

# When BIGGEST is BEST

**Pontiac RV's strong, solid reputation has made it Illinois' largest RV dealer**

**By Jane Schreier Jones**

In a state the size of Illinois, with talented competition and successful enterprises from border to border, it's hard to be the biggest of any kind of retail and service operation.

But the largest recreational vehicle (RV) dealer, hands down, is Pontiac RV located in Pontiac. In fact, a recent study showed that 14 percent of all RVs in Illinois were purchased at Pontiac RV. The company has sold more than 12,000 RVs since the dealership opened in 1979.

"We have worked hard to earn our customers' trust, and that's why we're now serving the second and third-generation of owners," says Kent Kafer, General Manager of Pontiac RV. "We treat people as we would want to be treated. That's what causes customers to recommend us to their friends and family."

The selection at Pontiac RV is enormous. "When people walk in our showroom, they say it looks like a Wal-Mart, it's that big," says Kent. "There's 100,000 square feet in our heated showroom. We usually

display 100 RVs there, so people can shop comfortably no matter what the weather."

There also are 15 acres of new and pre-owned vehicles and a service department, which is so preferred by RVers from surrounding states that it has 38 service bays, with factory-trained technicians serving all makes and models.

The Kafer family has slowly and steadily built their operation since 1979, when Ken and Gail Kafer transitioned their mobile home business into a popular recreational vehicle dealership. Ken and Gail are semi-retired, but their three hard-working and likable children run Pontiac RV. Kent is general manager, Kevin is service manager, and

"The whole industry is off, but we're bucking the trend pretty well," says Kafer. "Fuel prices are causing RV owners to curtail their long trips more, and seek out new adventures and favorite spots closer to home.

"Even with higher fuel prices, traveling in an RV is economical. RV owners travel where they want, in comfort, without the



(l to r) Heidi Novak, Greg Novak talk with sales associate Phil Kratochvil discuss lights and tires on this new trailer.



(l to r) Kent Kafer, Mark Farrell, Kevin Kafer and Courtney Farrell

Courtney is business manager; all three are co-owners, along with son-in-law, Mark Farrell, who is also the sales manager.

The Kafers are taking their company through a slight slow down in sales because of current economic conditions.

stress of inflexible schedules," he says. Industry figures back up Kent's observations. According to the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association, campground reservations are up 23 percent year to date. More than 80 percent of owners say they save money by vacationing in an RV.

#### THE RIGHT RV

Recreational vehicles from 30 different brands are on display at Pontiac RV, including Fleetwood RV, Keystone, Forest River RV and Sunny Brook.



## Is RV life for you?

If you grew up going on RV trips with your folks, you know the special joys of seeing America, on long vacations, and short camping and fishing trips. You probably know what kind of RV you want.

But if you're a "newbie" to the lifestyle, or if you're unsure which style of RV is right for you, how do you know which vehicle to purchase? Consider purchasing a pre-owned RV.

"Lots of people buy a pre-owned RV for just that reason," says Kent Kafer, general manager of Pontiac RV. "It's your chance to select the best style for your needs while keeping your investment low."

People are coming to Pontiac RV to see acres of pre-owned recreational vehicles. A selection this enormous makes it easy to find the right vehicle at an affordable price.

"Pre-owned is a smart way to go, and we make sure we have the biggest selection around," Kent Kafer says.



Two main categories of RVs are motorhomes (motorized) and towables (towed behind the family car, SUV or pickup).

Type A motorhomes are generally the largest; type B motorhomes or van campers are the smallest and type C motorhomes generally fall in-between. Pontiac RV has huge selections of both gasoline-powered and diesel motorhomes. Towable RVs are folding pop-up campers, truck campers, conventional travel trailers and fifth-wheel travel trailers.

"With fuel prices being a concern, the industry is coming up with lighter-weight towables and more economical motorhomes that offer exciting options," Kent Kafer says.

Kent reports that a towable RV known as a "toy hauler," is becoming more popular. It's a motorhome, fifth-wheel or travel trailer with a "garage" as part of the back end of the vehicle. A ramp lets the owner to use this separate section to store everything from a motorcycle to equipment for setting up a trade show booth. The ramp door access makes traveling with someone in a wheelchair or with special needs, even more enjoyable.

### WHO'S BUYING RVS?

There are strong ownership gains among both younger and older buyers, as well as baby boomers. In fact, high

RV ownership rates now extend across a 40-year span from age 35 to 75, reports a University of Michigan study published by the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association.

People enjoy the "no pressure" aspect of shopping at Pontiac RV. "Our staff know that people like to take their time and look. We answer questions and assist in the buying decision process," Kent Kafer says.

People also like the dealership's parts and accessories department. "Sure, there's the nuts and bolts you need but there's always something new, like fun items for tailgating," Kent Kafer says. "We make Pontiac RV a fun place to shop."



(l to r) Sales associate Gary Wilmoth shows Hank Jessen and Rennae Jessen the engine of their new RV.

## QUICK STATS

**Company Name**  
Pontiac RV

**Type of Business**  
Sales of new and pre-owned recreational vehicles; service; parts and accessories

**Number of Employees**  
45

**Years in Business**  
Almost 30

**Keys to Success**  
Family owned and operated business, solid reputation for huge selection and top-class service

**Hours**  
Mondays: 9a.m. – 7p.m.  
Tuesdays – Saturdays:  
9a.m. – 5p.m.  
Sundays: Closed

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