

Frank Motors Is Committed To Both Customers and Its Employees

Entrepreneurial Spirit Runs in Family; New Superstore All About Customer Service

BY JESSICA KING

Perspective, flexibility and communication. Together, those three elements have proven crucial to the continued success of the family owned and operated **Frank Motors Group** in National City.

The family's foray into car dealerships began in 1965 when brothers **Frank** and **Felice Fornaca** opened Frank Lincoln Mercury in National City's then-relatively new Mile of Cars. Over the years, the family expanded with **Frank Toyota**, **Frank Hyundai** and **Frank Subaru**.

Though Frank Lincoln Mercury was sold back to the manufacturer in the late 1990s, Frank Toyota, Frank Hyundai and Frank Subaru continue to thrive under the family's operation today.

Frank's son, **Ron Fornaca**, serves as president of Frank Hyundai and Frank Subaru, while **Gary Fenelli**, who married into the family in 1973, is president of Frank Toyota. Both men have been heavily involved in the family business for decades.

"I think what I've learned over the years is that ... when you are at work, you are the boss, and when you are at home, you are something else ... the father, the uncle," Fenelli said. "You can't be working business at the dinner table."

However, Fenelli's father-in-law didn't always follow that train of thought.

Starting at the Bottom

"I'll never forget it," said Ron Fornaca. "When I was 12, one summer day, my dad said, 'you're not going to just run around in the neighborhood. You're going to wash cars' and I did."

The younger Fornaca continued to have summer jobs in the family business throughout high school,

7,384

Frank Motors:
Number of new and used
vehicles sold in 2016

and later became a salesman before working his way into management.

Other family members involved in the business today include Fenelli's and Fornaca's children. Fenelli has a son and two daughters who work for Frank Motors Group, while Fornaca has a son and a daughter for a grand total of seven family members. The latest generation of Fornacas is involved in everything from sales management to digital marketing.

The Fornaca family's work ethic and business savvy can be traced back to patriarch **Mario Fornaca**. The Italian immigrant opened a bakery business in Logan Heights in 1912. The business, which endured several name changes, grew to be a 24-hour, multimillion-dollar operation.

By the mid-1990s, it was known as the Fornaca Family Bakery. It was then that the bakery was sold to Pacific Pride Baking Co., which would later be acquired by Texas-based **Bimbo Bakeries USA**.

Chain of Command

One advantage of being a family owned and operated business is that the chain of command is easily accessed, Fenelli said.

"We can make decisions relatively quickly," Fenelli said. "We still have a chain of command to go through but we have the flexibility to meet with each other and communicate with one another easily. It's not a lengthy process."

And when there is a disagreement, the fix is

clear, added Fornaca.

"You get in a room and you hash it out," he said. Being a family business does have its downsides, though.

"When you're a family operation and you have to make choices, like making the decision to lay people off, boy, that's a hard thing to do because they aren't just numbers to us," said Fornaca, referring to the latest recession.

"I think one benefit with the family owned business is Ron and I are on the ground floor with our employees," Fenelli said. "Our employees are not just a number."

A Family and a Dealership Family

Fenelli said he knows every one of the 175 employees and their families at Frank Toyota.

The family fosters employee morale by having monthly group birthday celebrations. Also, promotion within the company is huge, according to Fenelli.

Additionally, there are company-sponsored scholarship programs for employees' children wishing to go to college.

Whatever the family is doing seems to be working. About 15 percent of the company's total 350 or so employees have been with the Fornaca family for more than 20 years.

On May 22, Frank Subaru opened a brand new superstore on its existing location. The new superstore measures 22,000 square feet and was designed to be energy efficient and customer friendly, with comfortable waiting lounges and more than 40 service bays for those bringing in cars for maintenance. There is also an attached dog park.

"We built this to grow," Fornaca said.



Jamie Scott Lytle

A family-owned business has its plusses and minuses, says Ron Fornaca, president of Frank Hyundai and Frank Subaru.