

40th Anniversary of the Lendrum family business: North Country Subaru

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Eric Lendrum, 33, VP of sales & marketing

Eric Lendrum said he was "the most cliché dealer kid" growing up. "I spent more time in here as the youngest child. I'd play video games in the office and run around."

At age 15, Eric tore his ACL. He was hobbling around when his father Ken told him to learn how to fix the transmission on an older Subaru.

"I still can't fix a transmission but it was a lesson in humility," Eric said. "He taught me you're as good as your staff, and never be afraid to ask for help."

Eric said his father sets the tone for the business. "The staff loves him. He has been so selfless in how he has brought others along with him."

Eric says, "These are not jobs, they are careers. Our employees are excited to be here. It's fun to grow like we're doing now. It's all smiles and high fives."

He said his parents have established the business based on Social Responsibility Capitalism, which he said means "spend what you can to improve the community, and you will be rewarded, and we will all win. That's what we aim for here."

Jeff Horton, senior master technician, in his 33rd year here

Jeff Horton is in his 33rd year working at North Country Subaru. "I started in 1979 when they were still up where Gambles Bakery is now."

He said, "It's a good company to work for. Family comes first. The Lendrums have kids and I have kids. They understand. Ken and Christine came to my kids' graduations and



VP Jared Lendrum, 36, joined business in 2007

Jared Lendrum graduated from Queensbury High School in 2000, and from Siena College in 2004. He joined the family business in 2007.

"Subaru hadn't really taken off as a brand when I started college, and Saab was on the decline," he said. "In my four years in college, it started to take off."

Jared majored in environmental science but minored in business because "I knew I might join the business at some point. He says,



weddings, and when I was younger, I used to bring my kids in here while I worked."

He said the Lendrums are "always ready for change. They are always ready to learn something new. You have to be able to adapt in this business, and they do that very well."

Ted Bapp, service manager: Lendrums have my back

Ted Bapp started at North Country Subaru on Feb. 8, 1982. He was 22 years old, and worked as a service technician for 16 years until he was promoted to service manager.

"I like the interaction with people and all of the employees," he said. "It's a great place to work. It's like an extended family."

Ted said, "Obviously Subaru has a great product for the North Country we live in. But it's all about picking the right people to do the right job. We are not micromanaged at



"Business and science are similar. It's all about data collection and analysis."

As Vice President of Fixed Operations, Jared oversees parts and service and provides employees "the tools to help them do their job."

He helped design the new express service addition, and "I ended up doing a large part of the building. I did all the trim and built the countertops, and ran the pneumatic plumbing. I probably did \$180,000 in work."

What's the secret of North Country Subaru's success? "My dad has always told me that it's easier to get a happy customer to come back than it is to get a new customer to come in. So we do what it takes to have happy customers."

"What do they say? It takes seven compliments to overcome an insult. That's how important word of mouth is. We try to make sure people are as happy as they can be so they come back."

all, and they have my back. It's a very comfortable place to work."

Scott Stickle: Rare dealership to have people stay this long'

Scott Stickle is in his 25th year at North Country Subaru. He was service manager for 15 years until suffering a heart attack. He's 68 now, but he's still working.

"You don't find a lot of car dealerships where people stay this long," Scott said. "This place is special. The people are special. It's family owned and oriented. We take care of the customer here. One unhappy customer does you far more damage than 50 happy ones."

"It's an excellent company to work for. Their philosophy matches mine. Put yourself on the other side of the counter and try to be understanding."

— Gordon Woodworth



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40th Anniversary of the Lendrum family business: North Country Subaru

The Lendrums' family business is on the grow on Quaker Road

By Gordon Woodworth
Chronicle News Editor

North Country Subaru, the Lendrum family's auto dealership on Quaker Road, is celebrating its 40th anniversary.

It had humble beginnings back in 1976. "We needed a job, quite simply," says Ken Lendrum. He and his wife Christine, both from Albany County originally, had graduated from Hudson Valley Community College.

"We were 24 years old when we started this, on a promise and a prayer and a couple of guarantees," Ken says. "It comes down to timing and it comes down to luck."

"I paid for college by working on cars, so I had a background in routine service and maintenance, and customer care, and when it was time to get a job after college, I got a job with Saab Cars USA in Connecticut and I worked there for about two years where I had an opportunity to see how the national companies were run."

Ken says, "There was no Saab dealership up here and no Subaru dealership."

"They call that an open territory. In today's world, there are almost no open ter-



Ken and Christine Lendrum, center, started North Country Subaru in 1976. Their two sons, **Eric**, left, and **Jared**, are now vice presidents of the company. *Chronicle photo/Gordon Woodworth*

ritories. Every franchise throughout the country has got just about every location that they want.

"But in the 1970s, if you were not selling one of the big three [Ford, General Motors and Chrysler], there were opportunities to

get started on the ground floor.

"We sold both Saab and Subaru when we started. Saab was involved until they went bankrupt in 2011. But it's been Subaru since day one."

Started out on Route 9, Miller Hill

"We started on 149 Miller Hill Road, which is where Gambles [Bakery] currently is," Ken said. "Gambles was the next occupant of the building we were in. We were there for five years."

They then moved to their current location, 616 Quaker Road.

"This was nothing but brush and dirt," he said. "We bought 20 acres, a lot of it wetlands. It had been for sale for a long time."

"It's a good location. If you remember, in 1981 this was a pretty desolate road. There wasn't very much on here. But there were a lot of commuters who drove by here from the Queensbury area who worked in Washington County. There was a lot of drive-by traffic, so it has actually turned out to be a very good location."

Ken said that after they bought the prop-

Turning point? When Crocodile Dundee's TV commercials for Subaru started airing in 1996

"The real turning point for us was when Paul Hogan came out in support of the Subaru Outback," says North Country Subaru president and owner Ken Lendrum.

"From that moment on, Subaru was on the shopping list of a lot of people, and business has been steady and growing ever since, and that was in 1996."

"Crocodile Dundee was driving around in a Subaru Outback, and he was the guy who said you should buy a Subaru Outback. He did the commercials for probably five or six years."

"The Outback hit the market right where it needed to be hit, Paul Hogan was the right guy to deliver the message, and you can trace our success to those commercials. Up until then we were survivors. We started to succeed from 1997 onward, and we've had pretty steady growth since then."

— Gordon Woodworth



2012 building update kick-started growth; more Subarus allotted

After the business boost from the Crocodile Dundee television commercials, "The next big hump I guess was when we re-did the building to Subaru's Phase Two look in 2012," Ken Lendrum said about North Country Subaru's progress.

"Obviously when you spend money on the brand, they give you a little bit more favoritism when it comes time to allocations, so hand in hand with us redoing the building was an increase in allocation, which means we got more cars."

Ken said, "Subaru has been in a car shortage for almost 15 years, but when you step up, then they step up."

"So we went from, round numbers, 200 cars a year in 2012 to 300 cars a year to 400 a year to this year, to this year where we're looking at 600 cars, which is unbelievable number for us in this town. We are on pace to sell 600 cars this year."

"But the building has really started to take off since 2012 when we added staff, added people everywhere."

"The math across the country is very similar to ours. The brand has grown significantly since 2011. If you look at national sales charts, they are very similar to ours."

— Gordon Woodworth



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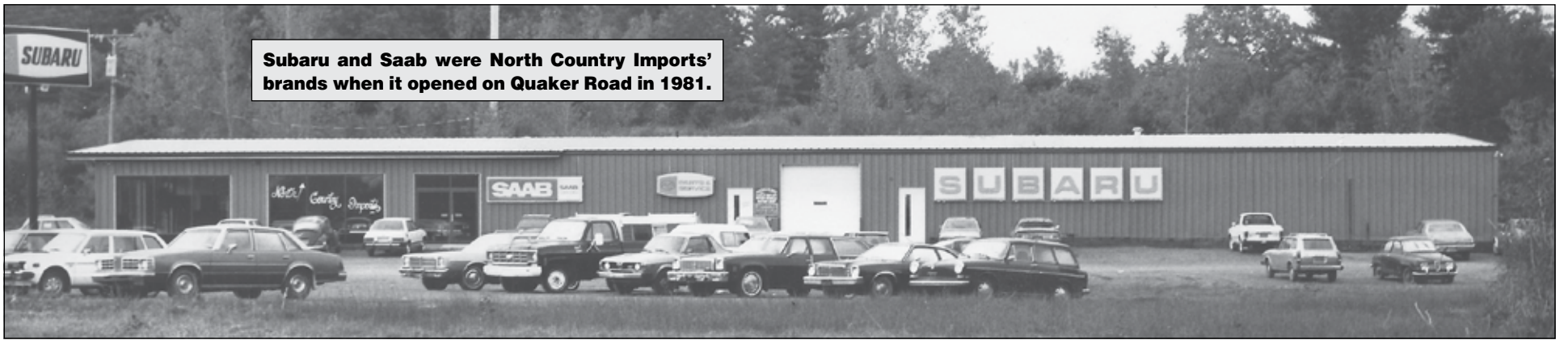
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40th Anniversary of the Lendrum family business: North Country Subaru



Subaru and Saab were North Country Imports' brands when it opened on Quaker Road in 1981.

North Country Subaru now in its second generation

From previous page

in service department, two new lifts and a car wash.

They now have 39 full-time employees. "We have hired seven new employees since February," Ken said.

He said they're on pace to sell 600 new vehicles in 2017, an all-time high.

"So we went from, round numbers, 200 cars a year in 2012 to 300 cars a year to 400 a year to this year, to this year where we're looking at 600 cars, which is unbelievable number for us in this town."

Ken said new car sales account for about

65% of North Country Subaru's business. Previously owned car sales are 25% and parts and service are 10%.

2 of 3 sons came into the business

Ken is president and Christine is secretary/treasurer of parent company North Country Imports, Inc.

Two of the Lendrums' three sons are vice presidents. Jared, 36, is VP of fixed operations, and Eric, 33, is VP of sales and marketing. Older brother David is a teacher in Albany County.

Jared has worked at North Country Subaru since 2007. Eric followed in 2011.

"Both boys worked other places," said Ken. "Jared worked for two different people, one where he was building houses. His natural tendency is he loves to build things. His degree is in environmental science. Both of them minored in business because they knew what they were doing. Jared worked for an environmental

company for a year, and then we sat down and we said, okay, business is good, and we need good people in this business, it's time for you guys to make a decision of where you want to go, because this is going to be your business if you choose. And two of them did."

Ken and Christine are still very active in the company, though Christine said she is trying to cut back to three days a week.

Ken says, "The question you're really getting to is: how well does it run when we're not here?"

He says it's running just fine. "They don't miss me. When you come back, your desk is empty. This is a team effort, but they've got it. They are both capable of running the dealership by themselves. The business is in good hands."

They are very financially qualified. They know what they are doing. They've been around. They are not novices.

"When they come in, they are ready to buy and they've already had a Subaru or know somebody who has one...."

"But as much as it's changed, it's the same. It's still people and cars, one-on-one conversations, eye contact, how does it feel, how do I fit in it, all of those little things where you can actually walk around and really inspect the product. We do that very well here. We are very, very good at that. Some of our competitors are like shopping on Amazon where you think you know what you are going to get but when it shows up, it's not quite right."

— Gordon Woodworth

Subaru went from a 'northeast niche' to a must-consider brand

North Country Subaru has benefited from the rise of the Subaru brand, says dealership president Ken Lendrum.

"Subaru went from being a northeast niche brand where only people who had exposure to them understood how they worked, to getting good press and all of a

sudden, if it wasn't on your shopping list, your shopping list wasn't complete.

"If you seriously consider this brand, and you seriously consider all of the cars that are in these shopping groups, this car has got to be in the top three because it really is that significant of a vehicle."

Ken says, "The car has gotten significantly better to where it's now widely considered one of the most durable cars on the road, and it's also one of the safest cars on the road. That's a good combination."

— Gordon Woodworth

Car business is now quicker; customer is more informed

How has the car business changed in 40 years? Christine Lendrum says, "For one thing, people used to come in and sign for a car and come back three or four days later, and now they want it the same day. That's the biggest change."

Her husband Ken Lendrum says, "The customer is much more informed than they used to be. They've done all of their homework, especially Subaru customers. If you look at the profile of who buys a Subaru, these people have done their homework.

Ken Lendrum: Our key is 'we really care'

Asked the key to North Country Subaru's success for 40 years, Ken Lendrum says, "If you really want to put it in a simple sentence, we really care. We care about our people, we get our people to care about our customers, and then our customers care enough about us to bring their friends in. It's simple.

"It's what you learned in kindergarten. Be nice to others and they will be nice to you. Sometimes it costs us money. Sometimes it costs us a lot of money. But it's the only type of business that we want to be associated with."

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~ Bob and Heidi Underwood ~

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Happy 40th Anniversary!
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‘We have customers that go back three decades’

“We have some customers that have been customers for 40 years,” says North Country Subaru president Ken Lendrum. “A conversation came up yesterday with a Subaru rep. You have to have a signed

check to go along with a special order. We have a special order from a man who works in this community who got his first car from us in 1978. I looked the rep right in the eye yesterday and said, ‘This gentleman has been buying cars from us since 1978. Better than that, all of his cars have come from us since 1978. If that guy wanted to take the car to Montreal on a test

drive, I would let him. No, I’m not going to demand a check from him. You want me to write out a check in my name?’

“That comes around to what do we really cherish the most, and it is those customers who believed in us and trusted us and kept coming back. Nobody’s perfect. When

we made a mistake, they told us and they gave us a chance to make it right, which we have.

“We have a lot of customers that go back three decades, some four decades. To me, that’s the coolest part.”

— Gordon Woodworth



Subaru gives \$15,869 to Camp Under the Woods in Queensbury

North Country Subaru supports Camp Under the Woods through Subaru’s Share the Love campaign. In April, they presented a check for \$15,869 to camp directors Heidi and Bob Underwood. The camp serves children with autism or other disabilities.

The money is from Subaru’s Share the Love campaign, in which Subaru donates \$250 for

each car sold or leased from mid-November to the end of the year. The dealerships each choose the beneficiary. In 2016, North Country Subaru gave \$7,907 to Camp Under the Woods.

“Bob and Heidi Underwood have done so much for so many for so long, and this is our opportunity to give back to them,” said Eric Lendrum, North Country Subaru’s vice president of sales and marketing.

In photo, from left: Eric Lendrum; Subaru district sales manager Annie Robillard-Esposito; Heidi & Bob Underwood; Wendy Matthews of Camp Under the Woods; Jared Lendrum. Chronicle photo/Gordon Woodworth

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Through all the years and all of the changes, we have been able to keep one thing constant; **caring for our customers.** The truth is that we could not do it without our **wonderful and devoted staff.** By having people we love and trust like family, we never have to worry how our customers are being treated when we are not present. It is because of them that we are here today and able to say that we have been “Proudly serving the Southern Adirondacks with great cars and outstanding service for over 40 years.” **This is our thank you** to all of you that have made this such a fun place to work. **~ The Lendrum Family**

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