**Archaeology & History in Your Backyard**

**Car Dealership History**

Hello Everyone! This is Archaeology and History in Your Backyard and my name is Dixie. X 88.7 FM and the Torrance County Archaeological Society are pleased to bring you a series of programs designed to acquaint you, our listening audience with little known people, places and events that took place in the past, right here in your own backyard. For the most part, we will be covering interesting facts, stories and legends about the past, and people that lived right here in the Estancia Valley and surrounding areas in central New Mexico. Our goal is to inform, educate, and possibly enlist your help in preserving and protecting our past.

Our show today will focus on the history of a few car dealerships in Torrance County.

This program was written by Dixie Boyle and produced by Bill Simms. Thank you for joining us today.

Baca Chevrolet was once located in Mountainair on the corner of Broadway and Highway 55 where Ruben Baca was in charge of a flourishing business selling cars from one end of the state to the other.

Baca purchased the business from Alfonzo Griffin in the fall of 1968. Alfonzo had acquired the business from his brother, Howard. Howard built a garage on West Main Street across from the present-day My Bank building. In 1917, he sold new Model T Fords for $390.00. Later, he would purchase the building where Ruben Baca was last located and had the first Chevrolet business in town.

Ruben Baca had been in business in Belen with his father and brother, Leroy since 1955. They operated Baca’s Used Car Lot, Baca Oil Company, a tire store and the Mountain View Motel.

Baca had become acquainted with Mr. Griffin while buying used cars in the area. He often went on buying trips from Belen to Lubbock, Texas and beyond. He was looking for a car dealership to purchase, and he thought Mountainair might just be the place to start his business.

Baca had tried to purchase Griffin’s business more than once, but he always told him he was not quite ready to sell yet. Finally, one day Baca stopped in to visit on one of his many car buying trips and Griffin was finally ready to sell and the deal was made between the two.

Baca remodeled the building and gave it a new look both inside and out. The service department was enlarged from four bays to sixteen bays so that quick and efficient maintenance and auto repair service was available to all customers in a timely manner. Griffin had only employed four people, but Baca would increase this amount to twenty-two employees. Sales had jumped from eighty units per year to fifteen hundred.

Baca was born in 1936 in Bacaville, New Mexico, a small farming community of about fifteen families just south of Belen. His father was born in Belen. Baca married Barbara Armador in December of 1955 and they had three children.

For many years, Ruben Baca was the No. 1 Chevrolet dealer in Torrance County. He was 18th in the region which consisted of Arizona, New Mexico and West Texas. Baca had a major advertisement program on radio and television channels throughout the state and region.

The Torrance County History books gives an interesting description of another family once involved with automobiles, parks and so far. This story was written by Clarice Wood. “In 1945, Bill and Clarice wood toured five states looking for a place to establish a business. Our modest finances were dwindling and somewhat discouraged we were on our way to Texas when we happened to see an advertisement in the Albuquerque paper. The ad read, ‘Service Station, Garage and Curio Store on East Central.’ We answered the ad and the salesman took us 35 miles east to Moriarty.

We used all of our finances to purchase, stock and lease then began operating the Rio Pecos Service Station and Garage. We opened a café there for about a year and operated the service station and garage for many more years.

We sold the garage and moved to Encino in 1949 to operate the Rio Pecos Service Station—then onto Roswell for six months and then back to Moriarty to operate the Buford Garage. In 1957 we bought the business known as the Valley Motors Supply. It was one of the first, possibly the only auto parts store in Torrance County. We operated the store and repair shop and put a salesman en-route to Clines Corners, Mountainair and Estancia from time to time. We have had the John Deere Agency, the International Harvester Sales and Service, used cars and wrecker service.”

Enriquez Mattingly was another involved in the business of automobiles. Before buying his father’s gasoline business in Estancia in 1937, he had worked selling Standard Oil products both wholesale and retail.

In 1942 he bought the old Catholic Church building across the street and remodeled it into a service station. A saloon had once occupied the site. Business was especially busy on Saturdays when all the farmers came to shop and visit. There were many dry land bean farmers and he was often kept busy delivering tractor fuel. Mattingly build a service station in Willard in 1953 and another in Mountainair in 1963. He finally sold his business in Estancia and retired in 1973.

In the early years of Mountainair’s history Bill Engle Pontiacs and Harvey Key had the Ford agency, the Griffin family had the Chevrolet agency and Hail Equipment sold Plymouths. Each year the car dealerships in Mountainair would have a Grand Opening when the new cars for that year came in. They would cover the windows of their businesses so no one could see inside. The day of the showing of the cars was a big party. Food, drinks, music, little gadgets were given to the customers. People from all over the country and state showed up in Mountainair during this time of the year to look at the new cars.

It seems every small town had either a new or used car dealership in the 1950s and 1960s. Even the Tapley family in Encino ran not only the Encino Motel but a grocery store and repair business. They also sold new and used cars. It is hard to imagine such a business in Encino today.

This has been Archaeology and History in Your Backyard, a series that will take you through our area’s history in future episodes.

The Torrance County Archaeological Society meets at 7 PM the first Tuesday of every month from March through November. We meet at the East Torrance Soil and Water Education Building at 700 S. 10th Street in Estancia. Please come and join us.

You can listen to Archaeology and History in Your Backyard Tuesday at 7 PM, Thursday at 12:15 PM and Saturday at 4:00 PM. Thanks for listening!

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