Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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Rico Auto Complex talks history, future plans

While the exact opening date in 1919 is unclear, one thing for certain is that Rico Auto Complex will celebrate its 100th year in business this month.

The *Sun* met with Rico Auto Complex sales managers, and brothers, Marty and Mickey Menapace June 3 to discuss the history of the dealership, as well as how they feel about carrying on a family tradition.

In addition to the the glistening showroom of new vehicles, the brothers take pride in Rico's vehicle repair and maintenance department – and how it benefits their customers in the long run.

"[We are] able to service everything we sell," he said.

This ability to provide good service to clients helps spur repeat business, which was also emphasized by Mickey.

Mickey mentioned a time when a couple of executives from General Motors came to Rico Auto Complex and said something that reaffirmed what they already knew to be the truth.

“[GM] said that we are one of the top dealers in the nation for selling to repeat customers,” Mickey said.

“We have trained employees for their roles, and currently provide a decent living for over 85 employees,” he said. “The [employee] numbers fluctuate, but we provide for them.”

Providing a good living for their employees helps build a loyal employee base, Marty continued, which then leads to long term of employment.

Some Rico Auto Complex employees worked for upwards of 30, 40, or 50 years at the dealership, according to Marty.

“We provide a good environment for them because they make us successful,” he said.

The notion of building loyalty with employees was also emphasized by Mickey, who detailed some of the events that the dealership is holding to show appreciation, such as a traditional blessing ceremony on the morning of June 7, and an employee appreciation dinner, along with a ceremony held June 6 by the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce.

“Loyalty has been the crux of our business for decades,” Mickey said.

A BUYER’S PERSPECTIVE

The concept of loyalty was also emphasized by Olsen Arviso, Jr., CEO of Arviso Construction Company in Ft. Wingate, who spoke to the *Sun* June 5.

Arviso said his family has been buying their vehicles from Rico Auto Complex since the 1960s, when his late grandfather first began dealing with them.

Then in the ‘70s, Arviso said, his father traded in a vehicle for a new one at Rico, and he became a loyal customer in the process.

A few years after his father began buying from Rico, Arviso and his siblings began dealing with Rico Auto Complex.

“Ever since then, that’s the only dealership we’ve been working with,” Arviso said.

In the decades that Arviso has bought from Rico Auto Complex, he said they have begun to treat his family like their own family, and that it is this sense of loyalty that keeps Arviso’s family going back.

Arviso’s children have bought from Rico Auto Complex as recently as last year, he said. He also said the dealership provides the fleet of up to 10 company vehicles for Arviso Construction.

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

One important aspect of preparing for the next generation of managers at Rico Auto Complex is ensuring they know how to evolve with the times.

“Everything is computers now,” Mickey said, citing technologies available in the dealership vehicles like OnStar and power seats. “A lot of [older] clients don’t want them, but they’re standard now.”

This idea of preferring simpler vehicles goes back to something his grandfather said, Mickey continued, that the more things you put into a vehicle, the more things can go wrong.

However, the decades of advancements in technology also have their upsides when it comes to dealing with customers, he added.

“Parents will be in here doing the work [of buying or selling], and their kids are babysat by technology,” he said.

As he spoke, he pulled out his cellphone, a flip phone, and commented about how newer phones have many more features that younger generations know about, and they actively seek vehicles to support their smartphones.

This, in turn, presents another avenue to get the next generation of owners to keep the business operating and flourishing.

“It’s important that we’re teaching and preparing younger generations to run the business, because they’re tech-ready,” Marty said. “[The new technology] is there and it’s coming.”

BEGINNINGS

In 1919, grandfather Enrico “Rico” Menapace launched Rico Auto Complex. According to the family’s website, grandpa Rico started the dealership with the intention of selling cars via loyalty, teamwork, family pride, and community involvement.

The company has 100 years of experience selling both Buick and GMC vehicles and General Motors parts and services to residents of the Gallup area.

The dealership was started and operated on numerous spots on Coal Avenue, before settling at its current location at 220 S. Fifth St.

Marty, who graduated from Gallup High School and spent one year at New Mexico State University, said Rico Auto Complex has been a family-owned business for four generations now, with the fifth generation stepping up to help manage the company.

“There’s been four generations, and four different dealers,” Marty said. “It’s all family [business].”

Mickey spoke about how the process of customers buying their vehicles has evolved over a century, namely the method of how some customers in prior decades paid for their vehicles.

“A lot of customers back then would bring in livestock for down payments,” he said. “At the time, you could consider us a trading post.”

Dealing with livestock is not unheard of for the Menapace family, Mickey said, given they own a 20,000-acre ranch near McGaffey, south of Ft. Wingate.

“[Exchanging and raising livestock] was part of what made this business last the way it has this long,” he added.

Marty discussed his involvement with the business as a youth, which started with watching their grandfather communicate with customers in different languages. He would also watch other customers barter with dealership employees on payments and vehicles, which also helped instill the desire to keep the family business going, he added.

In light of the 100th year of operation, Marty said he hopes to see the dealership continue for another hundred years with future generations of the family in charge.

“We really are proud of it,” he said. “We are very happy and very lucky to be where we are.”

Rico Auto Complex will be holding 100 Year Anniversary celebrations on June 7 from 11 am -5 pm, and June 8 from 10 am-3 pm at their dealership at 220 S. Fifth St. Festivities include bands, food trucks, and activities for the whole family.

For more information on Rico Auto Complex including vehicles, service, and financing, visit https://www.ricoautocomplex.com/

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