

REAL-TIME REBUILD

■ Service department doesn't miss a beat during extreme makeover

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Kindle Ford-Lincoln, in Cape May Court House, N.J., hadn't been fully renovated since it opened in 1957. When the dealership's executives launched a reconstruction project in late 2015, "we were worried about paying our bills" if the building had to close, says Steven Kindle, the store's vice president.

Instead, Kindle Ford-Lincoln — which Kindle's father, Bill Kindle, owns and his grandfather Bob Kindle founded — had one of its best years in 2016. That performance included a 7 percent increase in gross revenue from fixed operations over the previous year, Kindle says, declining to provide precise figures.



Tahtabrounian:
Kept store open
throughout work

The reason for this success: The dealership, including its service bays, stayed open and in operation throughout the eight-month renovation.

It wasn't easy keeping the business flowing and even growing despite inevitable disruptions, such as having to close half the service drive at a time while work was in progress, Kindle told *Fixed Ops Journal*. Still, he says, "we had a phenomenal year."

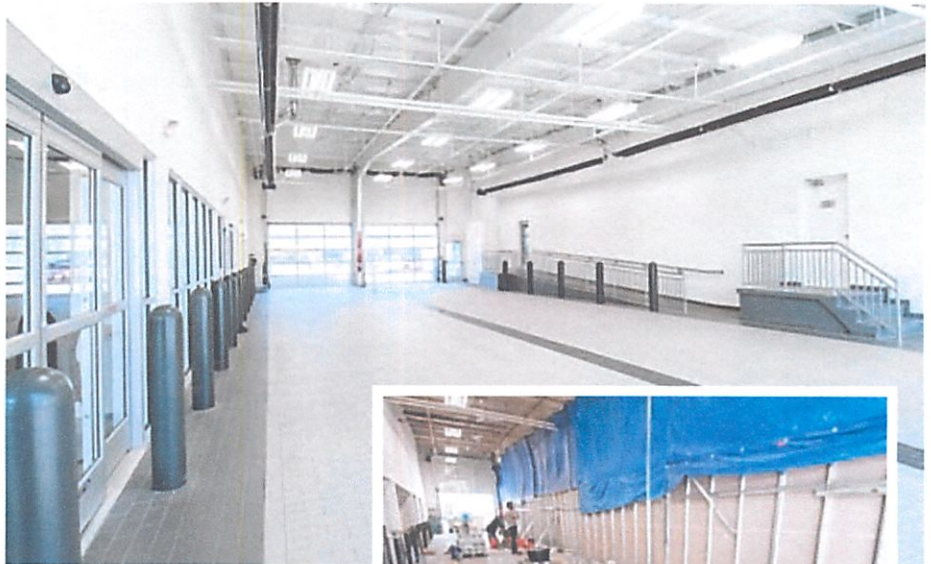
The dealership hired Oliver Construction Inc. of Norristown, Pa., to handle the renovation. The company's principal, John Tahtabrounian, had endorsements from Ford Motor Co. and other dealers, Kindle says.

One piece at a time

The key to keeping Kindle Ford-Lincoln open, Tahtabrounian says, was isolating and fixing up one piece of the dealership at a time. Renovating the service department was a particular challenge, he adds.

The dealership's service drive is two lanes wide for its entire length, with two garage doors at each end.

That allowed Oliver Construction to close off one side at a time and work while the other side stayed in business. In a shop of 20 service bays, construction proceeded on groups of four bays at a time.



During its renovation (above), Kindle Ford-Lincoln maintained its service drive while construction proceeded behind the scenes (right).



PHOTOS BY OLIVER CONSTRUCTION

Some downtime was inevitable. But Kindle said the dealership worked with service advisers and technicians to schedule their vacations for when their work stations were closed for renovations.

Before construction began, Kindle notes, the dealership had two service bays it wasn't using. That was because the store had trouble finding new technicians, not because there wasn't enough demand, he says.

During construction, he adds, the dealership did not hire technicians and put the open bays to use, as the store shuffled techs from bay to bay.

To save time, Kindle says, service advisers met customers at their vehicles and wrote repair orders before they entered the service drive. Service bays were closed in the middle of the week when business was slower, he says.

'Gridlock'

Ed Boyle, the dealership's fixed operations director, says he had to deal with "gridlock getting cars in and out. At one time, we reversed the direction of the service drive en-

trance and exit, so we had to have people outside directing traffic. Somebody could show up to deliver steel girders, right in the middle of your rush hour."

The dealership's customer satisfaction ratings were flat during the construction compared with ratings for the "functional but antiquated" facility that preceded it, Boyle says. Since the work was completed, he adds, the ratings have improved.

"All this doesn't mean we didn't have any dissatisfied customers because of the construction — we did," Boyle says. "But we explained to them how the work was going to improve everything."

Kindle says the renovation project cost "in excess of \$3 million," including a five-month remodeling of the family's smaller Chrysler-Jeep-Dodge-Ram dealership next door.

The work was performed under the auspices of the Ford Trustmark Design program.

The Ford initiative, which began in 2013, provides dealers with as much as \$750,000 in matching funds for facilities investments approved by the automaker. ■