

By Rebecca Patrick



The specialized dealership has seen significant expansion in a decade. Fred Grote: "Ours is a lot harder business, but it's much more rewarding. Our customers are very appreciative of what we can do."

Grote Automotive

LOOKING OUT FOR ONE ANOTHER

"Our theme is 'For the People' and that's what we advertise. We really try to instill that in our employees."

– Fred Grote, owner

The mileage

Fred Grote has been in the auto industry for 35 years – since he was 15. He opened Grote Automotive in Fort Wayne in 2007 with two other employees. Huge growth in the last three years pushed the employee count from 22 to 48.

The dealership sells pre-owned vehicles to those who have been told "no" everywhere else due to bad credit, bankruptcy or other challenges. That totaled nearly 2,000 cars in 2016.

Turning 'no' into 'yes'

"(Customers) don't want to go in somewhere and be embarrassed. That's what we try to take away from them. They don't have to be embarrassed if they come here. And when they walk out, they know that even if we couldn't get it done today, they should have a path for what they need to do to get a car in the (near) future. ... We don't let them leave without a plan."

The company works with more than 40 lenders for financing options.

Grote way

The belief is if employees are in the right seats on the bus, then they are happy and therefore will make customers happy. The upbeat and fun atmosphere often includes dancing as part of the daily routine in the sales department.

Hitting the spot

Fred Grote buys the team lunch every Saturday. "We're (also) installing a full kitchen. We have a nice covered picnic area for the employees that we just put together so they can have lunch (there)."

Community ties

Grote Automotive underwrites local sports teams – which means fun opportunities for employees. They can go down on the ice for the Fort Wayne Komets hockey games and throw out T-shirts, or watch from the pits at the Baer Field Motorsports Park.

A big semi wrapped in the "For the People" promise makes appearances at local parades; it converts to a huge stage and is donated for local events.

A Fort Wayne event wouldn't be complete without the Grote crew on hand. The company also supports a variety of area charities, including those promoting literacy and education, and for victims of abuse.

