



Home of the Brave

By Darian Armor

The owners of Lichtsinn RV didn't have to look far to find the ideal inventory for the dealership's customers.

Located only 1 mile from the Winnebago plant in Forest City, Iowa, Lichtsinn RV since 2005 has exclusively retailed new Winnebago motorhomes.

It didn't always used to be that way, however. Between 2002 and 2005, Lichtsinn carried a few different Keystone and Forest River towable brands.

"We were trying to focus more on our local market," company President Ron Lichtsinn explains. "A lot of the workforce in Forest City can't align their budget with a motorcoach, but we realized our passion was for the motorized segment of the RV industry."

Proximity to Winnebago is a benefit, but it wasn't the only reason the dealership chose to exclusively retail the RV maker's motorized products, according to Lichtsinn. Brand recognition and an acknowledgement that segments of the motorized market are performing well also played a factor, he says.

"We certainly align ourselves with what we believe to be the highest quality motorized RV manufacturer. Winnebago consistently ranks No. 1 in RVDA DSI quality industry indices," Lichtsinn says. "We learned between 2008 and 2010 – as we slipped in and out of recession – that it's a brand that follows emerging trends and demographics."

Today, the dealership carries a full range of motorized products, but B vans and fuel-efficient Class C models have come to represent a growing segment of the dealership's inventory.

Lichtsinn RV prospers thanks in part to its specialized focus retailing Winnebago motorhomes and its strong emphasis on employee retention and education.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LICHTSINN RV

Ron Lichtsinn, owner of Lichtsinn RV, is pictured with several Winnebago motorhomes on the dealership's sales lot. Lichtsinn says narrowing the dealership's focus to retailing only Winnebago motorhomes has proven beneficial for the dealership.

“We’re certainly going to stock more of Class B and C’s,” Lichtsinn says. “The stocking pattern of a Class B is a bit more streamlined and attracts a much larger audience.”

Adapting to Changing Times, Conditions

Adapting to changing conditions is not a new thing for Lichtsinn RV. Lichtsinn’s father started the dealership in 1976 as a Chevrolet Oldsmobile dealer, adding Winnebagos to his lot in the early 1980s. The automotive and RV operations were run out of the same facility.

In 2001, when GM discontinued the Oldsmobile line, Lichtsinn and his father switched the dealership to retailing Buicks. The dealership remained a full-line automotive dealer until 2015, when the dealership chose to focus exclusively on retailing RVs.

Transition also has occurred in terms of the dealership’s ownership. Ron Lichtsinn was raised in the business, but when he

graduated from high school in 1989 he wanted to do something else with his life. As he gained some life experience, however, he began to change his mind.

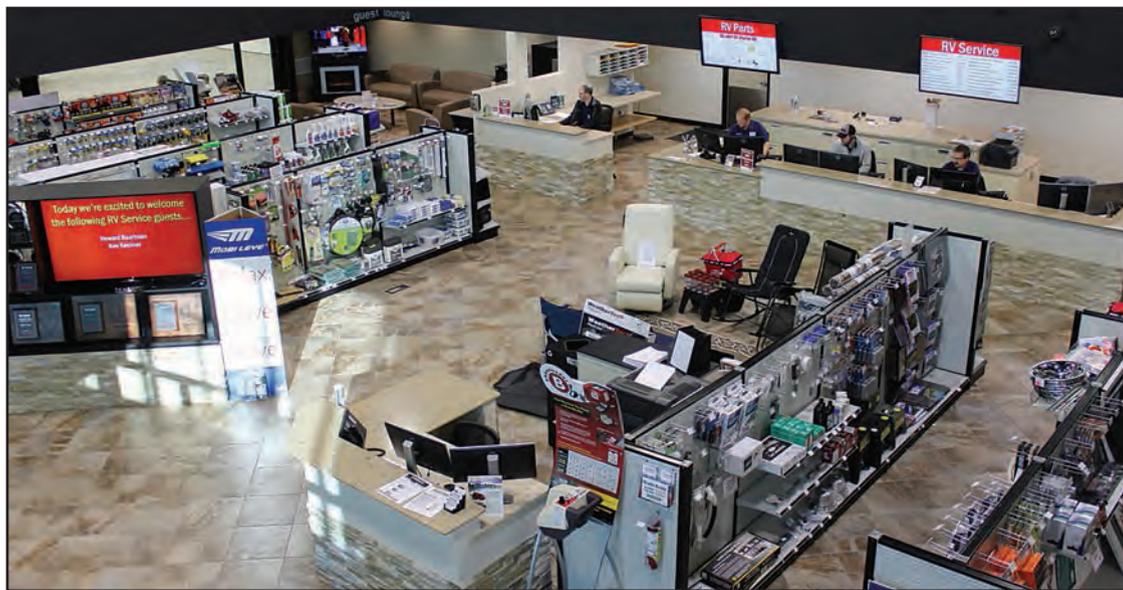
Lichtsinn and his father began plans for succession in 2000, and in 2001 Lichtsinn took over the dealership, which sits on 20 acres and features a 30,000-square-foot sales and service center and a 7,000-square-foot parts and accessories store.

Today, Lichtsinn credits being adaptable to change – combined with the strategy of focusing on motorized sales and a strong emphasis on employee retention and education – with allowing the business to prosper over the years.

The Right Hires

Despite the fact that Iowa’s unemployment rate is nearly 2 percent lower than the national average, Lichtsinn says he has very little employee turnover at the dealership.

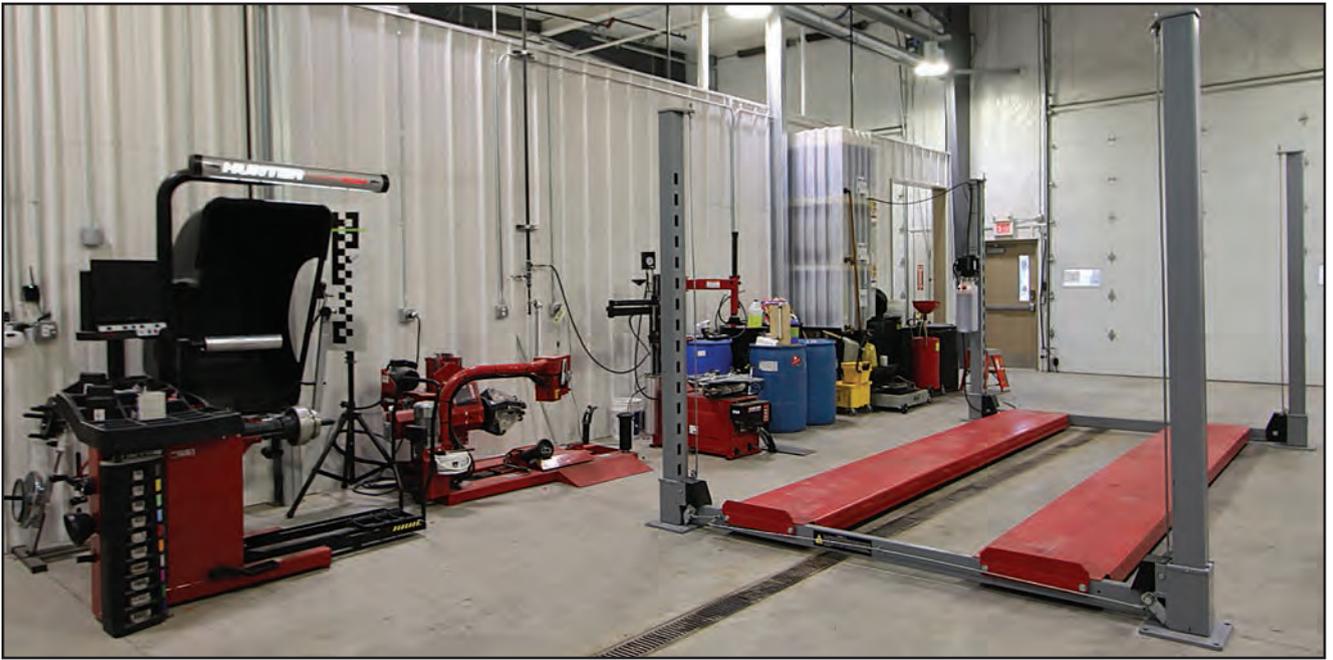
“It’s one of our strengths. We have great retention,” he says.



Lichtsinn RV features a 7,000-square-foot parts and accessories store stocked with popular products.

The dealership’s management team is pictured at right. Members of the management team are (left to right); Brandon Mondt, business manager; Callie Schmidt, marketing specialist; Heidi Thompson, vice president and general manager; Joshua Chase, RV finishing and quality control manager; Hope Lichtsinn, owner; Casey Singelstad, controller and human resources manager; Hannah Lunning, RV sales manager; Brian Buffington, service director; Ron Lichtsinn, owner; and Lonnie Fox, parts director. Not pictured are Dan Helgeson, business manager, and Sue Anne Hadacek, RV rentals manager.





Lichtsinn RV has a number of state-of-the-art service bays in which to perform service work on customers' RVs, including specialized repairs on motorhomes. The dealership sells and services a variety of Winnebago Class A, B and C motorhomes.



RVDA certified service technician Brad Buffington repairs a tire. The dealership's service techs are trained to tackle repair jobs big and small.

"We take an individual who has good problem-solving and interpersonal skills and bring them through professional development, teaching them to provide outstanding customer service."

Longtime employee Heidi Thompson, vice president and general manager of Lichtsinn RV, began working at the dealership in 1994 for Lichtsinn's father. After finishing college she remained at the dealership and worked in a variety of roles.

"We attribute our low turnover rates to hiring correctly in the first place. We are looking for an employee and team member who has the soft skills that are hard to train, such as work ethic, guest service and communication," Thompson says. "For us, we spend a lot of time on the front side making sure we're partnering up with the right person to ensure retention. We then provide continual training and professional development opportunities that help them grow in their career and create engagement."

Having engaged and trained employees helps with sales and service. Each employee is developed to help a guest regardless of what coach they are interested in. Any consultant can help any guest with any kind of product.

Employee Training is Key

At Lichtsinn RV, employee education is paramount.

"Education is what we hang our hat on," Thompson says. "We want to help RVers achieve the type of RVing and traveling they dream of. It's important to us within the purchase process to have educated consultants help customers achieve the right RV and their goals."

At Lichtsinn RV, a sales consultant is assigned to help educate a guest throughout the entire purchasing process.



A parts employee highlights aftermarket products new RVers might like to include on their coach during the orientation process. Lichtsinn RV's specialized focus on retailing Winnebago motorhomes helps it attract customers from across the United States.

Having begun as an automotive dealership, Thompson says dealership leaders know the time frame for an RV purchase – especially a motorhome – can take much longer than an automotive purchase.

“We know the buying cycle takes longer within the RV industry. We have a first contact and try to do a lot of work through the selection cycle of a guest because we don't want them to come back to us and say, ‘We bought the wrong floorplan,’” she says. “We put a lot of emphasis on that. We want to help them see how they are going to use the RV. We can work with a guest anywhere from a couple of months or a couple of years. It's unique in that you build relationships with people and get to know their story and background.”

Overcoming Fear with Education

Lichtsinn says sales consultants have a dedicated approach to support growth and help customers overcome any fears they may have about purchasing a motorcoach.

“We've found there are a few main fears of customers: Purchasing the wrong product, paying too much, education, and a fear of what happens next,” he says.

Lichtsinn RV has developed its Internet and in-person consumer education to such a level that the only time sales consultants are not able to help a guest in terms of the motorized segment is when a product is not in the customer's budget range or it's a product Winnebago doesn't offer.

Being so near the Winnebago factory comes with its advantages and disadvantages Lichtsinn says. While inventory experiences very little wear and tear making the 1-mile trip from the factory to the dealership lot, Lichtsinn says it can be a disadvantage when attempting to reach the business's far-flung customer base.



THE ULTIMATE TOWING BRAKE PACKAGE



✓ MODULITE® ZCI™ (ZERO CONTACT INTERFACE)

- ▶ Use the ZCI™ to wire and activate trailer lights



✓ 7-WAY ELECTRICAL ADAPTER

- ▶ Connect ZCI™ to 4-way to 7-way adapter



✓ PRODIGY® RF TRAILER MOUNTED BRAKE CONTROL

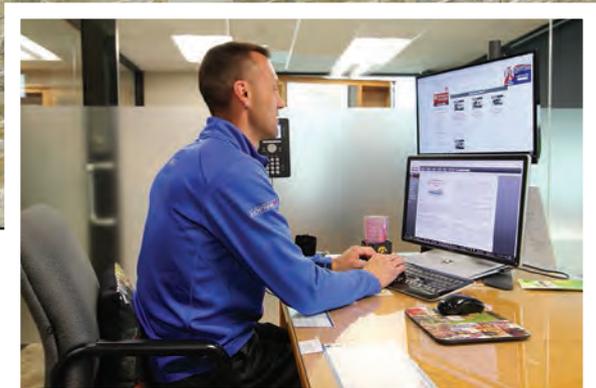
- ▶ Run 12 VDC power/charge line from tow vehicle battery to 7-way
- ▶ Mount Prodigy® RF trailer brake controller

WWW.TEKONSHA.COM

©2017 Horizon Global Americas, Inc. MKG2694



Above: The parts and service department team stands ready to assist customers.



At right: Sales consultant Jason Bruckoff responds to a potential customer via email.

With the bulk of the dealership's customer base coming from out of state, Lichtsinn and Thompson say the dealership must make sure value exceeds cost to get guests to leave their hometown and travel to Forest City for their purchase.

"What is validated in our reviews is the experience a guest will have leading up to their purchase," Lichtsinn says. "While here, they will receive an educational orientation with certified RVDA technicians and we follow up remotely. We offer a product that is nomadic and we have to express that long reach of service and education outside of break-in procedure."

A Strong Focus on Service

On the service side, Lichtsinn RV has eight service bays and six full time RVDA-certified technicians. The dealership's proximity to Winnebago helps it procure parts more quickly and the dealership also can outsource its paintwork to a Winnebago paint plant resource in town.

Looking at the dealership's service schedule on any given day, there will be guests from all over the country.

"It's not abnormal for our guests to take advantage of our service experience," Lichtsinn says. "We absolutely welcome guests who didn't purchase from us. We don't discriminate based on where someone purchased their coach; we service them regardless. It's an opportunity to display our professional level of service and provides a chance for us to win them over as a guest.

"The advantage from a service perspective is our expertise,"



The trophy case highlights just some of the awards Lichtsinn RV has won over the years.

he adds. "We help remotely by trouble shooting and expediting parts. In some cases, service advisors become a technician hotline for those who need help. We have people perceive us to be the factory based on our expertise."

When it comes down to it, Lichtsinn and Thompson are in the business not simply to sell RVs – but to help promote the RV lifestyle.

"One of the most fun things about this job is that the purchase of an RV is tied to some sense of freedom. Whether a customer is retiring or they are close they have the freedom to travel where they want," Thompson says. "Likely we have worked with them a long time, crossing from planning and dreaming to moving into reality. It's exciting to be a part of that."

PRO