

Automotive News

Green dealership leads way for GM

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General Motors is encouraging its dealers to include environmental upgrades in their construction plans. GM cites LaFontaine Buick-Pontiac-GMC-Cadillac as the state of the green art.

The dealership, scheduled to open in May in the Detroit suburb of Highland Township, Mich., will have pipes deep underground for heating and cooling. Its roof will reflect heat. It will have premium parking spaces for hybrid vehicles.

Dealer Mike LaFontaine Sr. estimates that environmental features have added as much as \$1.5 million to the dealership's \$15 million construction cost. But he says he expects to recover those expenses within eight to 10 years through reduced operating costs.

Added Mike LaFontaine Jr., general manager of two of the LaFontaine group's six dealerships: "We're not dyed-in-the-wool environmentalists. We're entrepreneurs. The timing couldn't be any better for us with oil at \$100 a barrel.

"If two more people look at a Cadillac versus a Lexus because we're green, that's ultimately good for us and good for General Motors," he told *Automotive News*.

Green house

LaFontaine Buick-Pontiac-GMC-Cadillac's new building includes these environmental features.

- Skylights to provide natural light in showroom and service areas
- Rainwater retention pond for landscape irrigation
- Service bay hoists lubricated with vegetable oil
- Special parking for hybrids and other alternative-fuel vehicles
- Employee bicycle racks and showers to encourage bike commuting
- Car wash that uses recycled water

Certified gold

The new dealership has 63,000 square feet — more than twice the space of the 21-year-old store it is replacing. It will be the first GM dealership to win gold-level certification from the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, program.

All of the family-owned LaFontaine group's dealerships are in Michigan. High energy bills at the group's Honda dealership in Dearborn convinced Mike LaFontaine Jr. that it was time for his company to go green.

When the family began planning the new GM dealership, he proposed a geothermal heating system that uses underground pipes. Although the system costs more than traditional heating and cooling technology, he said, it ultimately could save the dealership \$10,000 a month in energy costs.

The family took its environmental cues from automakers, says Ryan LaFontaine, another son of Mike LaFontaine Sr. and general manager of the Buick-Pontiac-GMC-Cadillac dealership.

"We looked at what the manufacturers were doing with hybrids and flex-fuel vehicles," he says. "After we decided on the geothermal, it just kind of spiraled from there."

Light-sensitive

The new dealership's 68 skylights will provide natural lighting to the showroom and service department. The 108 outdoor light poles will have photo sensors and timers.

The building uses recycled concrete blocks. A retention pond will capture rainwater to irrigate the dealership's landscaping. The car wash will recycle all the water it uses.

To improve indoor air quality, service department lifts will be lubricated with vegetable oil rather than toxic hydraulic fluid. The body shop will use water-soluble paints. Adhesives, sealants, paint and carpeting were selected for their low emissions.

To encourage employees to bicycle to work, the dealership will offer bike storage racks and a shower room. Carpoolers and employees who drive low-emission and alternative-fuel vehicles will get special parking spots.

Bill Stacy, GM's director of strategic operations and special projects, says his company is taking cues from the LaFontaines' effort as it develops environmental guidelines for its dealerships.

"If a dealer is building a new store, we believe that facility should be as green as possible," Stacy says. "We are looking at how we might incorporate certain environmental requirements in our facility image program. But we don't want to grab a template and say, 'Go do this.' "

A display at the new LaFontaine dealership will aim to educate consumers and other dealers about environmentally friendly construction and business practices.

Says Ryan LaFontaine: "If we could encourage one or two other dealerships to take this initiative, that's when you make a difference."

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