

Auto dealer gets creative to keep mechanics working during pandemic with classic car restoration

Ally recognizes ingenuity, resilience of small business owner with scholarships to recruit and train next generation of mechanics



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FUGUAY-VARINA, N.C., Feb. 23, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- With desperate times calling for creative measures, auto dealers across the country got inventive throughout 2020 to keep American drivers on the road and their staffs safely working and motivated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

John Hiester, owner of Hiester Automotive Group in Fuguay-Varina, N.C., found a novel solution by merging his passion for classic cars with the challenge of keeping his mechanics working.

Prior to COVID-19, the nationwide shortage of mechanics was one of the biggest management obstacles faced by American auto dealers, so it was an abrupt change to suddenly have too many service techs and too few cars to fix.

"Back in the spring when the work slowed, my mechanics asked if they'd lose their jobs," Hiester said. "I thought, 'Why not buy some classic cars and have my teams restore them?' I love classic cars, but my team never works on them because they are always busy with customers. It was a good way to keep them employed so they could support their families."

Hiester purchased more than a dozen classic cars, including a 1969 Plymouth Roadrunner, 1972 Chevrolet Monte Carlo, 1976 Cadillac Eldorado convertible and a 1978 Jeep J10 truck in various states of disrepair. The mechanics were paired up in small teams to restore the classic autos.

Service Technician Anthony Pompey said he appreciated the steady work and that the project helped "keep my mind off the news and the pandemic. I worried less about losing family or getting sick myself."

Hiester Auto Group is one of approximately 18,500 dealer customers doing business with Ally Financial, a leading digital finance company with one of the largest full-service automotive finance operations in the country.

"All of us at Ally were really moved by John's commitment to do it right for his employees because it mirrored our own values in keeping team members both safe and employed. We wanted to support his ingenuity and shine a light on the important role service techs play in the auto business," said Andrea Brimmer, chief marketing and PR officer at Ally.

Inspired by Hiester's initiative, the Ally Foundation will support efforts to recruit and train the next generation of auto mechanics by donating \$25,000 to the North Carolina Auto Dealers Foundation. According to the National Automobile Dealers Association, the industry requires 76,000 new technicians every year and technical colleges and training programs only graduate about half that number.

Ally's Brimmer connected the Hiester team with reality show host and celebrity car customizer Danny Koker of History Channel's "Counting Cars." Koker, based in Las Vegas, served as a virtual coach to the Hiester mechanics while also documenting the renovation process for a new web-based video series called "[Count's Culture](#)." The series began streaming in early December on

Koker's YouTube channel. Car enthusiasts are encouraged to follow the restoration competition online and vote for their favorite.

Hiester plans to auction the winning vehicle at the Greensboro Auto Auction in Greensboro, N.C., with the proceeds donated to a charity selected by his mechanics.

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