

Luxury cars are a family affair

Family business—an institution often dissolving into unrelated partnerships or even conglomerates—is booming at West Bloomfield's only car dealership, owned and operated by Frank and Chuck Audette.

In fact, Audette Cadillac's location on Orchard Lake Road just north of Northwestern Highway is often named by as many as nine Audettes when seven of the younger generation are at work.

"One of us is always here," says Frank of Bloomfield Hills, a former builder who with Chuck, a Farmington Hills resident, owned Audette Pontiac in Troy several years ago.

In their 30 months in West Bloomfield, the brothers have seen their business climb to fifth place in the metropolitan Detroit Cadillac market.

The brothers report selling four new Cadillacs to each of their "previously

owned" cars, 90 per cent of which are also Cadillacs.

When they started the luxury car dealership, 26 per cent of luxury cars bought in the metropolitan area were Cadillacs. Now, Frank says, the percentage has climbed to 48.

AUDETTE'S SHOWROOM reflects luxury also, with its leather furniture, plants, and wall-to-wall red carpet. The room has been used for receptions following local orchestra concerts.

Customers looking at "previously owned" cars are driven from the showroom, set 500 feet from Orchard Lake Road, to the used car display via a golf cart. "That shall not walk" signs are displayed.

Business has improved, according to used car manager Harold Robbins, since the dealership was given permission from West Bloomfield to display 35 used cars in front of the show-

room, closer to Orchard Lake Road.

The Orchard Lake Road master plan calls for all cars to be parked behind commercial buildings.

Chuck Audette went before the West Bloomfield Planning Commission and appeals board numerous times requesting a variance so used cars could be displayed at the front of the lot.

A year ago the Audettes were given permission for a used car display 160 feet from the center of Orchard Lake Road after weeks of deadlock.

The brothers had asked for a hardship variance, claiming their used car sales suffered because of their deep setback from the road, planned with an eye on proposed extension of Northwestern Highway which would have had an entrance ramp near their location.

With the highway extension decision stalled for several years, Frank Au-

dette quips, "Now we have the largest front lawn of any car dealer in the world."

With used cars displayed in front of the showroom, used car manager Robb says estimates one used car is sold each day, on an average.

NOW THE Audettes are trying to get the appeals board to allow more lights at the entrance of their property.

"They're three feet high now," Frank says of the lights. "We want 200-foot high lights. They work best in the dark. There is no question that increased lighting is a deterrent to crime."

"If we didn't have dogs, we'd be ripped off every night," the dogs are professionally-trained German shepherd guard dogs locked inside the building at night and picked up by their trainers each morning.

Thursday, September 6, 1991



Frank (standing) and brother Chuck Audette ready to inspect their "previously owned" lineup.

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