

## Eric Wilson

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**From:** debbie.frakes@gm.com  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 16, 2008 6:52 PM  
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**Cc:** thomas.j.pyden@gm.com; symphony.team@gm.com; Ryan LaFontaine; geri.lama@gm.com  
**Subject:** Coverage on LaFontaine

A nice video piece on WXYZ.com and a piece (text only) on WDIV.com. Will get transcripts and copies of other articles. Geri, please make sure this is included in the morning daily clips.

See Ad Age article below.

# Advertising Age®

## GM Opens Cutting-Edge Green Dealership Near Detroit

### Earth-Friendly Move Offers a Rare Bright Spot in Publicity for Tarnished Automaker

By [Jean Halliday](#)

*Published:* July 16, 2008

DETROIT (AdAge.com) -- As it plots major spending cuts and bats back bankruptcy rumors, General Motors Corp. today celebrated the opening of a \$15 million green dealership, LaFontaine Automotive Group's new Buick-Pontiac-GMC and Cadillac facility in suburban Detroit.



LaFontaine Automotive Group's 64,000-square-foot facility in suburban Detroit has 85 skylights to tap into natural light and reduce light bills.

Photo Credit: GM

Among other things, the 64,000-square-foot building has 85 skylights to tap into natural light and reduce light bills and solid doors made of corncobs and wheat. Eight-five percent of its car-wash water is recycled, and rainwater is used for landscape irrigation. General Manager Ryan LaFontaine said the facility's geothermal heating and cooling system was "probably the biggest expense." The system's 64 in-ground wells capture energy stored in the earth.

"We feel we are pioneers," said his father, owner Mike LaFontaine, at the press event in Highland Township. He predicted any new dealership built in the next five to 10 years will be green.

### **Consumer attitudes shift**

When asked about the benefits of his green dealership, he said, "There's a tremendous number of consumers out there who want to purchase from a green dealer." The group sold 4,000 new and used vehicles last year, he added.

The younger Mr. LaFontaine said the family started talking about a new facility in 2000 because it was outgrowing its old location nearby. But the company decided two years ago to "go green" and probably spent an extra \$2 million to do that and to qualify for Gold Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

Although the dealership originally expected to recoup the payout for the system in 11 years, Mike LaFontaine said he now expects that will happen in five or six years due to energy savings of up to 54%. GM did not require him to go green, he added.

Jim Hall, managing director of auto consultant 2953 Analytics, said, "A lot of people are sensitive about the environment," which can boost LaFontaine Group's business. Given current high energy costs, the facility's efficient systems can reduce its operating bills and improve the bottom line, he added. "These guys are at the front edge of the curve."

### **Battling perceptions**

Susan Docherty, who arrived June 1 as the VP heading Buick-Pontiac-GMC from her previous position as GM's West Coast regional general manager in California, said at the event that LaFontaine Group should be applauded for its investment. "With the opening of this dealership and those that are sure to follow, our consumers can enjoy a 360-degree green car-buying and car-owning experience."

She told Advertising Age that if you asked average consumers which carmaker they thought was green, they would say Toyota or Honda. But, she said, Buick-Pontiac-GMC have models that get better highway gas mileage than models from those two carmakers. For example, the 2008 Buick Enclave crossover gets 24 miles per gallon on the highway vs. Honda's Acura MDX, which gets 20.

To make the distinction clear, she ordered what she called a "pocket guide" showing 15 Buick-Pontiac-GMC models and comparing each vehicle's EPA-rated miles to the gallon with that of direct competitors. She hopes to educate both dealers and consumers with the guide, saying, "We win on fuel economy," which has quickly become the top reason to buy a new vehicle.

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