

BY RON REAHARD

# He Had a Goal: Remembering David Ressler

Sometimes it's not the teacher who leaves a lasting impression, it's the student. The magazine's resident F&I pro says goodbye to one trainee he will never forget.

In 1986, a young car salesman by the name of Dave Ressler from Mandan, N.D., attended one of my very first F&I classes in Galveston, Texas. I remember him well, mainly because of the outlandish attire he graced my classes with each day. They were definitely wild outfits. He wore a florescent yellow shirt and lime green pants with a white belt and matching shoes the first day of class. You needed sunglasses just to look at him.

His attire was even more outlandish the second day. By Day Three, I couldn't help but ask, "Dave, where do you even find clothes like this, a clown store?" Dave

turned the volume down a bit for the class photo, wearing bright blue pants with a red shirt and white sport coat. I couldn't help myself and asked, "Dave, shouldn't you be on a flagpole somewhere?"

But Dave was one of those people who, when you meet them, you just like them. You're not quite sure why, you just do. When Dave was around, you just knew you were going to have fun. He was always positive, energetic, and just fun to be around.

## MAKING A PROMISE

Dave was just as loud as the outfits he

wore. In fact, he had the loudest voice in the room. When class had concluded, he walked up and vigorously shook my hand. "I sure enjoyed this class," he said. "I've learned so much I can hardly wait to get back to the dealership and start helping customers in the F&I office. But I got to ask you a question.

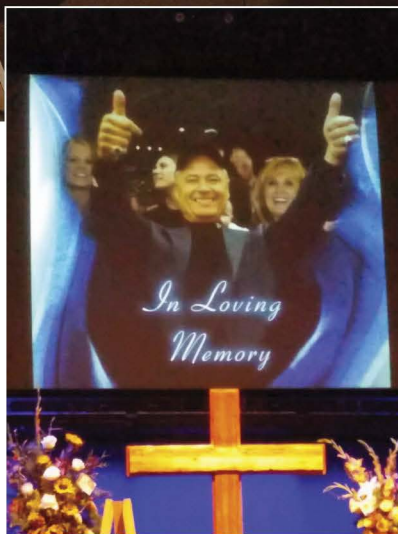
"Someday, I'm going to be a car dealer," he continued. "And when I get my dealership, I want you to come to my grand opening." Thinking the only way he was going to get his own store was with a Ph.D. — as in "papa has a dealership" — I asked, "Dave, does your dad



Pictured inside his 2015 Corvette Stingray is the late Dave Ressler. To the right is a photo Ron Reahard's 1986 F&I class. Ressler, standing to the left in his red, white and blue suit, purchased clown noses for the occasion. Reahard can be seen standing to the far right wearing a yellow clown nose.



About 1,200 people attended David Ressler's funeral on Nov. 17, 2017. It was held at Grace Bible Church in Bozeman, Mont. Ressler died of a heart attack 10 days earlier. The owner of Ressler Motors was 61.



**DAVID RESSLER**  
AUG. 24, 1956 – NOV. 7, 2017

David M. Ressler passed away on Nov. 7, 2017, at the age of 61. The Mandan, N.D., resident was born Aug. 24, 1956 to the late Chris and Agnes Ressler. In his early years, Ressler worked at Barney's Standard Service, Bill's Super Value, and drove a bus for the Mandan school system.

In 1980, Ressler began working as a salesman and finance manager for Chase Chevrolet of Mandan, a dealership he purchased from Ivan Gandrud in 1987. The dealer then added a Subaru franchise in 2002.

In the 1990s, Ressler moved to Bozeman, Mont., where he offered to buy dealer Pat Connell's Connell Chevrolet. By February 1999, he was the owner of what is now Ressler Motors. In January 2015, Ressler purchased Montana Import Group, which is now Gallatin Motors.

Ressler received numerous awards throughout his career for his sales, leadership and managerial accomplishments, and was a frequent Chevrolet Legion of Leaders recipient. The dealer loved the car business and everything about it. He was known for his generosity and support of community outreach projects, charitable foundations like the Wounded Warrior Project, youth sports programs, Montana State University, local schools, and much more.

In January 2016, Ressler Motors and the Gallatin Ice Foundation announced a 10-year corporate partnership to construct what is known today as Ressler Motors Ice Rink, which celebrated its first year in operation on Jan. 12.

Ressler is survived by his wife Gerri, whom he married in 1976; daughters Kandace Maxwell and Natalie Ressler; grandchildren Ayden and Hannah Maxwell, and Cayel and Owen Murphy; brothers Butch, Louie and Dan, and sisters Marsha Hertz and Lynn Ressler; and numerous nieces and nephews.

A celebration of Ressler's life was held on Nov. 17, 2017 in Bozeman, Mont.

own a dealership?"

Dave replied, "No, my dad doesn't have a dealership. But someday I'm going to own a dealership. And when I get my dealership, I want you to come to my grand opening." I told him I'd be happy to come to his grand opening. "OK, that's all I want to know," he said.

About six months later, I was out traveling with one of our reps. We had a little extra time before I had to catch my flight, so he suggested we stop by to see Dave Ressler. "He went through your class a few months ago," he said.

So we stopped by Ivan Gandrud Chevrolet, where Dave worked. From the showroom, I could see Dave at his desk, writing on a ruled pad. As we walked toward his office, I noticed him looking up at the ceiling, really concentrating. Then he'd write something on that pad. He was so involved in what he was doing he didn't notice us until we knocked on his office door.

Dave leapt to his feet, shook my hand, and exclaimed, "Wow! What are you doing up here? I sure didn't expect to see you today." We exchanged pleasantries and talked for a few minutes. Then I looked at the notepad on his desk and asked what he was working on.

"Oh, I'm trying to see how many benefits of credit life I can come up with today," he said. "Yesterday, I could only come up with 28 benefits. And by God, I'm going to get 30 today if it kills me." Keep in mind he had no idea I was going to show up that day, so he wasn't doing it for me. No, he was doing it for Dave Ressler.

**A DEALER'S PATH**

What I didn't know about Dave when he came through my F&I class was he was the top salesperson at his dealership. The reason he elected to go into F&I was because he knew it would help him pay



After moving to Bozeman, Mont., David Ressler purchased Connell Chevrolet from Pat Connell in 1999. He later renamed the dealership Ressler Motors. In 2015, he purchased Montana Import Group, now known as Gallatin Motors.



Ressler Motors claims to be the largest volume dealership in the state of Montana. Located on Huffine Lane in the city of Bozeman, the operation represents Chevrolet, Cadillac and Toyota. It also operates a pre-owned store at the same location.

for his dealership. In other words, it was another step toward his goal.

When Dave got back from F&I school, he had a new goal. He wasn't going to be a good F&I manager, nor a great F&I manager. He was going to be the best F&I manager in the United States. I don't know if he ever achieved that, but I can tell you with all certainty that he was *really* good.

I heard from Dave less than a year later. I was in my office when the phone rang. "It's a beautiful day," the voice on the other side of the line rang out. "Yes, it is a beautiful day. Do you still love your job?" I asked. "I sure do," the voice answered. "Do you know who this is?"

Since 1985, I've started every F&I class the same way: "It's a beautiful day. I feel good. I live in America. And I love my job!" So I knew it had to be a former student. I just didn't know who, and I admitted so in my reply.

"It's Dave Ressler!" the voice shouted. I asked him how he was doing. He said things were great and then asked, "Do you remember me?" I confessed I didn't, as I desperately tried to put a face to the name. "Well, maybe this will refresh your memory: You called me a clown," he said.

"Oh, yeah, I remember you now, Dave. You wore the brightest clothes of anybody I ever met," I replied. He then asked if I remembered what he said after class. I didn't. He then reminded me that he came up, shook my hand, and told me he would someday be a dealer. He then reminded me of his request — that he wanted me to come to his grand opening. "Oh, I remember that now," I replied.

"Well, it's this Saturday," he said. "Will you come?"

## KEEPING A PROMISE

I kept my promise and flew up for Dave's



David Ressler purchased his first store, Chase Chevrolet, in 1987. The Mandan, N.D., store was the same dealership his father Chris worked at for 25 years. Pictured to the right is the yellow cap he handed out during his grand opening. Ressler was also an avid Corvette collector, and amassed a collection of 55 of the most coveted Corvettes.

grand opening. He gave out what was probably the brightest yellow farmer's cap I've ever seen that day. Of course, he was kind enough to autograph mine.

Well, Dave wasn't done. After he took over that Chevrolet dealership, he bought another one, as well as a Toyota dealership in Bozeman, Mont. The only difference between Dave Ressler and most F&I managers I train is that he had a goal. And he worked on that goal every day.

I think I've told this story in every single F&I class since Dave got his first dealership. I still have that glowing yellow cap from the grand opening of the original Ressler Chevrolet in my office. I also have a framed picture that Dave gave me of his 1986 F&I class. Everyone in the photo is wearing clown noses he bought just for the occasion.

I was devastated when I learned of Dave's passing on Nov. 7, 2017. He was 61 and had a heart attack. He was a larger-than-life personality who was a



friend to everyone who knew him. He generously gave back to his community and to numerous charities, and he always went out of his way to help others. It was a joy to be around him.

Dave's enthusiasm for life and relentlessly positive attitude was both inspiring and inescapable. Whether you are a salesperson, an F&I manager, or an automobile dealer, as Randy Travis sang in "Three Wooden Crosses," "It's not what you take when you leave this world behind you, it's what you leave behind you when you go." Dave, my friend, thank you for what you left behind. ■

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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