

Hackensack Nissan off to stimulating start

New dealership cashes in on 'Cash for Clunkers'

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It made for a hectic and, in some cases, maddening summer, but when the wildly popular "Cash for Clunkers" program came to a halt on Monday night, it was widely hailed as an overall plus for the faltering economy. Despite some bumps in the road, the federal government-initiated vehicle trade-in program was largely viewed as a wind-fall to the automobile industry, which was in a severe slump before the rebate incentive's July start.

According to the Department of Transportation, "Cash for Clunkers" generated 625,000 new car sales worth \$2.58 billion in rebates just prior to the filing deadline and those numbers were expected to grow as the last applications were filed. For many dealers, the lure of \$3,500 to \$4,500 rebates for gas-guzzling vehicles also led to new car purchases by customers who had no clunker to trade.

"It really stimulated the whole market," said Rich LoCurto, general manager of Hackensack Nissan. "There were some headaches, but overall we loved it. We had a tremendous couple of months."

For LoCurto, the timing could not have been better. Dealer Principal Jonathan Stern hired him to run the Hackensack dealership in April. Stern, who also owns Rockland Nissan and Orange County BMW in New York, had just purchased Garden State Nissan in March. He changed the name to Hackensack Nissan and, shortly there-



PHOTOS BY EUGENE PARCIASEPE JR.

Heading up the management team at Hackensack Nissan, which opened in the spring, are (l-r) Richard LoCurto, general manager, Jonathan Stern, dealer principal, and Tom Mandel, service director.



after, hired LoCurto, a 30-year auto industry veteran.

"The 'Cash for Clunkers' program certainly created an extraordinary amount of interest and pulled some people off the sidelines and brought them into the market right now," LoCurto said. "It created a lot of activity and traffic for us, which was nice because we just started here in the spring and we are trying to build the business. It was also nice, because it has obviously been a challenging time for the entire industry."

Like the successful pairing of the "Cash for Clunkers" program with the auto industry, the match between Stern and LoCurto has also been a good fit.

Stern "grew up in the business." His father and grandfather ran pre-owned and wholesale automobile operations for many years. The family opened Rockland Nissan in 1993 -- now the

largest volume Nissan dealership in Rockland and Westchester counties -- and, in 2000, they opened Orange County BMW -- one of the fastest growing BMW franchises in the country.

LoCurto, meanwhile, started out in the business in 1976 and worked at several Bergen County dealerships.

"We've both been in this business for a long time," Stern said. "Throughout our careers, we both focused on providing outstanding service to our customers -- making the customer feel comfortable and their visit as enjoyable as possible is crucial."

"In our New York locations, our friendly, professional staffs always work

hard to exceed the customers' expectations. That's something I wanted to see implemented in Hackensack and it's why we brought in Rich. As far as I could tell, he was always successful in earning the respect and loyalty of his customers."

That was evident almost immediately as several of LoCurto's long-term customers followed him to Hackensack.

"There are people who have bought six, seven cars from me," LoCurto said. "I have sold cars to the kids, grandkids and friends of my customers. Many of them have followed me here. I understood early on that people don't buy cars every day and that it is a serious undertaking for most people. I've always

taken pride in helping them through the process in an upfront, honest manner"

Stern's Rockland and Orange County operations are something LoCurto had always admired from afar.

"I've always had a lot of respect for Jon and the operation he built in New York State. When I heard that they were coming down here and that they were looking for somebody to run things, I jumped at the opportunity. He knows that customer service affects every aspect of the operation and that is why I wanted to be a part of it. With that said, it is absolutely imperative that we continue to make customer service the cornerstone of how we conduct business."

Helping to make that possible is the sales, service and parts team that always strives for "100 percent customer satisfaction," said LoCurto.

"They try hard to make the buying or leasing of a vehicle a pleasant experience," he said. "That commitment is also second to none in the service and parts department. From general maintenance, such as oil changes, to major repairs, we offer premier service. And we offer comprehensive parts for any vehicle."

It also doesn't hurt that Nissan is known for its "reliable, fuel-efficient cars," said LoCurto.

"Success stories in the auto industry are hard to come by these days. It's become clear that Nissan is emerging from this economic downturn faster than others."

Added Stern, "Customers in Bergen County are now finding out what customers in Rockland and Orange counties have known for years -- we are going to be around here for a long time to offer outstanding products and services to our marketplace."

Hackensack Nissan is located at 400 River St., Hackensack. For more information, call 888-328-7155.