

Dealer POINT

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Don Brenengen is Wisconsin's Dealer of the Year

Meet Don Brenengen: Wisconsin Dealer of the Year and Wisconsin's TIME Magazine Quality Dealer of the Year (TMQDA) nominee, a genuine community leader who has enjoyed 17 consecutive years of profitability at Brenengen Chevrolet in West Salem.



"My career has challenged me and allowed me to learn, grow and prosper beyond all my expectations," he said. "At the age of four, I could name most makes and models of cars. My father fixed damaged vehicles for a second income and I inherited the

'car gene' from him. I worked my way through college and began my business career working in the accounts payable department of J C Penney Company in Milwaukee. It didn't take long for me to determine that accounting would not be my life-long career."

Brenengen wanted to work in the car business, but most dealers weren't hiring college graduates back in 1975,

he said. Fred Mueller and Harry Dahl of Dahl Ford in La Crosse granted Brenengen an interview for a sales position. "When I asked about my long-range plans, I told them that I didn't want to sell cars all my life," recalls Brenengen. "They liked my answer."

While employed at Dahl Motors, Brenengen was approved as a Ford Dealer Council representative in 1985, even though he had no ownership in the dealership. At the age of 39, his dream came true when he and his wife Cheryl purchased Curlys Chevrolet of West Salem.

What is his success secret? "I monitor inventory days supply, staffing needs, and expenses very closely," said Brenengen. "I also try to anticipate changes in new and used vehicle demand, changes in customers' expectations and identify the opportunities that will arise from the anticipated changes."

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Brenengen has eliminated layers of management in his stores and empowers his staff to take care of the customer's needs, which in turn promotes his Customer for Life philosophy.

"Working alongside the right people makes all the difference in the world. Dennis Zee, general manager, has been with us since September of 1992 and has been an integral part of our success. Dennis purchased stock in the dealership in 2003," Brenengen said. "I credit a large part of the success of my other stores to the efforts of my sons and my brother Tony and of course the great staff which reaches all the way to the most recent detail department hiree."

"My career has afforded me the privilege of giving back to the communities that helped our family grow the Brenengen Autogroup. I have watched my three sons, Matt, Scott and Nick, mature into men who have chosen to pursue careers in the same business and progress into talented managers, earning the respect of their peers and our customers," said Brenengen.

Cheryl, Brenengen's wife of 36 years, shares kudos for most of the dealership building design, development and chari-



Nick Brenengen restored this Camaro when he was in his early 20's with Don assisting in a minor role. The Brenengen family members are from left, Tiffany and Nick with Elaina and Danica; Matthew and Gabriella with Sawyer; Scott and Angie with Paige (behind the wheel) and Hannah; Cheryl and Don Brenengen.

table work they've done in Wisconsin's Coulee Region. Both are members of the Village People, a revitalization organization in the West Salem community. The Brenengens are the voice for their youth group.

"My greatest legacy has been the role I played in the creation of the Boys and Girls Club in West Salem," said Brenengen. "Over the last five years, Cheryl and I have spent countless personal hours leading the Village People Youth Committee in remodeling a clinic building, furnishing the club and raising \$645,000 which will fund the first three years of operation and start an endowment fund. After only one year the club has over 600 members, far exceeding everyone's expectations.

They share a long list of good deeds done in time, materials and money for numerous other causes. A significant example was their purchase of 28 acres of land so they could donate it to La Crosse County with the stipulation that a paved bicycle trail be built to provide safe access from the Village of West Salem to Veteran's Memorial Park. Brenengen also serves on the board for the LaCrosse County Economic Development Fund and is a member of the 7 Rivers Region, a study group



Fellow auto dealers, Rahn Pischke, "Dodge man", Brenengen, "Chevy Man" and Nick Harring, "Ford Man" compete in the "Bobbing for Beef Tongue" fundraiser.

for economic and social betterment of a seven county area.

Brenengen has a long list of "firsts." He was one of first 50 dealerships in the country to purchase over 1,000 vehicles on the Internet through GMAC's Smart Auction. When he opened Brenengen Chevrolet in 1991 he started the first "one price" dealership in his market area and in 1996 his was one of the first dealerships to employ non-commissioned sales consultants who earn bonuses based on units sold, rather than gross profit.

His proudest moment, however, is not reflected in his business, but his humble beginnings at Logan High School in La Crosse. His name and picture was placed on the School "Wall of Fame" in 2003, recognizing his outstanding ethics and community contributions.

"I felt greatly honored when Logan High School recognized me. I was the oldest of six children and came from very modest beginnings. From early on, I wanted financial security that would allow me to become a contributing member of my community," he said. "I have never forgotten my roots and to be recognized by my high school and to speak motivationally to the graduating class was unforgettable."

Congratulations Don!



Don and Cheryl Brenengen raise steers at their tree farm to donate to the local food pantry.

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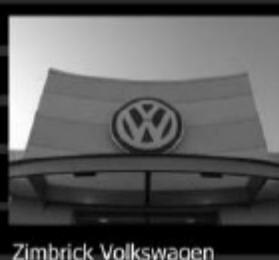
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