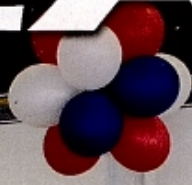


OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE PUGET SOUND AUTOMOBILE DEALERS ASSOCIATION

# THE PUGET SOUND DEALER



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# Mike and Scott Blade

## *A 100+ Year Legacy*

## *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*

Driving into the Mt. Vernon dealership of Blade Chevrolet, the first thing one sees at the base of their welcoming sign is the prominence of the name *Walt Blade*.

It is a name that was, and is, a northwest automotive icon and its perpetual presence says much about the Blade mission and motto: *Yesterday, today and tomorrow*.

“Our great grandfather Carl was the pioneer,” says owner Mike Blade, “but it was Walt who was always the soul of Blade Chevrolet.”

The legacy began over a century ago. The year was 1913 and Carl Blade was operating a blacksmith shop in the small waterfront town of La Conner. Observing that his horseshoe business was dwindling due to the rising popularity of the “horseless carriage,” Carl wisely transitioned from horses to automobiles and was soon selling the Ford Model A.

“Carl saw the writing on the wall,” says Scott Blade, Mike’s brother and co-owner. “He brought the Blade family in on the ground floor of the car business.”

The fledgling dealership grew and flourished, and in 1929 Carl made three historic decisions: (1) he moved the business to Mt. Vernon to have access to the railroad, (2) he settled on Chevrolet as his exclusive product line, and (3) he brought his son, Walt, newly graduated from the University of Washington, into the business.

Walt turned out to be a natural – a savvy businessman and community leader who grew the dealership through extraordinary customer service and a love of people and cars. His passion was passed to his two sons: Karl, who operated the Mt. Vernon store for 17 years, and Bill – father to Mike and Scott – who built on the Chevy-Blade gene pool at the Spokane dealership of their maternal grandfather R.G. “Buck” Buchanan before returning to the Skagit Valley in 1980.

“Hardly a day goes by that someone doesn’t share a positive story about our dad or grandfather,” says Mike. “Walt and Bill showed us that customers can and should be an extended family.”

Both Scott and Mike graduated from Eastern Washington University and settled quickly into learning every aspect of dealership operations. This was no small task: the Blade business is one of the most comprehensive in the Northwest, with new and pre-owned vehicles, service and body shops, a Business Elite fleet division and a recreational vehicles department.

Their service operation, which services all GM brands, has captured the AAA “Top Shop” Award for the past eight years, and they were the only Washington dealership to be awarded Chevrolet’s Mark of Excellence in 2013. For 14 straight years they have been voted the “People’s Choice” award for the Best Auto Dealer in Skagit County.

The brothers credit a committed and gifted staff for the recognition and success.

"We're blessed with a team that's committed to excellence," says Scott. "Whether it's training or goal setting or customer service, it's a matter of pride to everyone here."

The current staff of about 70 boasts a number of people with tenures of 30 years and more. One man who still works part-time likes to remind the Blades that he has been around longer than they have.

"Pete likes to point out that he's been in our service department longer than I've been drawing breath," laughs Mike. "There's a lot of longevity and loyalty with this team."

Part of the appeal, of course, is the beauty and livability of the Skagit Valley. Located 35 miles north of Everett and 30 miles south of Bellingham, Blade Chevrolet draws customers from a vast area and, for pre-owned vehicles and RV's, from Canada. They reach the market through some traditional methods – radio, print, direct mail – but it is the Internet that has turned their business in a new and positive direction.

"These days, the vast majority of car buyers have searched online and pretty much know what they want in a car or truck," says Scott. "They've seen the vehicles on our website but they still want to see them up close and personal. It's been the combining of technology with old fashioned customer service and a family atmosphere that's been the key to our growth."

Another source of brand recognition comes from participation and support of charities and community events. Scores of non-profits have benefited from Blade giving, including the Boys & Girls Clubs, youth baseball and soccer, area schools



Mike Blade



Scott Blade

Photo by Adam Buchanan

and colleges, hunger and housing support groups, service clubs, performing arts, hospital foundations, first responders, and, of course, the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival.

"For us, it's the easiest thing we do," says Mike. "Walt showed us the example – to give back to the communities that have allowed us to flourish for 101 years."

Is there another generation to follow in the family business? Scott and his wife Jo Ann have four children (Dalan, Chelsey, Tyler, and Brannigan), each of whom has spent time at work in the store. Mike and wife Vicki have two adult sons – son Cooper is at school in Germany and Alex is currently on staff.

"Time will tell if our children eventually make this their career," says Mike. "I know there was a time when I said I would never...ever...ever get in the car business."

Scott agrees. "When we were kids, we'd come into the store and think 'this is so boring.'"

As it turned out, that was just Walt and Bill making it all look easy."

"No question - there's plenty of excitement to go around,"

adds Mike. "We've got the gray hairs to prove it. But it's still one of the greatest jobs in the world."

Walt Blade, whose name will always be on the company sign, would surely agree.



Scott and Mike Blade