

# San Fernando Valley Business Journal

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## Passing of Torch Poses Challenges for Family

By Mark R. Madler - 6/25/2007

San Fernando Valley Business Journal Staff

Succession planning can be a tough road for family businesses to travel and it's no different at the leading car dealer in the San Fernando Valley.

At Galpin Motors, Brad Boeckmann and brother Beau are being groomed to take over the business from the their father Bert, whose success is legendary in the Valley business community.

Planning for that succession has been difficult because of the personalities involved, said Brad Boeckmann, a vice president.

For one, his father is not the retiring type and will always want to be involved. For another, both his father and mother think of the business in terms of all the hard work they have put into it, Brad Boeckmann said.

"It's happening but happening slowly," Brad Boeckmann told an audience of 25 at a gathering June 21 of the Family Business Center of California State University, Northridge.

Galpin Ford, one of a number of dealerships collected under the Galpin Motors banner, is the largest Ford dealer by volume in the world.

Brad Boeckmann, however, in telling the history of Galpin Motors, said that his father was never a "car guy" but had caught the eye of Fred Galpin because of the way he treated customers.

When he was a young salesman in the 1950s, Bert Boeckmann took it personally if he did not close a deal, his son said.

The lessons taught to the sales staff 50 years ago remain in place today – keep a promise to a customer and have a clean, organized and friendly showroom for the customer to step into.

Galpin expanded over the years to add Mazda, Saturn, Jaguar, Lincoln-Mercury, Aston Martin and Honda dealerships. The company also pioneered customization with its Galpin Auto Sports; and added amenities, such as a restaurant, that are now common place at many dealerships.

From a staff of about 40 in the late 1960s, the company now employs nearly 1,200 people. The combined revenues from all the dealerships in 2006 were \$740 million.

Family members have always been involved with the dealerships. Brad Boeckmann said he started there on weekends when still in junior high school.

Working with family – including his own two sons – has been an enriching experience yet also fraught with difficulties, he said.

For instance, it may not always be clear when his father is playing the role of the Galpin Motors boss or that of a parent, Brad Boeckmann said.

Boeckmann described his brother Beau – seen on MTV's vehicle customization show "Pimp My Ride" – as being creative, bright and driven, and said they don't always see eye to eye.

"It causes stress you might not have if this weren't a family member," Brad Boeckmann said.

Another source of stress that Galpin Motors must address comes from outside the dealership and the Valley and all the way to Detroit.

The tough times in the U.S. auto industry are not limited to those corporate giants making the cars but trickles down to the sellers, even one as large as Galpin.

The dealership faces those tough times by getting out before the public to get across the quality of Ford products over the imports, Brad Boeckmann said.