

A conversation with Toyota of Newport's Paul Mika

By Jeff McDonough

Paul Mika, the owner of Toyota-Scion of Newport, has seen a number of recessions during his long career in the car business, and is optimistic that spring will bring renewed interest in purchasing automobiles.

"We've seen it already," he said. "On warm days people come out. There is a lot of pent up demand."

Mika has owned Toyota-Scion of Newport on East Main Road in Middletown since 1992. He also owns Hyundai of Newport, located on West Main Road.

A native of Austria, Mika has been in the car business in the United States since 1957. Before that he worked as an auto technician in Austria. He was 7 years old when World War II ended.

When Mika came to the U.S. he settled in Detroit where he worked in just about every position in a

Cadillac dealership and eventually became the dealer's owner. It was a big dealership that sold 200 plus cars per month.

Mika said he sold the dealership and moved to Rhode Island because he liked to sail. Eventually he was able to purchase the Toyota dealership he owns today.

"I always knew that Toyota was a company I wanted to be associated with," he said. "It was Toyota's attitude toward quality that impressed me. Toyota has always been concerned that making quality cars is more important than making the cheapest car."

Mika said the Toyota philosophy is one of gradual improvement, always making their product better. The Detroit philosophy was "this is good enough."

The U.S. was going through a recession when he moved here in 1957, Mika said. "I could barely speak English," he recalled. "I was

scared." The automotive business suffered through the gas crunch in 1973, he added, and another recession in 1980-1981.

"This recession we have now is pretty interesting because it seems to be worldwide, probably because everything is more interdependent today," Mika said. "We have to prop each other up or fail together."

Mika said the car business remains a good business to be in because "people still need cars."

"There is really no alternative in this country," he said.

Mika believes that President Obama's initiative to improve public transportation is important. But the car will still have its place in the American landscape. "We need to put more money into public transportation. I know that may be funny for a car dealer to say, but I grew up in a country where everyone traveled by trains that always



Paul Mika of Toyota of Newport-Scion.

ran on time," he said. "My family never owned a car."

"When I visit Austria today I do not rent a car. I travel by train and street car," he added.

The economy has faltered because people have lost faith and as a result are not purchasing the big items like cars, appliances and

See "Toyota" on page 13

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