Barcus had no trouble satisfying both.

“Systems construction is flexible enough to allow a great deal of design latitude,” Carlson points out. “Those buildings are utterly different in outward appearance, but they are equally well-built, effective and weathertight.”

Barcus, who has designed with Butler® building systems for 17 years, says he can create any look he wants from pre-engineered...
components.

“When you say ‘metal building systems’ to a client, his eyes glaze over and he automatically thinks of the dilapidated metal buildings that you see out in the boondocks,” Barcus says. “In reality, the design and final finish of the building is limited only by the architect’s imagination.”

The 120,000-square-foot Earnhardt project and the 90,000-square-foot Chapman project were completed about a year and a half apart.

Earnhardt Ford, which was finished first, has masonry walls; Chapman Chevrolet has tilt-up concrete.

The new buildings are just the latest reincarnation of a long-standing, but friendly, rivalry.

“The Earnhardts and the Chapmans both started off in the city of Chandler,” says David Bower, chief financial officer for Chapman Automotive Group at its corporate headquarters in Scottsdale. “They have a Ford dealership just down the street from our original Chevrolet dealership on Baseline Road.”

Earnhardt Ford, the largest family-owned car dealership in the world, had particularly humble beginnings. In the early ’50s, Tex Earnhardt was working at his dad’s gas station in Chandler when someone from Ford pulled in and asked him to sell distributor caps, points and plugs on consignment. He kept the Ford money in his left pocket and his own profits in his right. Soon he was selling cars, and his no-nonsense approach proved very successful.

For its new dealership in Chandler, the company wanted a no-nonsense building as well. The attractive structure’s straightforward efficiency and open ambiance are helpful in selling cars, says Bill Waters, risk and facilities director for Earnhardt Management Co. “You’ve got to make the customers comfortable—have a friendly atmosphere, like a restaurant almost,” he says. “Everything has to flow.”

Although talking about a very different building, Chapman’s Bower says virtually the same thing.

“You want a place that’s inviting, not intimidating,” he points out. “Our building is set up with a relaxed atmosphere. It’s very open, very light. It flows very well.”

Earnhardt’s Waters is familiar with Butler buildings, and has used them for some time. He also has worked with M.A. Carlson on several other Earnhardt facilities and is very pleased with their work. “I believe in negotiating work rather than bidding it if I can,” he says. “Mark has a lot of
construction savvy, and he’s honest and helpful.”

Chapman Chevrolet also has a long-standing relationship with M.A. Carlson. “Mark keeps us informed about everything that’s going on,” says David Bower. “When there’s a problem, he gets right on it.”

Both Chapman and Earnhardt chose a Widespan™ structural system for their building. The clearspans not only make for clean showroom aesthetics but help to eliminate driving hazards. “As risk manager, I get tired of people running into columns,” Waters says. “We have cars constantly backing in and out.”

Both buildings also have an MR-24® standing seam roof system. “I think it’s the world’s premier roof system,” architect Barcus says. “A seaming machine is used to actually seam the panels together in the field, and they just don’t leak.”

For the roofs of the service-and-parts buildings for both dealerships, Barcus used a seamed-in-place translucent Butler Lite®Panl® skylight system to save on lighting costs. “The panels are flush with the roof and just don’t leak, like skylights in a conventional roof,” he explains.

While Earnhardt’s building—with its adobe appearance, large overhangs and stucco and natural-stone façade—is unique, Chapman’s design is based upon a prototype from Chevrolet, which promotes a standard look for all its buildings. Chevrolet’s guidelines did not dictate what could be built, however.

“I think our building looks great, and it functions very well.”

DAVID BOWER

“There were no restrictions on the kind of construction we used,” says David Bower. “I think our building looks great, and it functions very well.” He adds that having two great-looking buildings across the street from each other “draws people to the area.”

Earnhardt’s Waters agrees. “The Chapman Group is a good group of people. We’re just out to sell more Fords than they do Chevys, and they’re out to do the same in reverse. We feel it creates a certain synergy to have other dealers around, and their building makes the whole area nicer.”

Neither of the friendly rivals wants to tout its own building at the expense of the other. Bill Waters adds, “They’re totally different, and they’re both very nice.”

Have the two dealerships vied for bragging rights? “Not that I’ve heard,” Bowers says.

But, says architect Barcus, “I do think that they each believe that theirs is the best building!”
Auto Row, as locals call it, is a strip along the access road of Fort Wayne’s Highway 14 corridor. The view is a vista of 17 car dealerships, but one stands out from the crowd. It’s the dramatic Southwestern style showroom and service center of Preferred Automotive Group, Inc. “It’s the ‘wow’ factor,” explains owner Jay Leonard. “It’s gorgeous.”

Leonard’s company is the largest independent, full-service used car dealership in Indiana. And he intends to keep that leadership position—in part by creating a first-class environment that helps customers feel they are working with a topnotch company.

The dealership was built by Butler Builder® Shawnee Construction & Engineering, Inc., in Fort Wayne, and designed by architects MSKTD & Associates of Fort Wayne. “They did a fabulous job,” says Leonard. “The building is state-of-the-art and absolutely fantastic.”

The 25,300-square-foot dealership is located on
“We stay with Butler because we’re very happy with them”

JAY LEONARD

five acres. The building’s focal point is its triple-arched showroom entrance, which is embellished with X-shaped metal-work, accented by two stone towers, and centered in an expanse of glass. For the front wall flanking the entrance to either side, the builder and architect chose a Flat StylWall® II with Texture-Cote™ wall system.

“This gave a smooth, stucco-like appearance to blend with the stone,” says John Schenkel, co-owner of Shawnee Construction & Engineering. A matching Butlerib® II wall system was used on the side and rear walls, providing a durable exterior that kept costs in line.

Pete Keelan, principal of MSKTD & Associates, was very pleased with the dealership’s resulting visual proportions. “We delivered an end product that doesn’t look huge,” he explains. “The building’s size is offset by the elements we used to clad the front.”

An impressive interior

Once inside, customers are amazed at Preferred Automotive’s impressive showroom. Rising to a two-story height, it is overlooked by a 2,300-square-foot mezzanine that houses offices and a conference room.

“People walk in and can’t believe it,” comments Leonard. “They ask us daily if we’re a new car the majority of the facility is devoted to vehicle service (above). The building’s Widespan™ structural system provides an 85-foot clearspan for plenty of maneuverability.

HOW TO CREATE A WORLD-CLASS USED CAR DEALERSHIP

Jay Leonard started Preferred Automotive Group in 1989, with six cars parked on a vacant lot and a construction trailer for an office. Today the firm employs 100 associates in six locations and boasts more than $50 million in sales for 2004.

How did he do it? It’s all about differentiation.

Leonard trademarked the phrase: “Home of the 100,000 Mile Warranty™.” For every used car built in the last six years, Preferred Automotive backs the vehicle with their 100,000-mile warranty—for free. The warranty covers parts and labor on more than 200 items.

“We can do it because all our cars are hand-picked,” Leonard explains. “Then, they are run through a 96-point inspection. If a car doesn’t pass the inspection, we take it to auction.”

Leonard says his firm spends an average of $850 per vehicle in repairs prior to selling it. “If you fix it before you sell it, it’s an investment. If you fix it after you sell it, it’s an expense. Good businessmen make investments so they don’t have so many expenses.”

Leonard also believes that value is created when the customer finds pleasure, simplicity and peace of mind in the car purchase process. “If the first buying experience is a good one, people keep coming back. People don’t care where they buy a car, they care who they buy it from. That has to be someone they can truly trust.”

Leonard’s philosophy extends to his employees. “We close earlier than other dealerships, because I think it’s important that our employees are home to tuck their kids in bed. This attitude has paid off for us. Many employees have been with us since day one and all our general managers have been here for more than 10 years.”

Leonard’s philosophy is spreading. He is now selling licensing agreements for “Home of the 100,000 Mile Warranty” to other dealers who are willing to re-tool their business practices to conform to Preferred Automotive standards.

“People think car sales are all about price, price, price,” he says. “But it’s really all about value, value, value. Peace of mind is priceless.”
“People ask us daily if we’re a new car dealer—they can’t believe a used car company could be so attractive”

JAY LEONARD

dealer. They can’t believe a used car company could be so attractive. It builds a comfort level when they see that they’re dealing with a company that has class.”

Preferred Auto’s definitive differences are not just visual. Among the value-added services it offers customers is a free, 100,000-mile warranty on vehicles as much as 6 years old (see page 10). Virtually the entire main portion of the building—around 20,000 square feet—is devoted to providing customer service. Here, the building’s Widespan™ structural system provided an 85-foot clear-span, allowing plenty of room to position automotive car lifts and to move vehicles in and out without maneuvering around structural columns.

Preferred Auto customers also enjoy a free “Carwash For Life” with each purchase. To provide this, the dealership includes a self-contained 3,000-square-foot automatic car wash. Shawnee Construction & Engineering placed it inside the building like a box, and lined the interior with Butler® liner panels to contain moisture.

The dealership is well protected from external moisture by its low maintenance MR-24® standing seam roof system. “It’s very watertight,” says architect Keelan. He adds that “the MR-24 system is a friendly roof to construct in the field, and it provides flexibility in unusual roof framing conditions.”

Butler all the way

The new building on Highway 14 is the sixth location for Preferred Automotive Group. Each facility is a Butler building. “We stay with Butler because we’re very happy with them,” says Leonard. “We’ve had virtually no problems. Our first building is now 13 years old.” And, he says, Butler buildings are expandable. “They’re simple to add on to. We added four bays on one of our buildings in just 30 days.”

Leonard has nothing but compliments for Butler Builders. “We’ve used a different Butler Builder for every project in order to pass the work around,” he says. “For this new location, we worked with Matt and John Schenkel at Shawnee Construction & Engineering. They were fantastic. They take such pride in the work they do. This is really an incredible building.”
As the first new United States franchise awarded in 10 years, Hank Aaron BMW in Union City, Georgia, sets a standard for BMW’s corporate identity program. With its contemporary design and European flair, the dealership commands attention while offering clients a professional, relaxed car-buying atmosphere.

“It’s magnificent,” Aaron says of his first automobile dealership. “It goes above and beyond BMW requirements with its very clean, classic lines.”

The building embodies BMW’s persona with its inimitable look, feel and philosophy. “The way this building is built, you can see it’s a BMW dealership without ever seeing a BMW sign,” says Sid Barron, the dealership’s general manager. In fact, the dealership is held up as a corporate prototype and has been visited by BMW dealers from across the country.

Randy E. Pimsler, AIA, of Pimsler Hoss Architects, Inc. in Atlanta, was the architect, in partnership with Miller Zell Inc., an Atlanta-based firm specializing in integrated store design and development. Pimsler and Miller Zell worked with Rainwater Construction Co., a Butler Builder® in Atlanta, to create the modified design/build project.

Located one mile off Interstate 85 adjacent to Fayette Co.—the highest per capita income county in the state—Hank Aaron BMW enjoys high visibility. With an inventory of nearly 50 new vehicles and another 40 pre-owned BMWs displayed around the sleek building, it quickly attracts buyers’ attention.
BMW advocates key concepts for a successful sales image, Pimsler says. Central to the design is a three-point customer contact area where the showroom, service area and retail parts section are easily visible. “Clean lines of sight, an open environment and minimizing the number of walls to allow spaces to flow together are essential,” he explains.

Pimsler found the building’s Landmark™ 2000 structural framing system, which provides wide bays, very adaptable to this open floor plan. “Initially, I would not have expected a pre-engineered building to be this flexible,” he says.

The building also features weathertight, long-lasting CMR-24® and MR-24® standing seam roof systems. The exterior walls were built with the factory-insulated StylWall® II flat wall system. Pimsler liked the attractive and utilitarian finished interior surfaces of both the StylWall wall panels and the CMR-24 roof system, and he left the interior finish of the wall panels unpainted in the back and the ceiling of the service department exposed. The building’s liberal use of white walls, white furniture and the brushed aluminum frame
An open interior, also essential to the dealership’s design, was easy to achieve with the building’s flexible Landmark™ 2000 structural system. In the service area at the left, the CMR-24® roof system, which has a finished interior surface, was left exposed.

of the Vistawall® glazing system used in the showroom also enhance its clean, 21st-century image.

Outside, the dealership’s distinctive appearance is enhanced by large white display canopies that create exterior showrooms for demonstrator vehicles. Resembling white high-tech umbrellas, the canopies protect the vehicles, as well as customers, from the elements.

When it came to choosing the best type of construction, several factors were considered, recalls Sid Barron. Meeting BMW’s criteria was the primary concern. “BMW’s look is very clean with no obstructions, and the Butler® building gave us that,” he says. “We also needed to build quickly and cost-effectively, with the ability to add on. It was the simplest and easiest [kind of] building to expand.”

Six weeks after builder Ben Rainwater Jr. shook hands on the project, the steel systems were on site and being erected. And the easy expandability of the Landmark 2000 system has proven to be especially important.

Hank Aaron BMW has been awarded one of two Mini franchises in the state of Georgia. Owned by BMW, the Mini is a four-passenger urban commuting vehicle that will be formally introduced to the U.S. in March 2002. The dealership plans to add 2,000 square feet of sales space for the Mini and pre-owned BMW vehicles, and to enlarge its parts department by 1,200 square feet.

Barron says numbers tell the story when it comes to measuring the success of the dealership’s new corporate image: In the first 12 months of operation, Hank Aaron BMW exceeded corporate sales projections by 27 percent, and its parts department beat sales projections by 118 percent. The market share for the luxury automobile dealership has risen from 13.1 percent on opening day to 21 percent.

Since Hank Aaron also is a numbers man with a fondness for setting records, he is positioning his dealership for another winning career. As he says, “It’s my latest home run!”
Campbell Toyota, a family-owned business in Chatham, Ontario, Canada, believes it's important to project a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere. In fact, Bob Campbell says the dealership even has a theme—Welcome Home.

“It’s a feeling customers and dealers tell us they get when they come here, and that’s exactly what we want them to feel,” Campbell says.

Vertec Contractors, Ltd., a Butler Builder® in Chatham, built the project on a design/build basis. They get rave reviews from Campbell for exceeding the dealership’s expectations. “We all love it,” Campbell says. “We’ve had just about all of the Toyota dealers from around Ontario visit us to see what we have here.”

The 22,000-square-foot dealership is not just welcoming, but first-class. Dramatic double staircases sweep from the showroom in front to a balcony leading to the administrative offices, lunchroom and storage areas on the second floor of the central section. The parts office and washrooms are located on the ground floor beneath. Campbell Toyota’s comfortable, easily accessible service area is located in the rear.

For the showroom, Vertec integrated conventional steel framing with a VSR™ architectural standing seam roof system. The dealership’s center section and rear service area were constructed with the Widespan™ structural system, Shadowall™ wall system and MR-24® standing seam roof system. Both roof systems were insulated to a value of R-20.

Because of this, the new facility is consuming far less energy than expected. “Utility costs didn’t go up as much as we had anticipated,” Campbell says. “The building is three times larger than our previous facility, but our utility costs have only doubled, if that. This is a very, very efficient building.”

Joe Verhoeven, president of Vertec Contractors, also notes that systems construction held down the building’s cost per square foot considerably and helped keep the project on schedule.

Campbell says the dealership chose Vertec for its good reputation and the quality of the Butler® building systems. He is delighted that they did so. “Vertec and Joe Verhoeven are fantastic people to deal with,” he says. “They provided topnotch, quality people and workmanship.”

Photography courtesy of I-maginethis.com Inc.
Building Design by Dimensional Design Consultants Inc.