



Bayview Ford-Lincoln-Mercury Owners
Damon Wickware and his wife, Leahia, stand
with a new Ford Mustang at their dealership.

Dealership Makes Customers & Employees Priority

Though the car industry has seen its share of ups and downs in recent years, Bayview Ford-Lincoln-Mercury has held steady by making customers and employees a priority, according to **Damon Wickware**, the company president and owner. The company is the Mobile Area Chamber's Small Business of the Month.

"Success in business depends on the people you surround yourself with," said Wickware. Availability to customers is also an integral part of his business philosophy. So crucial, in fact, he prints his private cell phone number on business cards. "I encourage our salesmen to give out my card," he said. "I believe if the caller has an important enough reason to call me then I should take the call."

Wickware's entry into the Mobile Bay area car market was initially more happenstance than planned. While exploring business options, he said an acquaintance talked with him about owning a car dealership. Looking back, the

dealership president described the process as being in the right place at the right time. Wickware, who was living in Dallas, called the Ford dealer development department and inquired about owning a dealership. In 1992, after a series of interviews and a lengthy training program, he was approved for his own business — but it was in Alabama, a state Wickware said he was unfamiliar with, except perhaps to pass through on his way to somewhere else.

The Daphne dealership he took over belonged to Jim and Velma Gaston, members of one of Fairhope's founding families, who were leaving the business after 67 years. "They were so wonderful to me when I moved here and they took me in as part of their family," Wickware remembers. "I didn't know anyone so it was good to have them around. And not knowing anyone allowed me to work 24 hours and seven days a week to get the business up and going."

Wickware's hard work paid off. Nineteen years after entering the business, he employs 31 full-time workers and boasts the F-Series trucks as the current best sellers on the lot. But Wickware says the car business has changed since those early days, with the Internet now playing a major role with consumers. "Customers are better prepared and more educated about the cars they want to buy before they come to the lot and see the car in person," he said.

Now deeply entrenched in the community, Wickware said contributing to the area by way of volunteering and charitable giving are also important aspects of his dealership's success. He and his wife Leahia, along with their employees, are significant contributors to United Way of Baldwin County and Wickware is heavily involved with the Ruff Wilson Youth Organization, a Boys & Girls Club in Daphne. To contact the dealership, call 626-7777 or visit www.bayviewflm.com.

Go to mobilechamber.com/award.asp to submit a Small Business of the Month nomination, or contact Danette Richards at 431-8652 or drichards@mobilechamber.com.