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Fairfield auto dealers invest millions in showrooms

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By Chelsey Levingston

Staff Writer

FAIRFIELD — Riding higher auto sales, local auto dealers have made a series of recent investments to expand and renovate their southern Butler County showrooms.

Since 2009, seven dealerships, including Jeff Wyler, Performance Toyota and Superior Hyundai along Fairfield's Dixie Highway, have put money into new signage, extra floor space and renovating customer service areas to attract car buyers. Those investments exceed \$7.5 million, the cost of construction builders estimated when seeking permits from the city.

The so-called "auto mile" in Fairfield is a hot spot for buying and trading in cars, which attracts customers that spend money while they visit, said Greg Kathman, economic development manager for Fairfield.

"We attract customers from throughout the greater Cincinnati region who come up to get new cars, get them serviced," Kathman said. "People drive up here, they may get lunch, shop at Jungle Jim's while they're here."

Performance Automotive Network completed this year a more than \$4 million expansion, including \$2.8 million in direct building costs, at its Toyota dealership at 5676 Dixie Hwy. in Fairfield, said General Manager Bart Sturm.

The Performance Toyota showroom was renovated, and the service area expanded. The dealership's technicians service about 120 cars a day, Sturm said.

"Probably the most major transformation was on the inside. It was very old and pretty dark, but now it is pretty bright and airy," Sturm told Fairfield city council members at their July 14 meeting.

"We had 21 total bays available to service cars. We've doubled that. Now all of it is inside under air (conditioning)," he said.

Performance Auto first opened a dealership in 1971 near the site of Performance Toyota. The company, one of Cincinnati's largest privately-held businesses, today owns 10 dealerships in greater Cincinnati and Central Ohio.

Along with the renovations in Fairfield, "we are really trying to step up our level of service," Sturm said.

Two big initiatives undertaken for the second half of the year is to speed up the process of buying a car, he said. Additionally, plans for later this year are to ease car buying negotiations, and post the one best price upfront.

U.S. auto sales climbed four consecutive years to 15.6 million vehicles sold in 2013, according to Autodata Corp. That was the most since 16.1 million passenger cars and light trucks sold in 2007. Halfway through 2014, new vehicle sales of 8.2 million are tracking 4 percent higher than a year ago.

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