

Featured Member of the Month
April 2012

Hammer Chevrolet



In April 1937, exactly 75 years ago, Ed Hammer along with brothers PR and RD Staunton filed letters of incorporation to form Hammer Staunton Chevrolet. They operated their business at 316 N. Main St. (currently Maurice's) until 1941. There was a small service and parts area with storage for cars in the basement, a gas pump on the Main Street sidewalk, and a new car display lot behind the store. The used car operation was down the block at Main and Dow (currently Wells Fargo).

In 1941 the company purchased the International Harvester franchise at 107 E. Alger and moved the Chevrolet business there in a combined operation. The farm equipment sales and service operations from International Harvester sustained the business during the war while U.S. manufacturing-including new car manufacturing-was re-purposed and dedicated to the war effort. One anecdotal note in the corporate minutes indicates a long overdue raise in salary for Ed Hammer was approved by the board but subject to approval from the Federal Wage Stabilization Board as required of the industry during the war years. In 1944 the Oldsmobile franchise was added although no cars were produced or sold until after the war. Four years later, the International Harvester business was split from the car business and relocated to 5th and Broadway (currently Valley Motor Honda). A new company, Valley Motor and Implement was formed to handle the International business and sold in the next few years.

In January 1949 the name Ed Hammer, Inc. was officially filed with the Secretary of State and property obtained from Sanderson Motors directly to the east (which had a Whitney Benefits lien) to facilitate construction of a new 9000 sq. ft. service department as well as a complete remodel of the existing International Harvester store into a modern Chevrolet-Oldsmobile showroom and offices. The grand opening was held in December 1950.

In 1953 the company become entirely family owned, and has remained in the family. Richard Hammer, Sr. joined the firm in 1953 after graduation from MIT, a stint in the armed services and a short career in the Midwest in engineering management. In 1956, Ed Hammer went to Washington D.C. to testify before Congress in an anti-trust suit against General Motors and successfully protected his franchisee rights. In 1957, Richard Hammer assumed the role of general manager and responsibility for day-to-day operations.

In 1968 a mechanic's labor was charged at \$7.50 per hour. In 1974 sales plummeted 25% as the Arab Oil Embargo drastically impacted gas prices from 39 to 57 cents per gallon and fuel supplies were short. In 1975 a retirement plan was offered to employees for the first time.

In 1983 Richard D. Hammer, Jr. (Dick) joined the family business after completing graduate school in engineering at the University of Wyoming. In 1989 he took over as general manager and assumed responsibility for the daily operations of the dealership while "Senior" became Chairman, a position vacant since Ed Hammer's death in 1977.

More recently, Hammer Chevrolet opened a new 10,000 sq. ft. "state of the art" Collision Center located north of the main showroom at Mandell and Gould in the summer of 1999. At the end of 2000, GM discontinued Oldsmobile. In 2002, planning began for reconstruction of the existing sales and service facility. A new, modern sales, service, business office and parts facility was

rebuilt on the original site of the 1929 International Harvester store. Many interior and exterior components including Art Deco design and original neon signage were restored and redeployed to pay homage to the historic roots and location of the business in historic downtown Sheridan. A grand reopening was held in November 2004. The new/used car display lots were expanded and improved with pavement and lighting in 2005.

In 2007, as gasoline approached \$4/gallon and continuing into 2008 and 2009, the American automobile industry was rocked by events and crises in the broader economy and financial markets. GM closed nearly 40% of U.S. dealerships. Hammer Chevrolet's strong community support, loyal customer base (many third and fourth generation customers) and parts, service and collision repair operations greatly helped span this uncertain time for vehicle sales.

Now, in 2012, Hammer Chevrolet is celebrating 75 years in the automobile business. Three generations of Hammers have operated this business and served Sheridan and the surrounding communities. Hammer Chevrolet has 36 employees with an annual payroll of over a million dollars. Through wars, recessions, the Great Depression, boom and bust and oil embargos some things have never changed. Hammers have sold and serviced Chevrolets. As Dick Hammer says, "We have supported and contributed to these communities we call home. We have volunteered our time and contributed money and services. We have supported your church, your hospital, your YMCA, your senior citizens and veterans, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Rodeos and beauty pageants and every sports team imaginable. And you have supported us. Thank you."

In celebration of 75 years in business, Hammer Chevrolet is hosting an open house on Friday, April 13, at their currently location of 107 E. Alger. They will also be giving away prizes all month long, which include: \$75 Farmers Co-op gas cards with any vehicle purchase, 75 Hammer commemorative Growlers with Black Tooth Brewery beer, 75 pairs of Centennial Theater movie tickets, a .75 carat pair of diamond earrings from Kraft's Jewelry and \$75 gift certificates for Hammer Parts and Service. Please stop by and visit them, call them at 674-6419 or visit their website at www.hammerchevy.com.