

Mid-States Campers Company Story



It's been nearly 40 years since the first camper rolled out of the drive of Mid-States Campers. Today, Mid-States is one of the largest RV sales and service facilities in the Midwest - over 27,000 square feet under one roof sitting on 13 acres of RV's. Still owned by the Trupe family, the company employs over 30 associates, each having the most advanced training available in the RV industry.

grew. However, with three other jobs (carpenter, cement layer, and Old Home Bread delivery man), sometimes it was a struggle to find enough time in the day.

Bob was having fun selling his products to people who love to have fun. He soon found his way to his hometown banker to get the backing for the purchase of his first order of new "Mid-Statesmen" pickup campers for resale. All working out well, it would be time to name his new-found business. For lack of a better idea, he took the name of the brand of pickup campers he was selling, changed it just enough, and there started the beginning of Mid-States Camper Sales.

Mid-States quickly outgrew its original backyard location in Rapid City. In 1970, Bob & his wife, Marlys, found a new location with some acreage on Hwy 44 west of Rapid City. This would become the new home to the business for the next 30 years.

In the early 1970's, the business grew steadily. Bob would deliver bread in the mornings. Marlys would stay and tend to the business and her family. Then Bob, Marlys and their 4 helper children, (Robin, Robert, Marty & Morey) worked until evening to get everything done. It was times like these when Bob & Marlys's work ethic and drive for service excellence was installed in their family and business.

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The company eventually came to the point where it could afford a building to do business from. Bob & the boys would no longer have to lie in the gravel driveway to service their customers. Along with the new facility, the boys also found that working for Dad became rewarding. Some examples of the rewards were:

- Sweep the shop for \$.05
- Install a Topper for \$.10
- Install an equalizer hitch & wire a tow vehicle with brakes for \$1.25
 - Install a fifth-wheel hitch & wire with brakes for \$2.50

After time, each of the boys found the special place for their talents within the company. They all laugh about their experiences now but highly appreciate being blessed with their upbringing. Starting from the ground up gave each of them an appreciation for every aspect of the company.

A year of celebration for the nation and a turning point for the company happened in 1976. The Bicentennial gave many, including Bob, a reason to grow a Lincoln style beard. This, however, did not set well with the Old Home Bakery supervisors. After 15 years of service with Old Home, Bob was given the choice of shaving his beard or finding another career. Bob's sense of right & wrong (along with a little bit of stubbornness) told him not to shave. Little did Old Home know that Bob's new career was lurking in the background just waiting to flourish. After his dismissal, Old Home (maybe a little nervous about the consequences of their decisions) quickly offered Bob the opportunity to return to his prior position, but to no avail. Bob had heard his calling and decided to dedicate his efforts to his new full time career through hard work and handshakes. Bob was now a full time "RV guy."

Shortly after, in the late 1970's, came a challenge that many RV dealers did not survive. The gasoline shortage posed a severe hardship in the RV industry, but Bob used it to his advantage. With the high demand for domestic oil, the Gillette oil boom created a housing shortage. A few years earlier, Mid-States had taken on Nu-Wa's Hitchhiker line of fifth-wheels. Seeing the demand for housing during the boom, and knowing that Hitchhiker was one of the only RV's which could withstand a Wyoming winter, Bob made the bold move to substantially increase his inventory of Hitchhiker product. The gamble paid off and Mid-States moved to the #1 position for Nu-Wa in the fifth-wheel market. It was during this time, that Bob clearly understood the value of carrying the best value in products available. Not only was it a benefit to the consumer, but also ensured long term customers for the company. Unfortunately for the other 13 dealers in the Rapid City area, they were narrowed down to 4 dealers by the time the gas crunch was over.

During the next several years, many smaller events helped shape the future of the company. Many events were invisible to the outside world. Kids in college, marriages and new families all played a role. Robin, the oldest child, moved on to pursue her career in accounting and is the only child not currently involved in the business.

Sometime in the late 80's, Marlys slowly began to choose semi-retirement. Eventually, the boys all grew into their roles in the company. By the late 1990's, both Bob & Marlys found themselves with the desire to leave the business. In 1998, the boys had enough interest in the company that Bob & Marlys felt it appropriate to move on and enjoy their retirement.

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It was only about a year after Bob's retirement that the boys contemplated the move to a more visible location. They knew that if they were to support of their families, along with all of their associates' families, it would take a large and long term commitment to their future and their customers. So with that in mind, they made a bold move and began to pump money into a new state-of-the-art facility. In the spring of 2000, they made the move to the new location on Interstate 90 in Black Hawk.

Moving from the small, "Mom & Pop" type atmosphere to a larger scale "destination" type of dealership brought new challenges. The higher volume in sales meant a higher demand for service for their customers. It became clear that they could not do it without relying heavily on their associates to get the job done. So the level of education again needed to move to the next level. After all, commitment to service is what built the company. This brought the need to expand the service facility again by:

- Increasing the service facility from 6 to 12 bays.
- Creating a reconditioning department to ensure that the RV's are ready for sale.
- Creating a body shop and paint booth to handle the little or big mishaps which may come along for customers.
- Creating a new hitch and welding bay.
- Creating 8 new delivery sites where a family can get to know & understand their newly acquired RV better.
- Hiring qualified people to get the job done.
- Implementing processes to better teach the new owner to operate their RV.
- Implementing weekly satellite training for technicians.



Mid-States Campers is constantly changing and adapting to what consumers want and need to fulfill their dreams with the RV experience. They continue to uphold the values and commitment to customer service that Bob Trupe started nearly 40 years ago. As one of the oldest RV dealerships in the Midwest, Mid-States has the luxury of "cherry picking" some of the best brands in the industry and making them available to their customers. With nearly 8,000 RV's sold, Mid-States remains committed to making the RV experience a pleasant one and to "Opening Doors to a Whole New World."