



DODD RV NAMED PENINSULA AUTOMOTIVE RETAILER OF THE YEAR

Longtime family company adds newest title to its awards haul

By Melissa James
York County Contributor

In a year where camping suddenly became the trendy vacation choice, few RV dealers were as prepared to meet the demand as Dodd RV. With its impressive inventory of 250+ units—spanning over 11 acres on Highway 17 in Grafton—Dodd RV helped many new customers embark on family road trips in 2020.

Due in part to that success, this multi-award-winning company was named the 2020 Peninsula Automotive Retailer of the Year by the Retail Alliance, a nonprofit trade association that promotes the healthy growth of retail businesses in Hampton Roads.

“Dodd RV encapsulates all the elements that we look for in our Peninsula Automotive Retailer of the Year,” said Ray Mattes, President/CEO of Retail Alliance. “Their endurance, reputation, product quality, and community involvement are all characteristics to be admired

and rewarded in any business.”

“It’s pretty exciting to win that because of the number of phenomenal auto and RV dealers in this region,” said owner Jamie Dodd. In addition to this honor, the company has also been a “National Champion” in customer service for five years running from DealerRater.com (the leading national dealership review source), where it remains the highest rated dealership in both Virginia and the United States. Dodd RV also has been named one of the top 50 RV dealers in North America (out of 3,000) by the trade magazine RV Business many times over.

Dodd RV was an outgrowth of the Texaco gas station Jamie’s dad, George, first bought in 1956. The business was located in Portsmouth. One of George’s good friends operated a large RV dealership in Virginia Beach, which took a lot of autos on trade-in. George would buy the pre-owned vehicles and sell them at the Texaco. Later he began selling new travel trailers, around 20 feet each.



Owner Jamie Dodd accepts the Peninsula Automotive Retailer of the Year award from Retail Alliance representative Beth Cook.

“I worked at Dodd RV Portsmouth as a kid, cutting grass and cleaning campers,” Jamie said. “After attending college at the University of Alabama, I went to work in the automotive industry—and I loved it.”

Jamie decided to pursue his MBA at the University of Florida a few years later. Upon graduation, his father offered him a great opportunity with Dodd RV Portsmouth. Jamie said he felt it was what he was supposed to do, but wasn’t sure it was what he wanted to do. So he discussed the decision with several mentors, and they all advised him that the RV industry would be an excellent career move.

“That was over 20 years ago,” he said. “Today, I couldn’t imagine doing anything else.”

In 2008, Jamie opened another location in York County—which survived the subsequent reces-

sion and has since thrived.

“I think one of the great things about the recreational vehicle business is that we’re making a difference for families—we create memories and experiences, which last forever,” he said, noting that his customers span all age groups.

“Motor homes are the most expensive, but the travel trailers are very reasonable, and that’s a big part of our business. The banks will do extended-term financing on RVs.”

The company also services RVs, which need a higher level of care. Jamie explained that these are homes on wheels, so they’re bouncing and shaking down the road, and get exposed to extreme heat and cold. Dodd RV stresses the importance of maintenance to help the vehicles perform optimally and last for years.



Dodd RV in 1988.



The Dodd family in 2020, from left: dog Giro, Elizabeth, Christina, Jamie, Cannon and Abigail.

The key to the company's success though, he said, is its unique processes to support the customer experience.

"Our team is carefully selected and trained on how to treat people," he said. "We strive to make customers comfortable—to make their experience to be non-pressured. We won't twist your arm to buy an RV today. It's a casual shopping environment, where they can stroll around and look at RVs at their leisure."

Many first-time buyers don't understand the difference between

the brands, he explained, and don't realize that Dodd RV has exclusivity on the entire Hampton Roads market for several of the nation's top brands: Tiffin Motorhomes (a dominant force in motor home building for quality, features and visual appeal), and Grand Design RV (recognized as premier towable RV builder). Dodd RV also sells other brands, including Thor and Forest River.

"Because of our long-term success, premier brands have made Dodd RV a first choice to represent them," he said.

"There are nine RV dealerships in this region, but we're the only one with these brands."

So what bells and whistles can you find in the high end of the market? Tiffins often come with four large-screen TVs. Many have washers, dryers and dishwashers. Some "toy haulers" have a garage for ATVs and golf carts inside. The largest top out at 45 feet long. The exteriors have come a long way, Jamie said, with premium paint jobs for stunning visual appeal. New travel trailers start in the \$15K/16K range, and then the Tiffin motor homes can go as high as \$600K.

Jamie with a line of the company's high-end RVs

But it was the basic travel trailers that flew off the lot this year as first-time buyers flooded the market. The popular floor plans sold out quickly. Still, Jamie managed to find time with wife Christina and children Elizabeth, 11, Abigail, 10, and Cannon, 8, plus their pup Giro. The family enjoys camping (of course), boating, biking, and being active at Liberty Live Church in Williamsburg.

The Dodd family and business are also devoted to community support—coaching and sponsoring youth sports, and supporting York County Sheriff's summer programs and Shopping for Santa, Gloucester Dukes Football, Special Olympics, York County Safety Town, An Achievable Dream, Toys for

Tots, the Peninsula Food Bank, and Lackey Clinic.

What's next for Dodd RV? It will begin expansion beside its existing property, including a new showroom and sales center.

"Jim Noel from the County has been a key asset to our success," Jamie said. "So have Susan Castle and Sam Daniels." He also credits his parents, who played an essential role in the business for decades. His two sisters, Susie and Jennifer Dodd, both work for the dealerships, and his brother Paul acquired Dodd's Automotive Service, which is on the same site as the original Texaco.

"If you look up family business in the dictionary, you'll see our picture," Jamie joked. But he places just as much value on the non-blood members of the Dodd RV family.

"The biggest reason for this recent award is the great people on our team at Dodd RV Yorktown. They have made a huge difference. They include general manager Mike McNeil, Ricky Miner, Scott Hudgins, Mary Tippet, Crystal Dynan, Linda Testa, Suzanne Anderson and Pete Foertsch," he said. Jamie also expressed how happy he was to have a business in York County: "It's safe, the neighbors are great and it's central for our region."

Dodd RV is located at 7023 George Washington Memorial Highway in Yorktown and 4705 Portsmouth Blvd in Portsmouth.



Jamie with a line of the company's high-end RVs