

Scholfield Honda is driving the future with new dealership

When Vic Scholfield and his partners opened a new, 37,000-square-foot Scholfield Honda dealership in 1985, Roger Scholfield considered the building his father's crowning achievement.

"It was a beautifully designed store and it worked wonderfully for 30 years," said Roger, who joined the family business the next year in 1986 at the age of 28.

He hopes the next Scholfield generation and the 105 employees of Scholfield Honda will feel the same about the new, 54,000-square-foot dealership that contractor Hutton Construction completed this month. As Wichita's exclusive Honda dealer and already home to the largest selection of new and pre-owned Hondas in Kansas, Scholfield Honda needed to boost its service capabilities and room for new vehicle inventory. The state-of-the-art facility is packed with customer amenities, upgraded equipment to improve service efficiency and sustainable features that will reduce the operation's footprint. It is built at 7017 E. Kellogg, the same site as the old building, which was demolished.

"This positions us for the future," Roger said. "One of the things I admire about Honda is that while many businesses have one-year and five-year plans, Honda also thinks in terms of 20-year plans. We built this store thinking about where we'll be 10, 20, 30 years from now."

Roger sees the new dealership driving the future of Scholfield Honda, just as his father's new dealership in 1985 drove their growth over the past three decades.

"The timing is perfect for us," he said. "Honda has had a renaissance in the last year and a half. We've had more new models and more redesigned models than in the entire history of the company. We're excit-

ed about all of the new products, the new building and our new footprint in Wichita."

Three generations will be on hand for the grand-opening ceremony this month, just as they were together for the groundbreaking for the building.

"I've been involved with remodels and building some small service centers, but I've never built a dealership from the ground up," Roger said. "It's going to be very special for me to be there with my father, who is 84 and is still my partner in the business, and my son, A.J., who is a junior studying business at the University of Kansas."

A.J. has worked at the dealership every summer since he was 15, progressing from a lot attendant to changing oil to working as an express service advisor to most recently selling cars.

"Unlike his father and grandfather, he has a ton of mechanical ability," Roger said. "This is the only thing he's ever told me he wanted to do since he was 6 years old, and he's already getting a well-rounded background in the business."

Like his father, Roger isn't pushing A.J. into the family business. Roger worked summers in the business during high school but he was 28 before he decided to come work with his dad.

He started in sales in 1986 and as he worked his way through the ranks, Vic and his partners gave Roger the title of vice president of personnel and tasked him with taking the dealership's customer service to the next level. His father and uncle had differentiated themselves early in the car business with a service-first philosophy rather than focusing on sales. Their success in the 1950s and

1960s led to them becoming the 107th Honda dealership opened in the U.S. (there are more than 1,000 today) on July 31, 1971.

"I learned from them that if people don't have a great sales experience, they don't have a good service experience, you've lost them and they'll go somewhere else," Roger said. "You've got a lifetime relationship when they come back for service and their service consultants are friendly and knowledgeable and we fix your car right the first time in a timely manner and at the price we told you it was going to be."

So when he was given the task, Roger asked for an example of the best customer service they'd ever had and they told him Ritz-Carlton luxury hotels. Roger contacted a Ritz-Carlton in Kansas City and the general manager invited him to go through orientation and gave him access to employee and training manuals. The experience was invaluable and led to an in-house training program that still exists today.

"The Ritz-Carlton experience real-

ly shaped my vision of what the level of service at Scholfield Honda should be," he said. "People are starved for great service. When they get it, it knocks their socks off and they are wowed. Delivering that wow experience takes everyone, from reception to sales to finance to service."

Today as president of Scholfield Honda, Roger holds quarterly Curb-side Chats that bring the entire staff together to talk business, recognize employees and have fun. Roger said he always reads a few customer letters to keep everyone's awareness on the difference exceptional service can make.

"As we head into our 46th year as a Honda dealer, I'm really proud to be associated with the Honda brand," Roger said. "Honda has been a great corporate partner for us. They continue to put out fabulous cars that offer cutting edge technology, cutting edge safety and cutting edge fuel economy. It's a great brand to be around and I've been blessed to have a great management team and great employees."



AJ, Roger and Vic Scholfield