In step with Tire Dealer of the Year winners Bob and Juanita Purcell

TRIB wins battle for California retreaders
A tradition of trust

Bob and Juanita Purcell — MTD’s Tire Dealer of the Year winners — continue to build Purcell Tire side-by-side

By Mike Manges

hey are the top independent retreaders in the United States. They operate the third largest independent commercial tire dealership in the country. Their dealership is North America’s 10th largest independent tire store chain with sales of $170 million to $200 million a year.

Through expert planning, innovation, a willingness to take chances and sheer hard work, they have turned what started out as a small operation into one of the industry’s most profitable tire dealerships, with more than 60 locations throughout 10 states and Mexico, plus seven retread plants.

They are universally respected within the tire industry — not only for their vision, financial acumen and business success, but also for their impeccable integrity, trustworthiness and eagerness to share their bounty with others.

They are Bob and Juanita Purcell of Potosi, Mo.-based Purcell Tire & Rubber Co. And they are the winners of Modern Tire Dealer magazine’s 2004 Tire Dealer of the Year award, from two associates, Taylor Wells, a man he had previously worked for, and Ted Hiltz to start the company. The loan from Wells was sealed with a simple handshake.

Robert worked hard to build the business — not an easy task during the Great Depression. “He never looked on the dark side of things,” says Bob. “He was honest, sincere and a very hard worker.”

Robert’s reputation for fairness preceded him in the small town of Washington. “During World War II, he was in charge of the local rationing board,” says Juanita. Everything from salt to fuel fell under his jurisdiction. “People were trying to get favors, but he wouldn’t do it. He made sure everybody got the same thing.”

Even more impressive were his quiet displays of generosity. After Ted Hiltz fell ill and became incapacitated, Robert took care of his affairs and kept him involved in the dealership. “Every Tuesday and Friday, he would pick Ted up and take him to the shop, just to keep his mind active,” says Bob.

With his father as a role model, Bob learned the value of hard work at an early age. He worked part-time at the dealership during high school and also set pins at a local bowling alley.

Before that, at the age of 10, he sold watermelons door-to-door, transporting them three at a time in a hand-drawn wagon. “I’d sell three and then go back and pick up three more.” He charged from a nickel to seven cents per melon. Margins weren’t bad, jokes Bob, “but it was the idea of walking around and talking to people and asking, ‘Would you like a watermelon?’” that really appealed to him.

Bob displayed uncanny business savvy, even at that early age. A potential customer once demanded to poke a hole in a melon to check its freshness, a common practice in those days. Without missing a beat, Bob fired back, “If you do that, how am I gonna sell it?”

Juanita also entered the working world at a young age — eight years old! Her first job was in the kitchen of a local restaurant. By the age of 12, her mother was coming to her

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for advice about household matters (Juanita’s father passed away when she was three years old.) “Mom would ask, ‘Do you think we should do this? Should we do that?’”

Juanita’s mother turned out to be a successful entrepreneur in her own right, buying a restaurant/tavern well after the age of 50. “Bob and I helped her with her permit and books and things like that. She made money her first year!”

Triumphs and setbacks

Bob learned the nuts and bolts of the tire business while working for his dad in high school. “Everybody at the store learned how to sell and change tires,” he says.

After graduating from high school in 1952, Bob spent two years in the Navy. He enrolled in the University of Missouri in 1954, where he delivered milk and sold insurance on the side.

Bob met Juanita — who was working as a shoe model for a footwear manufacturer at the time — between his freshman and sophomore years. “My brother and I had gone to this nightclub in Washington,” says Juanita. Bob — who was there with some friends — introduced himself to her.

“I got a date with her and took her out,” he says. “Once I met her, I wasn’t interested in anyone else.” They married in September 1955.

After getting his business degree in 1958, Bob went to work for Goodyear as a trainee in St. Louis. The following year, he took a job with General Tire & Rubber Co. and the couple relocated to Nashville, Tenn.

In 1964, Bob’s dad invited them to join him in running Purcell Tire, which was growing. They moved back to Missouri and assumed management of the dealership’s recently acquired tire store and retread plant in DeSoto, Mo.

“The company was in good financial shape with a good customer base and a good reputation,” says Bob. “Just because my dad didn’t have a formal education didn’t mean he wasn’t a good businessman. The business was rock-solid.”

Then tragedy struck.

In 1969, a fire broke out at Purcell Tire’s DeSoto retread shop as the result of an industrial accident. The facility was the company’s only retread plant and a primary source of income. It was completely destroyed. “I was at a nearby park with the kids (Jackie and Patti) and looked up and saw the black smoke,” says Juanita.

Fortunately, nobody was injured in the blaze. However, the plant and its equipment were uninsured. “After the fire, we weren’t sure if we were going to go back in business,” says Bob. “It could have gone in either direction.”

The Purcells decided to stick with it and located a parcel of land with a vacated factory building some 25 miles down the road in Potosi, Mo. They bought the property and started retreading again within several months.

Purcell Tire manufactured passenger, medium truck and OTR retreads. “At the time we sold passenger retreads for $5.95 apiece,” recalls Bob.

“Snow tires also were big,” says Juanita. “We’d keep our DeSoto store open all night and we’d work around the clock putting snow tires on.”

Unfortunately, Bob’s father developed a heart condition and had to reduce his involvement in the business. “But right up until that time, he sold, moved and changed tires,” says Bob.

He died in 1970, and Bob and Juanita took over the whole company, which consisted of the Potosi plant and three outlets. “We just continued what he had built,” says Bob.

How to enlarge a business

The Purcells maintained their focus on retreading. The local market was extremely competitive, and most of their rivals “were also good friends of ours,” says Bob. “In fact, there used to be more people in the business than...”
Modern Tire Dealer’s
2004 Tire Dealer of the Year

It Pays To Be In The Right Circle.

Goodyear congratulates Bob and Juanita Purcell and the entire Purcell team.
Since 1935, Purcell Tire has been providing quality Goodyear tires and unbeatable service.
The right people, the right tires - the ultimate winning combination!
Purcell Tire sold to several lead mines in the area, which was part of “The Lead Belt.” OTR retreading could be a tough sell at times, according to Bob. “A mine just west of here had a front-end loader and wanted me to come out and look at it. They didn’t think I could retread it because the load (that the tires carried) was so heavy and the service was so severe.”

The size was 14.00x24, which was considered mammoth at the time. (“We’re successfully retreading 57-inch tires now!”) Bob took the tire back to his shop and recapped it, to the customer’s amazement.

Other mining companies were impressed with Purcell Tire as well. Some even sent letters to the Purcells saying that the dealership’s retreads were outperforming new tires. “We’d guarantee the same service hours as a new tire,” says Juanita.

As Purcell Tire’s customers expanded their operations, the dealership bought new molds and equipment. The

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In good company
Purcells join star-studded roster
Bob and Juanita Purcell are the 12th winners of Modern Tire Dealer’s Tire Dealer of the Year award. They will receive an etched plaque commemorating the honor, plus a framed portrait. A $1,000 check will be sent to Pony Bird Inc., their charity of choice.

The Purcells were chosen by the following independent judges:

• Anne and Russ Evans of Tires 2000, a tire importer/exporter based in Hebron, Conn.;
• Saul Ludwig, a managing director with KeyBanc Capital Markets, a division of Cleveland, Ohio-based McDonald Investments Inc., and long-time author of MTD’s Ludwig Report;
• Richard Morgan of Morgan Marketing Solutions in Dallas, Texas; and
• Larry Morgan, 2001 Tire Dealer of the Year, current Tire Industry Association president and founder of Morgan Tire & Auto Inc.

Last year’s Tire Dealer of the Year was John Marshall of Grismer Tire Co. in Dayton, Ohio. Other Tire Dealer of the Year recipients include Tom Raben, Raben Tire Co., Evansville, Ind. (2002); Les Schwab, Les Schwab Tire Centers, Prineville, Ore. (2000); Raynal Pearson, Pearson Tire Co., Richfield, Utah (1999); and Tom Gegax, Team Tires Plus Ltd., Burnsville, Minn. (1998).

Living proof that hard work does come full circle.

Growing from three locations to more than 50 in 11 states. Ranking as the third largest independent commercial tire dealer in North America. Invaluable contributions to the growth of the Tire Industry Association’s “Off-the-Road” Tire Conference. Bob and Juanita Purcell of Purcell Tire are the perfect choice for Modern Tire Dealer Magazine’s Dealer of the Year. And, if we may be so bold, they are also the perfect business partners.

Yokohama Tire would like to congratulate Bob and Juanita on this monumental achievement and thank them for all their years of honest, dedicated service to the tire industry and their community.
Purcells even began creating custom tread designs and compounds with help from suppliers — two unusual practices for a small independent.

“They stayed ahead on technology,” says Jack Woodland, chairman of Marangoni Tread North America Inc. Woodland met the Purcells nearly 25 years ago, when he was CEO of Oliver Rubber Co. and they were Oliver customers. “Their technology in OTR has always been ahead of even the majors!”

Missouri’s sharp, rocky topography helped as well. “We cut our teeth on severe applications and surfaces,” says Bob. “Our product was really good.”

Retreading — particularly large OTR tires — led to other things. “It was so capital intensive, we had to find other uses for the equipment.” The company began wholesaling tires in order to spread its cost over more units.

The 1970s saw Purcell Tire expand into other states. In 1972, the dealership opened a location in Henderson, Ky. Two years later, it added a retread plant in Murray, Utah, plus sales/service locations in St. Louis, Mo.; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Du-Quoin, Ill. If there was a mine to be serviced, the Purcells wanted to be there.

Bob was on the road constantly, while Juanita ran things from company headquarters in Potosi. “He had to buy equipment, he had to buy service trucks, he was the only salesman,” she says. “He’d leave Sunday night and come back on Saturday.”

Being a woman in the tire industry in the early 1970s wasn’t always easy. “Bob would be gone and customers would call and say, ‘I want to talk to a salesman.’ And I’d tell them, ‘You have to talk to me.’” They’d back off a bit, but would warm up to her once she demonstrated how knowledgeable she was. “Then they’d want to talk to me eight hours a day!”

Congratulations Bob and Juanita!

You make us proud of our partnership with Purcell Tire!
“Once they found out she had the answers they wanted — that’s what really mattered,” says Bob.

“I never really thought of this as a man’s profession,” says Juanita.

The Purcells credit Marvin Bozarth, who came to work for Purcell Tire in 1970, as a tremendous help during that time. “He’s a great technical person,” says Juanita. Bozarth spent 19 years with Purcell Tire before taking a job with the old American Retreaders Association (later called the International Tire & Rubber Association), where he rose to the position of executive director.

“It was a slow start, getting everything going,” says Bozarth, who now owns Bozarth Tire Industry Consultants and also serves as senior technical consultant to the Tire Industry Association (TIA). “We used a lot of old equipment, we rebuilt a lot of equipment.

“But Bob was a heck of a salesman. He’d go anywhere and call on anyone to make a sale — early in the morning, late at night, whatever it took. Juanita took care of office procedures. They were very hands-on people.”

Ideas flowed freely at Purcell Tire, according to Bozarth. “An idea would pop into someone’s head at lunch time and early in the afternoon it would be, ‘When are we going to get started?’ It was unpredictable sometimes.”

“Years ago, we used to meet every Saturday morning at a local restaurant,” says Juanita. “There would be five of us, including Marvin. Once a discussion was going on and I was on one side of the issue while Bob was on the other side. And I said, ‘Let’s just take a vote.’ Marvin spoke up and said, ‘Can it be a secret ballot?’” To this day, the Purcells say Bozarth “ranks high on our list.”

The Purcells were unafraid to make adjustments when needed. With trademark foresight, they stopped retreading passenger tires in the mid-’70s.

“I sometimes think it might be a good idea to get back into it, but Juanita brings me to my senses,” Bob jokes.

The national economy took a turn for the worse in the early ’80s and Purcell Tire felt the impact. “OTR, in particular, was very depressed,” he says. “So we went into truck tires in a big way and it turned out to be a savior for us. We developed the truck tire end to a great degree.” The company’s experience in OTR helped them make the transition.

“That’s why I call Bob our visionary,” says Juanita. “He came in and said, ‘We have to start diversifying.’”

Meanwhile, they continued the company’s expansion by acquiring Phoenix, Ariz.-based Western States Tire in 1983. Western States, a longtime fixture in the Southwest, sold and serviced OTR, medium truck and passenger tires; produced truck tire retreads; and operated a thriving wholesale division.

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If there was a mine to be serviced, the Purcells wanted to be there.
Purcell Tire & Rubber Co. is the largest independent retreader in North America. Its daily OTR retread output is up 29.2% since 1997, while its truck tire retreading output is up 16.6%. Purcell retreads tires up to 57 inches in diameter.

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Source: Modern Tire Dealer
The purchase brought Bob and Juanita new business and personnel, including Western States vice president Al Chicago, who currently serves as Purcell Tire senior vice president.

The acquisition of Western States sparked a major growth phase for Purcell Tire. The company added nearly 20 locations throughout the rest of the '80s and continued adding locations during the '90s and beyond. Most of the additions were new outlets. “I can’t say (expansion) has happened haphazardly, but I also wouldn’t say there was a very structured plan,” says Bob.

The road hasn’t always been smooth. Once, Purcell Tire had been sharing a major account with Firestone Tire & Rubber Co. and “we lost the bid,” says Juanita. “It just killed us. So I went down to talk to the (customer’s) general manager. He called in their purchasing department and they said, ‘You’re $300 a tire higher than Firestone.’

“That was a harrowing experience for me. I wasn’t used to being told..."
business as we see fit.”

Yost joined Purcell Tire in 1996 after 25 years with Bridgestone/Firestone. Factors that drew him to the dealership included “the opportunity to be myself, the freedom to do what I knew how to do, and knowing that Bob and Juanita had the resources I needed to be successful.

“I felt like I had more to accomplish and Purcell Tire gave me that opportu-
nity.”

“If you keep your employees happy, they keep your customers happy,” says Juanita. “Our employees are number one. ‘You’re the best of the best!’ That’s what Bob tells them.”

Two years ago, the Purcells transferred 100% ownership of the company to an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). The program is administered through an employee trust. “The driving goal was to reward some of the people who had been with us a long time and deserved credit for getting our company where it is today,” says Bob. He and Juanita even financed the first portion of the ESOP (the second part was financed through bonds they bought from Morgan Stanley).

Purcell Tire’s ESOP is unique in several ways, according to the couple. First, employees own 100% of the company’s stock, while many ESOPs involve smaller percentages. Second, new hires are enrolled in the program the day they start and are totally vested within five years. Some ESOPs, say the Purcells, won’t admit new members until they’ve put in at least a couple of years.

Seventy-five-percent of the ESOP is based on salary; the rest is based on se-

‘Our plans are much more formal now. It’s not just Bob and I deciding ‘We’re going to do this’ as opportunities present themselves.’

— Juanita Purcell, on the company’s ESOP program

CONGRATULATIONS PURCELL TIRE!
TIRE DEALER OF THE YEAR

• Purcell Tire & Rubber Company offers innovative battery testing for all automotive applications utilizing Midtronics diagnostic products.

• Purcell Tire & Rubber Company offers a full line of Exide Batteries which includes The Exide Orbital Select battery, the best battery you can buy!

Orbital is a registered trademark of Exide Technologies
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payments at 65 if they choose or let the money sit until they finally retire. It was an easy sell to their employees. “The day after we announced it, our employee communications manager in Springfield, Mo., who is on our communications committee, called and said, ‘Bob and Juanita, I think this is just wonderful!’” recalls Juanita. “And I said, ‘Well, we’ll have to go around and explain it to everybody.’ He replied, ‘What’s to explain? It’s free!’”

The ESOP also represented a shift of power within the company. Prior to the ESOP, the Purcells had final say in all of the dealership’s affairs. Now major decisions — like property purchases, for example — must be approved by the company’s board of directors, which includes Bob and Juanita, plus Jim Barnett, dean of the University of Akron’s Business School (in Ohio) and Shawn Hayes, CEO of National City Bank in the St. Louis region. If the board grants approval, the decision then goes to Purcell Tire’s ESOP trustee, John Grider, who is employed by the dealership. “We’d have to prove return on investment, our plan to turn (the property) around, return on the bottom line, etc. In some cases, if the trustee can’t justify it, he won’t approve it.

“Our plans are much more formal now,” says Juanita. “It’s not just Bob and I deciding ‘We’re going to do this’ as opportunities present themselves.” Purcell Tire’s ESOP has improved employee productivity, according to the Purcells. It also has become an excellent recruitment tool.

With the ESOP in place, the couple easily could have slowed down, but fate had other plans. Shortly after the program was established, Purcell Tire lost three key accounts. “Bob and I said, ‘We have to go back and work harder,’ and that’s what we did. We’ve since overcome those problems and we want to make sure the ESOP does well.”

“They could have sold the company to a competitor and walked away with pockets full of money,” says Purcell Tire Region Manager Bill Guttery. Employees now have “a real sense of ownership. Each of us feels like this is our own company.”

Different talents
Professionally, the Purcells approach

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Congratulations Bob & Juanita Purcell.
MTD Tire Dealer of the Year.

You’re not just a tire dealer. You’re a Continental tire dealer.

Continental
They’re not just tires.
They’re Continental tires.

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Bob and Juanita Purcell certainly have earned the respect and admiration of their employees and associates, both privately and professionally, as the following comments reveal:

Al Chicago, Purcell Tire senior vice president: “I met them 35 years ago when Bob sold retreads to Western States Tire. We went on some trips together, so my wife and I got to know them. They are very personable and friendly. It doesn’t matter who they’re with — they like to make others feel like the center of attention. They are Grade A people.”

Joe Jackson, Purcell Tire senior vice president: “They’re great motivators, they’re great business people, and above all else, they’re fair. They’re able to recognize and identify the strengths and weaknesses of people. If you’re going to work in the tire business, Purcell Tire is the place to work.”

Dennis Flynn, executive vice president: “They’re dedicated to the business. All they talk about is tires, whether at the office or at home. The business is their life. I’ve learned so much from them. They give you the leeway to make decisions and move the business forward. I’ve been up and down the roller coaster with them, and it’s always been fun and exciting.”

Bill Guttery, region manager: “I love working here because I can do what I want to do. Bob and Juanita have so many people who want to work for them. They really capitalize on their people and their assets, and their reputation is just flawless.”

Marvin Bozarth, owner of Bozarth Tire Industry Consultants, who spent 19 years at Purcell Tire: “They’re willing to work and put in whatever time is necessary to get something done. Bob is a brilliant analyst. Juanita is a detail person. Even in their personal life, most of the time they’re talking business. I’d say the strong point of their whole career has been their relationships with their customers and suppliers; they’ve become very close to some of them.”

Jack Woodland, chairman of Marangoni Tread North America Inc. and a longtime friend: “They confide in each other, they bounce ideas off each other and they take input from everyone in the company. They work very well together. They’re always thinking of ways to grow the business; they enjoy the chase.”

Jon Rich, president, Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.’s North American Tire division. Goodyear has supplied Purcell Tire since 1935: “Bob and Juanita have built a tremendous organization, but more than their growth, it’s the way they treat their customers and the way they treat their associates. They’re tremendous people and good representatives of Goodyear, and they personify what the independent tire dealer should be.”

Many of Purcell Tire’s employees display a tremendous amount of enthusiasm when discussing the company:

Carol Burton, retail sales associate: “It’s a great sense of security knowing that you work for a company that has such a long track record.”

Richard Werre, store manager: “I’ve been in the business 25-plus years, two with Purcell Tire, which has been the best time of my career. Purcell Tire is strong because the Purcells have assembled a team of professionals.”

Mike Vodika, service manager: “The integrity of this company is high as far as giving customers the best possible service. Customer loyalty is very high.”

Steve Richards, store manager: “No one can beat us because we are a company that stands together, even in the worst of times.”

Mike Boyd Sr., store manager: “I have all the faith in the world in (Purcell Tire’s) upper management and their ability to work one-on-one with anyone who has a concern or question.”

Paul Kirkorian, store manager: “This company will do great things in the future. Just look at the people working..."
their business from different perspectives. “I’m the big picture guy,” says Bob. “Juanita likes to dot the i’s and cross the t’s.”

“Bob watches the sales line and I watch the bottom line,” Juanita jokes. Bob is the company’s “thinker,” she says. “He lets everyone do their planning and then comes in and critiques it. As we finish the P&Ls every month, I scan them and approve them before they get e-mailed to each location. I look at each one. Bob waits until all of them are done, and then he looks at the consolidated (number).”

Juanita enjoys the financial aspects of running the dealership. “I take problems apart; it’s fun!”

“She’s uncanny about finding and solving problems,” says Chicago. “We always ask, ‘How could she pick that (problem) out?’ While Bob is talking to our managers, she’s on the paper side, checking bills and making sure credit is right.”

“Bob is the visionary who is unafraid to take risks,” says Yost. “He’s out there doing things, and Juanita is right behind him, making the whole thing work.

“I’ve learned a lot from them, especially by observing their ability to build relationships and work with vendors. When you’re the size we are, you need to have trust with your vendors. They’ve worked hard at that over the years, right up to the level of senior management.”

Joe Jackson, who supervises all of Purcell Tire’s sales and activities in the East, joined the company 16 years ago after Bob and Juanita invited him to work for them. “I love Purcell Tire because it’s straight-line management,” he says. “We’re lean and mean. If you have an issue, it gets resolved today. What makes it so neat is the ability to get answers, put them in place and see the results.”

**Work is number one**

Bob and Juanita Purcell make no excuses about where Purcell Tire resides on their list of priorities. “We talk about the business all the time — on the way to work, on the way home from work, at the dinner table, and everywhere else,” says Juanita.

“When we go to sleep we sometimes take a break from it,” says Bob with a wink. “A lot of times we’ll talk business when we’re brushing our teeth.”

“We never, ever turn the business

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‘Bob is the visionary who is unafraid to take risks.
He’s out there doing things, and Juanita is right behind him, making the whole thing work.’
— John Yost, region manager

**Congratulations to Juanita and Bob Purcell. . .**

the first team ever voted “Tire Dealers of the Year.” You have been working and playing together for 49 years and Myers Tire Supply and Patch Rubber Company are honored to be part of your larger team.

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off,” says Juanita. “The problem is, you find yourself only talking about problems, when there are so many good things.

“A lot of people who have been married for as long as Bob and I don’t have anything to talk about. They don’t have anything in common. We definitely have something in common!”

Both admit that their round-the-clock focus on business isn’t for everybody. “It bothers some people,” admits Juanita.

The couple tries to leave as many frustrations as possible at the office. “Juanita doesn’t have stress; she gives stress!” jokes Bob.

“Look who’s talking!” Juanita replies.

The couple’s close rapport keeps them grounded when problems do arise. In March 2002, Juanita’s doctors discovered that she had a heart problem, which called for immediate valve replacement surgery. “We were lucky because we had one of the best artery specialists,” she says. Her recovery was slower than originally anticipated, but now she feels as good as new.

Over the years, Bob and Juanita have learned that the principles that build solid marriages can be applied to business. “You have to be sincere,” says Juanita. “We need each other; what’s the difference if it’s business or personal? If I make a decision, Bob backs me up, and if he makes a decision, I back him up.

“He makes all the big decisions anyway, like what we’re going to do in Iraq,” she jokes. (Bob likes to keep up on current events.)

“And Juanita makes all the small decisions, like what kind of car we’re going to drive,” he says. “That’s our standard joke.”

The Purcells are deeply involved in various tire industry functions. Bob, in particular, has volunteered countless hours to both TIA and the Missouri Tire Dealers & Retreaders Association. He also is one of the most active contributors to TIA’s annual OTR Tire Conference.

“Our friends are the people within this industry,” says Juanita. “We want them to do well. Whenever I hear somebody say, ‘Oh, so-and-so is a terrible retreader,’ I just hate it because it gives everybody a black eye.”

“Larry Morgan (Morgan Tire & Auto Inc. founder and current TIA president) is a dynamic leader,” says Bob.

“We never felt threatened by him; we tried to learn from him. The same

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**Congratulations to Bob and Juanita Purcell for receiving Modern Tire Dealer’s Dealer of the Year award. From your friends at Carlisle Tire & Wheel Company.**

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**Steady growth: 45% in 10 years**

Purcell Tire & Rubber Co. has grown 45% in the last 10 years based on number of outlets:

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Source: Modern Tire Dealer.

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Left to right: Juanita, Robert M. Purcell, several Goodyear officials, Sophie Purcell (Bob’s mother), and Bob at the opening of Purcell Tire’s Potosi, Mo., retread plant in 1969.

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gives for Brad Ragan Sr. (the late OTR retread pioneer and Brad Ragan Inc. founder) and Les Schwab (Les Schwab Tire Centers founder)."

Other dealerships, in turn, now look to Purcell Tire for inspiration.

In November 2002, Bob was inducted into TIA’s Tire Industry Hall of Fame, along with Jack Woodland. “It was one of the greatest awards I’d ever received. To go through life, doing what you want to do, and to get an award for it?” He remains humbled by the honor. “It’s kind of strange to be in the company of people like Charles Goodyear and Harvey Firestone.”

**Ahead of the curve**

The tire industry is much different than it was when Bob and Juanita moved back to Missouri to help run Purcell Tire 40 years ago. “The changes have been amazing,” says Juanita.

The scope of customers’ operations, including the capacity of their equipment, has increased. At mine sites, 350-ton trucks have become commonplace. “Thirty years ago, there wasn’t anything like that,” says Bob.

Tire size proliferation has developed into an ongoing challenge. To compete, you try to do the same things that got you where you are. You try to be honest, truthful and sincere.’

— Bob Purcell

Purcell Tire has remained on the cutting edge of technology by adapting to changing trends, like larger mining trucks and other equipment.

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**Bob & Juanita**

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have all sizes of OTR tires available, for example, takes more money than it did years ago. Designs and types have changed and there are a lot more of them. Availability is a big item.”

Computerization, which the Purcells have wholeheartedly embraced, has made doing business easier. The couple can track sales and stock throughout the entire company from corporate headquarters in Potosi.

“I remember working on the inventory book late one night at the first store we had,” says Juanita. “Someone walked by and knocked the book over. It fell apart and I almost cried.

“Now you can punch a key on your computer and see what your inventory is.”

Consolidation has reduced the number of dealerships in the OTR and truck tire arenas, according to Bob. And those who have survived find themselves competing at more intense levels with their own suppliers. “To compete, you try to do the same things that got you where you are,” he says. “You try to be honest, truthful and sincere.”

Customers expect more brands. “For a long time, we were 100% Goodyear,” says Juanita. Purcell Tire now sells Goodyear, Michelin, Yokohama, Toyo, General and Hankook brand tires, plus tires imported by China Manufacturers Alliance LLC.

Finding a profitable niche doesn’t hurt either. “There are lots of people who sell tires, but we’ve gone a step further. Not only can we sell a tire, we can remanufacture a tire, which really lowers the (customers’ ) price in the right application.”

Purcell Tire’s truck tire retread processes include pre-cure, Goodyear Unicircle and mold cure (using CIMA equipment). For OTR retreading the company uses mold cure and segmented mold cure, its Flex Cure system (for radial OTR tires), and Precision Cuts.

“One thing we watch closely is service. If you do service and aren’t billing for it, you’re giving it away.”

“We did $250,000 a month in service at one truck tire center in Phoenix. Our Little Rock, Ark., and Salt Lake City (truck tire) locations aren’t far behind.”

On the downside, price has become a bigger consideration among customers. “I still think people do business with people, so we try to stay in contact with our customers,” she says. “But it’s got-
ten harder; they’re busier, we’re busier. You don’t have that personal feel like you used to.”

That hasn’t prevented Purcell Tire from earning contracts with some of the world’s leading mines, including Magna, Utah-based Kennecott Utah Copper Corp.; Phoenix-based Phelps Dodge Corp., one of the biggest copper mining outfits on the planet; and Barrick Gold-strike Mines Inc., among others.

Sharing their blessings

Neither Purcell has plans to slow down in the near term. Both still work five-and-a-half days a week and spend two weeks at the company’s Phoenix and Las Vegas offices each month.

Maintaining forward momentum remains a goal. While some tire dealerships struggle with managing their growth, Bob and Juanita say expansion is easier than ever now that Purcell Tire is so large. “Right now we’ve moved our retread plant in Phoenix and are selling the old one,” says Juanita. “We’ll simply take the money (from the sale) and roll it into a new plant.”

Growing Purcell Tire’s ESOP is another priority. “We want to create a lot of wealthy people” within the organization, says Bob.

The Purcells’ participation in a wide variety of charities also keeps them busy. For the past 10 years they have been involved with the Make-A-Wish Foundation, an organization that enables children with life-threatening medical conditions to fulfill their dreams. Purcell Tire has hosted golf tournaments in various cities to raise money for the group; one tournament raised $10,000 for the charity. Juanita, an avid golfer, hit the links with employees, suppliers, customers, and other guests, while Bob, a non-golfer, sold hot dogs and beer at the concession stand!

The couple donates money to Habitat for Humanity, the Boy Scouts of America, various diabetes groups and the Salvation Army. They also provide money for high school scholarships in Washington County, Mo., which is plagued by high unemployment.

At the top of their list is Pony Bird Inc., a Mapaville, Mo.-based organization that provides residential, recreational, educational and adult day programming services to individuals with severe physical and mental disabilities. The Purcells were introduced to Pony Bird years ago through their relationship with an associate whose son was a resident there. They’ve enthusiastically supported the cause ever since.

Bob and Juanita’s reputation for selflessness even crosses national boundaries. A nun from Canada once had a loader grader owned by the parish where she lived, says Juanita. “She couldn’t get tires for it anywhere else, so she’d call Bob every year. And Bob would duck her and say, ‘Tell her I’ll call her back!’”

Bob, who attended parochial school as a child, eventually allowed his conscience to get the better of him and called her back.

“She’d send a truck down here from Canada, and we’d retread those tires for free!”

To this day, the Purcells aren’t sure how the nun found out about them; Continued on page 40...
MTD Dealer Profile: Bob and Juanita Purcell

Full names: Robert G. Purcell, Juanita C. Purcell

Family: Jacquelyn Purcell Breder (daughter); Patricia Purcell Flynn (daughter); Dennis Flynn (son-in-law); Tosca Sanders, Lori Breder, Kala Flynn and Kyle Flynn (grandchildren)

I am most proud of:
Bob: my wife, Juanita, and meeting and marrying her almost 50 years ago; being named Tire Dealer of the Year; and my induction into the Tire Industry Hall of Fame.
Juanita: my family; our company, as it has become part of our family; and my husband, Bob, in his relentless pursuit of doing a good job.

My hobbies/interests include:
Bob: running Purcell Tire.
Juanita: reading, golf, certain charities, and working.

My favorite childhood memories:
Bob: My father showing me how to change a tire on a Model T and growing up in the tire business.
Juanita: I was raised in a small county, Warren County, Mo., and was asked to give the eighth grade commencement speech for the entire county. I saved the dress I wore for years.

My biggest regret:
Bob: I did not do an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) earlier.
Juanita: I didn’t finish my master’s degree. We moved to DeSoto and the nearest school was an hour away. With two small children and working, there simply wasn’t time.

My favorite books:
Juanita: All books. I read fiction, non-fiction and a great number of motivational books.

My favorite sports:
Bob: football and baseball.
Juanita: golf and football.

My favorite athletes:
Bob: Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb and Mickey Mantle.
Juanita: Jackie Smith, tight end for the former St. Louis Cardinals. My favorite coach is Dick Vermeil, who said, “I’ve always felt that if you can move a player’s commitment from his head to his heart, you’ve got a chance to make him work a little longer and a little harder.” How is that any different in business?

My favorite movies:
Bob: “The Sixth Sense,” “From Here to Eternity,” and after reading all the reviews, I want to see “The Passion of the Christ” as soon as it is on TV.
Juanita: I really enjoyed “The Sixth Sense.” We don’t go to movies often; we much prefer reading and keeping up with the latest news.

My favorite food:
Bob: Butterscotch pie with graham cracker crust and real whipped cream topping.
Juanita: I enjoy going to restaurants that know how to fix all kinds because I don’t know how.

My favorite politicians:
Juanita: Condoleezza Rice. She is a woman who has succeeded in a man’s world and I think she’s very smart.

Am I a morning or night person?
Bob: Morning.
Juanita: Morning, which stems from working. The best work is done early in the morning for the majority of people.

My advice to the tire dealer who is just starting out:
Bob: Develop a good work ethic and build trust with your customers.

The greatest thing about the tire industry today:
Bob: Anyone can succeed if they are willing to sacrifice. A little luck helps, but success usually comes to those who will do what it takes to achieve their goals. The tire industry has been very good to my family and I.
Juanita: The constant change. Changes used to occur every five to 10 years; now it’s more like daily.

My advice to parents:
Bob: Be truthful, even when it hurts.
Juanita: Be loyal to your family and friends and be trustworthy. Do what is right, regardless of any pressure put on you.

If I could change one thing about myself:
Bob: I would not work so many hours in the business and be more active in the community and church.
Juanita: I would have tried to not be such a workaholic. I love being outdoors and could have spent more effort doing that.

My most humbling experience:
Bob: The fire in 1969 (that destroyed Purcell Tire’s retread plant).
Juanita: Calling on our largest customer and losing a major bid.

My goals in life:
Bob: To be as instrumental as possible in growing this business and making a lot of wealthy owners (Purcell Tire is now employee-owned).
Juanita: To make sure our ESOP does well, then to spend more time with my grandchildren.

A perfect evening for me:
Bob: An evening with associates and/or customers.
Juanita: Be loyal to your family and friends and be trustworthy. Do what is right, regardless of any pressure put on you.

The smartest thing I’ve ever done:
Bob: Creating our ESOP and growing this company.
Juanita: The most important decision one makes in life is who you choose to marry, so the smartest thing I’ve ever done was marry Bob.

Best advice my parents gave me:
Bob: Be truthful, even when it hurts.
Juanita: Be loyal to your family and friends and be trustworthy. Do what is right, regardless of any pressure put on you.

My advice to my children:
Bob: Enjoy life, be happy and work hard.
Juanita: Be loyal to your family and friends and be trustworthy. Do what is right, regardless of any pressure put on you.

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Juanita suspects she was referred to them by one of Purcell Tire’s competitors.

The Purcells receive requests for help from various charities each week. The letters don’t go unanswered — thanks, in part, to a blessing that the couple still remembers after 30 years. After Purcell Tire’s DeSoto retread plant burned down in 1969, Juanita prayed fervently for snow. “This was late October,” she recalls, “and it snowed!” As a result, the company was able to get by on winter tire sales. “I’ll never forget it,” she says. “That’s why every request gets some money.”

“We always did what was necessary,” says Juanita. “Even when Bob worked at General Tire, he’d bring a customer in after having driven a long way. They’d get in at midnight and I’d get up and fix breakfast for them.”

While Bob was on the road building Purcell Tire’s client list, it wasn’t unusual for him to land at an airport at 4 a.m., then turn around and put in a full day at the office. “Anybody who is willing to sacrifice and work hard will be successful,” he says. “You can be smart and not be successful. Of course, you’ll always run into that one person who has talent and is willing to work; there are occasions when lightning strikes...”

“...or you win the lottery,” says Juanita.

“But you have to be willing to work,” he says.

Money isn’t always the driving factor, according to Bob. “At the end of the year, we want to have something to show for our efforts. But as far as daily or hourly, I don’t know if that’s the only thing that inspires us to do the right job for our customers.

“Each and every minute of each and every day isn’t always enjoyable, but at the end of the day or the month or the year, you say, ‘Well, I did it,’ and then you move on to something else. Every morning we want to get up and go to work. I don’t think that’s going to change.”

“I once told Bob, ‘I’m going to retire,’” says Juanita. “And he said, ‘If you’re going to retire, then I want to work forever!’ But then he said, ‘If you walk out that door, I’m walking with you.’ I consider that a compliment. And here we are!”

Bob and Juanita Purcell are as busy as ever. “Every morning we want to get up and go to work,” says Bob. “I don’t think that’s going to change.”

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Bob and Juanita Purcell

Modern Tire Dealer’s Dealer of the Year

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