

Conner Motors/Sternberg Ford

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chatting with the customers who, over the years, have become close friends.

"This used to be the only room with air conditioning," Keith recalls. "It's where we'd bring the customers."

The Conner family — Narl and wife, Hazel, and their four children, Ron, Keith, Eric and Deann — lived in the house next door to the dealership at Medcalf and Washington for three years, while they were building a new home. And, a new building. Conner Motors (now Sternberg Ford) moved to its current location in 1956.

"When we lived next door, Ron (the eldest) would clean out and light the coal furnace in the morning. After school, we all changed out of our school clothes, then cleaned the floors, emptied the trash and did whatever needed to be done," Keith relates.

After Ron graduated from Indiana University, he worked at Conner Ford in Rockport, which he eventually took over. Narl's brother owned it at the time.

At one time or another, each of the Conner offspring worked at a family-owned dealership (at one time there were four).

Ron was at Conner Ford in Rockport, Eric at Boonville and Deann's husband, David, ran a Chevy-Olds dealership in Rockport.

Deann had worked in the office at Conner Motors through her high school years. After college, she worked in social work — Dubois County Child Protection Services. Then, the family needed another salesperson in Dale.

Deann came back.

It was unusual at that time for a woman to be selling vehicles.

"She was probably one of the first," Keith says.

"It was an interesting dynamic," Deann smiles, "selling a guy a truck. I had to know our product better than any of the guys."

But know her product she did.

"No one ever asked to talk to a man instead," Keith grins proudly.

Along with the car dealerships, Narl Conner briefly owned an Allis Chalmers Tractor agency in the late 1950s.

"I think Dad saw his sons knew nothing about farm machinery," Keith says.

That agency was sold to Ken Shourds, who knew a lot about farm machinery.

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