



TONY V. MARTIN | THE TIMES

REMODELED FACILITY READY WITH NEWEST BUICK-GMC MODELS

Experience the Schepel difference

Schepel Auto Group has been the top Buick-GMC dealer in Chicago for 19 years in a row, and is the largest GM Certified pre-owned car dealer in the area. Founded by President Rich Schepel in downtown Crown Point 1968, he moved Schepel Buick to its current Merrillville location in 1970. Rich added GMC in 1987 and Cadillac in 2002. Even though the Pontiac and Hummer brands were cut by GM, Schepel still offers GM authorized service for those owners, and has expanded their pre-owned showroom. You can still find Rich Schepel in the dealership a couple days a week, while day-to-day operations are handled by Tom

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Tom Van Prooyen, Vice President Schepel Auto Group

Van Prooyen, Schepel Auto Group’s vice president and Rich Schepel’s son-in-law, who originally signed on in 1982. “We were awarded GM’s Buick-GMC Dealer of the Year in 2010 and 2011, and we’re hoping we might capture it for 2012,” said Tom.

While Tom is seeing growth in the car market and in the local economy, he remains cautiously optimistic. “Last year showed some increase year-over-year in North American vehicle sales overall,” he said. “The Midwest stayed somewhat flat, but it didn’t decrease. Based on January, it looks like we are looking at an 8% to 10% increase this year.”

Quite the car buff himself, Tom is announcing a new series of events this year for car collectors and enthusiasts. “Saturday mornings this summer we’ll be holding ‘cars and coffee’ gatherings,” said Tom. “We’re not selling anything, it is just a social thing. It plays off the charity car show we hold every June. Any car is welcome. You can come out



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Schepel Team Members. (L to R) Dave Hoekstra, Bruce Lichtenfeld, Daniel Quinones, Tom Van Prooyen, Keith Vooy, Steven Ogrence, Tim Tedesco, Glen VanDerStee, Steve Doty, John Hastings.

in the morning, meet friends or make friends. Then get on with your day and go work on the yard, or take the kids to the beach.”

Schepel Buick-GMC completed major renovations to the dealership to new GM standards a year ago. Now Buick and GMC are in the midst of redoing or replacing their entire product lines to go in those showrooms, so we asked Tom what were the latest hits. “The 2013 Buick Encore is a new compact-sized luxury crossover,” he said. “It’s the first vehicle in its class, nothing else like this is offered. Initial response is very good, five came in they they all went out right away. It’s a nice size with room for four and it gets great fuel economy.”

“The GMC Sierra is totally redesigned for 2014,” said Tom. “We are known for trucks. This is not just a refreshing, it’s a whole new truck. New engines, new interior, new sheetmetal. There are a lot of great innovations. The tailgate hinges are damped so it goes down slowly when you open it. There are under-rail bed lights for the cargo area, and an integrated step to help you climb up. Another neat thing on the extended cab is the rear doors open forward like on the crew cab, whereas in the past they opened

backward. We’re really excited about this truck.”

Two very popular sales leaders over the last few years, the Buick Enclave and GMC Acadia crossovers have been restyled this year. “The size is similar, but there are some styling upgrades and new interiors,” said Tom. “What has made these vehicles so popular is they appeal to people who have had larger vehicles like the Tahoe and Yukon. They can still carry seven passengers, but they are V-6 powered and get much better fuel economy. Or else, some people have a smaller vehicle and their family is getting larger. It’s a great vehicle to move up to. There are a lot of attributes to these vehicles in size, economy, and comfort. All-wheel drive is available, which is great to have in our climate. They have it all. Plus the seats fold down so you can carry quite a lot of cargo if you need to.”

If pre-owned is your preference, Schepel Auto Group specializes in GM Certified Pre-Owned vehicles. Minimum warranty is 12 months/12,000 miles on GM Certified Pre-Owned cars, and now they are even including 2-year/30,000 mile maintenance.

“Getting good used cars is tougher and tougher,” says Tom. “Four years ago

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GM and Chrysler, and to some extent Ford, got out of leasing cars through their captive finance arms. So, it created a situation where there are now no late model off-lease cars, which were good merchandise for us. The good thing is consumers are finding out their vehicles are worth more than they typically expect. We’re even contacting customers with late-model low-mileage cars. You might not be thinking of trading, but a lot of people have been taking us up on it. Interest rates are low, and values are high. Sometimes they’re getting a new car and their payment is going lower.” General Motors is committed to leasing again with some great lease programs with Ally, US Bank, and GM Financial. Residual values on GM cars are the highest in years, which means lower payments for the consumer

Schepel Buick-GMC’s service department has extended service hours as well. “For the last year we’ve had a full Saturday service schedule, not just maintenance.” Says Tom. “We have a complete journeyman technician crew coming in six days a week, for the convenience of our customers. GM is now encouraging dealers to do this, and we were a bit ahead of the curve.”

The Schepel motto is Experience the Schepel Difference. “We have not, and do not intend to add any extra doc or prep charges to any transactions,” said Tom. “We think it’s distasteful that during the euphoria of buying a new car an extra charge just shows up. We’re different in what we do. We’ve always prided ourselves on a low-pressure, enjoyable car buying experience. We hope you have a good feeling about the time you spend with us. In the past there’s been a lot of negative feelings about the car buying experience and we work hard to overcome that.”