

SUCCESS AFTER SERVICE

Southfork Dodge Drives Home Its Commitment to Local Business Owners

by Meredith Wargo

Today's business owners face myriad challenges as each chases the entrepreneurial dream of owning his or her own company. And sometimes it takes a fellow business owner to appreciate and understand what those struggles look like.

Celebrating its first year in operation, one Texas-based automotive dealership takes pride in its service-oriented approach toward local business owners. "We opened this dealership in 2017 with the commercial customer in mind," says Chris Godwin, owner and General Manager of



Chris Godwin (center), owner and Managing Partner of Southfork Dodge, with members of the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles Southwest Business Center management team.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOUTHFORK DODGE

Southfork Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram (*Southfork Dodge*) in Manvel-Pearland, a suburb to the south of Houston. "When business owners need their vehicles serviced, our goal is to get them back on the road as quickly as possible."

Godwin explains that Southfork Dodge prides itself on doing things differently. "There are many things that set us apart from our competitors and that includes having a fully non-commissioned sales staff. Like most companies, employee turnover is one of the biggest issues we face. We created a program where our staff isn't paid on the margin of a deal. By eliminating the stress that's associated with commissioned sales, we can create a positive automotive experience for all our customers," he says.

TIME IS MONEY

From independent plumbing contractors to oilfield service companies with multiple offices, Southfork Dodge's clients' needs are as varied as the vehicles they sell. "We understand that Houston-area business owners have very different needs," says Art Houser, Fleet and Commercial Director of Southfork Dodge. "We have an extensive selection of commercial vehicles and can service a variety of customers, from mom-and-pop business owners who only need to purchase one or two vehicles every few years, to large companies that buy 30 or 40 heavy trucks every month," he says.

When Billy Crain was tasked with helping his client replace several company trucks, he turned to Houser at Southfork Dodge. Crain is an Industrial Sales and Marketing Manager for Vernor Material & Equipment Co., Inc., a road building, industrial and residential demolition company in Freeport, Texas.

"We have crews that work inside a large petrochemical complex near Houston," Crain says. "Our client needed to purchase several trucks before the end of 2017. We



Billy Crain (right), Industrial Sales and Marketing Manager for Vernor Material & Equipment Co., Inc., poses with Phyllis Winscott, Sales & Leasing Advisor for Southfork Dodge, in front of several company trucks Vernor purchased from Southfork Dodge's fleet division.

shopped the internet and tried to find some ready-built vehicles but were unsuccessful. Art and his team pulled some strings and delivered flawlessly in producing the vehicles that we needed in the required time frame."

Any down time that a business owner experiences when a vehicle is out of commission usually means a loss of revenue. Southfork Dodge participates in Ram's BusinessLink program as another way to show their commitment to minimizing area business owners' problems.

"One of the perks of being a BusinessLink member is our first-priority bay service," Houser explains. "When a business owner brings a truck in for service, that vehicle will always be next in line for maintenance and repair work. Expedited service enables our commercial customers to get their vehicles back quickly so they can continue servicing their customers and accounts."

As Southfork Dodge's client base continues to grow, the dealership's commitment to delivering quality customer service also grows. A year after opening its doors,

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Chris Godwin, Owner and General Manager, Southfork Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram



Employees of Southfork Dodge celebrate the groundbreaking of the dealership's new facility and service center.

Southfork Dodge broke ground on a new facility next door to its current building that will feature 48 service bays, including two large truck centers with taller and larger bays for servicing heavy-duty vehicles.

"Upon completion of our new space, we plan to hire and expand our staff to include several diesel and transmission mechanics for servicing heavy trucks," Godwin says. "We also plan to add two shifts so when a vehicle gets brought in late in the day, it will more than likely be repaired the same night. We are doing everything we can to stay ahead of our customers' needs and service them better than our competitors."

MOTHER NATURE'S WRATH

When Hurricane Harvey blew into Houston in August 2017, life in the fourth-largest city in the United States came to a virtual halt. Thousands of homes and businesses were flooded, roads were impassable and scores of people were left trying to figure out how to pick up the pieces of their lives after surviving this natural disaster.

Houser was the only Southfork Dodge employee who could make it into work the day after the rains subsided. "My wife came with me and together we opened up the dealership," Houser recalls. "She started answering the phones while I directed the tow truck drivers who were showing up at our door with vehicles that had been submerged in the flood waters."

As soon as the full impact of the hurricane was realized, the corporate leaders at Chrysler swung into action. "Within a few days, Chrysler diverted hundreds of Chrysler cars and trucks that were originally being shipped to dealers throughout the Northeast and routed them to dealerships along the Texas Gulf Coast," Houser says. "While many car manufacturers offered discounts on the vehicles they had on their lots, Chrysler went an extra step by increasing available inventory, as well as offering discounts, to help folks get back on their feet faster."

But having additional vehicles to sell wasn't enough for Godwin. He felt the dealership could do more to help those

impacted by the hurricane. Southfork Dodge had just wrapped up a scheduled fundraising event in which employees, friends and customers donated nearly \$11,000 to Yellow Up, a local organization dedicated to supporting the needs of families who have children fighting cancer. After the hurricane, Godwin decided to hold a second fundraiser.

“So many people needed help after the storm. We raised nearly another \$11,000 and donated the money to local shelters and organizations that were assisting flood victims. Although we only have about 50 employees, most of our staff contributed to one or both of our fundraisers, while the dealership matched all consumer donations. I’m proud of how we came together as a team to help our community,” he says.

HOMEGROWN TALENT

Godwin’s commitment to assisting local customers with their business needs spills over into the way he manages his day-to-day dealership operations.

“Soon after we opened our doors, I joined the local chamber of commerce and committed that I would not do business if at all possible with any company that wasn’t a member of the chamber,” Godwin says. “If I can get services or products at a similar price from a local business owner rather than outsourcing, I will keep it in the community. Regardless if we’re buying Saturday lunches for our employees or if we need an electrician to fix a lighting problem, almost 60 percent of the services that we use at the dealership come from local businesses. I’m an all-in kind of commitment guy. I believe in the power of networking and building relationships that create good for all parties involved.” 🐼

Southern Utah-based Meredith Wargo is a contributing writer with more than 30 years of experience writing for myriad industries.



Cindy Leach (left), Southfork Dodge’s Community Marketing Manager, and Chris Godwin proudly display some of the myriad toys collected during the dealership’s 2017 Marine Toys for Tots campaign.



Southfork Dodge employees stand ready to answer consumers’ questions at the Pearland Town Center’s Ram Ride & Drive event.

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