

THE MORNING CALL

Kellys add seventh area car dealership to their portfolio

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If selling cars is your thing, how many dealerships are enough?

In the Lehigh Valley, if your last name is Kelly, that number was bumped up to seven last week when Bob Kelly and his son Greg bought the Cooper Nissan dealership on William Penn Highway in Bethlehem Township for a price both declined to disclose. The family has a few other operations outside the Valley too, so when you include the Lancaster and Florida dealerships, the Kellys now have 10.

You can have "Kelly" written in chrome script on a Buick, Jeep, Cadillac, Subaru, Saab or a Ford. And your Saturn from the Route 33 dealership in Lower Nazareth Township is a Kelly, too.

The immediate impact of adding Nissan was dramatic, says Bob Kelly, as it seemed as if the building was part of a makeover show when cleaning, paint and landscaping crews arrived to make working conditions a little prettier for the 40 or so employees, none of whom is risking a pink slip because of their new owner.

Of course, the William Penn Highway site -- even though it's all gussied up -- will be closed down in a year or so as the Nissan dealership's new digs are ready about five miles away next to the Saturn dealership.

The family has been looking to add a Japanese import on the 10-acre site since 1995, Greg Kelly says, and the Nissan dealership provided the perfect opportunity to expand the product line.

Sales are good, he says, even though Alan Greenspan, who's no longer head of the Federal Reserve but still seems to be listened to, has been pretty cranky about the state of the economy and the possibility of a recession.

The Kelly organization, including all the brands, sells about 5,000 cars and does about 50,000 service transactions a year. Overall sales are up about 12 percent over last year, Greg says.

"We've been blessed to have significant new products in just about every franchise," he says.

"Our business is built on customer retention, and that's easier when there are more brands to offer."

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