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Pictured top (clockwise), Christenson Chevrolet newly remodeled showroom, new car receiving area, service waiting area, and the 2014 Chevrolet Impala from the Chicago Auto Show.

NEWLY REMODELED DEALERSHIP CARRIES ON FAMILY TRADITION; CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Founded in 1951 in downtown Griffith, Christenson Chevrolet has been in its present Highland location since 1963. Dean Christenson says the key to this longevity is a family tradition of active involvement in the business. "My Father Milford, my Grandfather, Warner Christenson, and two uncles Dale Christenson Sr. and Roy Christenson were the original owners," says Dean. "Last year, Dale Christenson Sr. passed away, and Dale Christenson Jr. and Philip Christenson retired. The dealership is presently run by Milford Christenson, Dean Christenson Jr., and myself, Dean Christenson Sr. Other family members working here are Tara Christenson in advertising and Erv Christenson."

Many of Christenson Chevy's other employees have a lot of experience as well. Ron Lubarski, who replaced Philip Christenson as used car manager has over 20 years of experience. Mike Somers, sales manager also has over 20 years of experience.

The biggest news at Christenson Chevy is renovations to the facility.

"We treat customers like family and strive to provide the best products and services at the best prices and we invest in and support our communities. We also believe strongly that the current selection of vehicles that GM is producing and we offer are among the best available anywhere."

Dean Christenson Sr, Co-owner Christenson Chevrolet

"We recently remodeled the entire dealership," said Dean. "It's a redesigned state-of-the art, totally new buying experience. Right down to the service department and waiting room, it's all redone up to new General Motors standards. It's clean, it's warm in the winter,



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Christenson Chevrolet owners (L to R) Milford Christenson, Dean Christenson Jr, Dean Christenson Sr.

cool in the summer, all upgraded to serve you better. We even added 14 more stalls to the service department."

New car manager Jeff Batliner just wrapped up a successful month at Christenson Chevy. "We had a big December, but February is perennially the biggest month of the year for us. It all happens in the two weeks around the auto show with all the extra auto show bonus cash. It's always a big time of the year."

TOP SELLERS

The 2013 Chevy Equinox continues to be the sales leader at Christenson. "It's a big factor, it's one of the hottest things. An SUV that gets 32 MPG. It's unheard of. I mean, are you kidding me, why buy a car? People think it's the best deal in the house. If we get 30 of them in we sell 30."

Then there's the 2013 Chevy Cruze. "It's being really well-received," says Jeff. "It's the replacement for the Cobalt and it's ten times better and gets tremendous gas mileage."

A lot of new products are on the way from Chevy, too. "We'll get the new Silverado in the next few weeks, and the new Impala in 30 to 60 days," said Dean.

Jeff says, "it's a great place to shop in any weather. Our slogan is giant showroom, not giant pressure. We have 80 cars inside. If you want to take a test drive, we can just roll up one of the four overhead doors and you can take a clean car out."

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The rest of the story is having an experienced staff. "We're not one of these dealerships that hires five new people every month," says Jeff. "Our sales staff has years of experience and can answer all of your questions. Whether to buy versus lease, building your Silverado, whatever they are. If you bought a car here five years ago, your salesperson is still here. We have one with 54 years of service, another with 43. Even the people we've added from Carroll and Gibson have years of service there."

Christenson Chevy also stocks over 130 to 140 pre-owned vehicles, most of which are GM Certified. They are thoroughly inspected and reconditioned, and come with a bumper-to-bumper warranty. The cars come primarily from leases and trade-ins, so the inventory leans heavily toward GM vehicles, but with other American and import makes represented.

The bulk of the inventory is 2008-2012 vehicles, though you can find a bargain ride for as low as \$3000. As far as financing, there are some really good competitive rates on late model cars right

now. You can check out the pre-driven selections at the Web site, and look up the CARFAX report. GM Certified vehicles are labeled.

All last year prices stayed strong mainly because of a shortage of nice used vehicles. GM wasn't leasing so the pool of low mileage, basically one-owner cars off leases dried up. They are back into leasing now, but it'll be a couple years to build it back up. It makes it a great time to trade in for anybody who has a nice car.

"Leasing is back in a big way," said Dean. "GM and others pulled out of leasing during the financial fiasco, but now we have really competitive leasing sources. It's a great alternative to buying. You can lease for 29 to 39 months, walk away and get another brand new car."

SERVICE AND SUPPORT

Area dealership closures, along with owners of recently discontinued GM brands like Saturn and Pontiac looking for service, have made Christenson's service department busier. "It's weird to have growing pains after 60 years," said Jeff, "but we now have extended service hours six days a week. Experience helps in both sales and service. We have no 'new' mechanics."

Christenson Chevrolet supports a wide variety of community groups and organizations. "We donated a brand new Chevrolet bus to the athletic department of IU Northwest," said Dean. "We support the Theatre at the Center with a new vehicle donation, we also support the Northwest Symphony, the Youth Orchestra, the YMCA, the Boy Scouts, Sharing Meadows, Griffith Parks projects, Trade Winds, Wicker Park, Campagna Academy, and many of the various local youth teams in the surrounding communities to name a few."

"Car sales have been definitely showing improvement but the economy is still hurting," said Dean. "Major projects like the BP expansion are definitely helping, as well as many businesses moving to Lake County from Illinois."

"We are a locally owned and operated family business," said Dean. "We treat customers like family and strive to provide the best products and services at the best prices and we invest in and support our communities. We also believe strongly that the current selection of vehicles that GM is producing and we offer are among the best available anywhere."