

Business Profile: Louis Boston of Chrysler



BY CYNTHIA BROWN

When Louis Boston, (now president of Gresham Chrysler-Plymouth) was running his business consulting firm in New York, he visited Portland a few times on business trips. "Even if I thought it was one of the best-kept secrets in the country, he said. When he was presented with the opportunity of buying a car dealership in Gresham, he decided to make the move.

While working as a consultant, Boston's clientele was varied and he had the chance to acquaint himself with many different types of ventures. One business stood out. "I consulted with a large dealership as a way to utilize my background in marketing and sales--to be able to use all my skills in one organization. Basically there are five different businesses in a dealership broken into separate profit centers: new car sales, used car sales, the service department, the parts department and the body shop. Each is independent but integrated. One drives the other."

After making the decision to buy a dealership, he researched the automotive industry thoroughly. "I talked to GM first but I wasn't convinced that they were really looking to the future. I looked at Ford next and liked them, but their training program didn't measure up to Chrysler's," he said.

Boston had to complete the rigorous 18 month dealer training program before Chrysler Corporation would allow him to purchase a dealership.

"I had to work for a dealer in all

the different areas and fly back to Detroit regularly for assessment. But completing the training doesn't guarantee that you can get a dealership. They also look at your personality and business skills," he commented.

After the training Boston purchased the Gresham dealership because "I see the opportunity in Portland for someone with skills to develop a business. The market is open. The Portland area and Oregon are growing and we need people with business techniques," he said.

Boston also saw a diverse ethnic population which offered opportunities for people of color, although after three years he's had to amend his perception somewhat.

"On the surface there appears to be a lot of acceptance but people here aren't used to competing with people of color. But I still believe there are opportunities for persons who are risk-oriented and I'm optimistic about the future. As the area grows the situation will improve. If I didn't believe that I might as well leave."

Several factors contribute to Boston's optimism. To start with Gresham has excellent growth potential. "It's the fourth largest city in the state. It's very vibrant and growth-oriented with a distinct business base. It's an excellent place to live and work. And Portland has a strong Chamber of Commerce committed to supporting people of color," he said. Faith in the basic principals of capitalism also play a part. "I still feel people will buy from the person who offers the best product at the fairest price." At the same time Boston is realistic "...everything is not 100% equal. As a person of color I have to recognize it and take steps."

The path that led Louis Boston to owning a car dealership and living in Gresham, Oregon was a roundabout one. He was born in Hackensack, New Jersey and was raised in Albany, New York. He received a bachelor's degree in political science (with minors in Spanish and philosophy) from West Virginia State. "I wanted to be an attorney but then I

discovered the business world," he recalled. "After getting my bachelor's I took several placement tests and they pointed to marketing and sales." He went on to attend the Executive MBA program at the University of Michigan and then "go quickly into sales and never looked back."

Boston has been married for 27 years to Clariner Boston. They have four children: Louis II, 25, who recently received his M.A. in communications from Syracuse University; Lowell, 24, working on his masters at the California Institute of Art in animation and filmmaking; Lyle, 21, who is studying business at Morehouse; and Cyrenea, 10, a student at St. Mary of the Valley and "the future chairperson of the board; she can't talk about the car business with the best of them," according to her proud father.

Boston is committed to community service. As the government pulls money out of social service projects "more and more businesses have to be involved in the community," he said. "If you take something from the community you must put it back. You need to donate time and money." He serves on the boards of the Urban League, YMCA, the Portland Chamber of Commerce and the Portland Opera, to name a few.

He has also established a special financing program which recognizes the changing social needs of our community. "Many single mothers have a hard time getting financing but they need a car. I'm proud our single parent/head of household program can get them financing or establish credit," he commented.

Boston's commitment to the community shows even in his advertising which bills Gresham Chrysler-Plymouth the "community-minded dealer". They offer full service sales, leasing, service and parts departments as well as special financing for single parents, small business mini-fleets and masters (55 plus). They are located at 1975 E. Powell; 665-7121 or 254-2076.

A P R I A Phillip Randolph Institution Stronger Unions Needed to Cure Many Social Ills

Submitted by
Donna Hammond
articles will run bi-monthly

As summer draws to a close, American unions celebrate the Labor Day holiday with guarded hope that the 1990s will be a decade of progress for the labor movement.

Having survived a decade of labor bashing, the AFL-CIO and independent trade unions are accelerating organizing drives throughout the nation. Although the unionized sector of the labor force has dwindled from 23 percent in 1980 to less than 15 percent today, union leaders believe the increasing numbers of low-wage workers entering the country will bring about a dramatic increase in union membership.

But they must first face some formidable obstacles. In addition to the economic uncertainty created by the savings and loan and Mideast crises, the unemployment rate reported for July (5.5 percent) was the highest increase since 1986, and many economists are predicting a serious recession in the months ahead.

Such predictions are corroborated by the experience of the labor force. A New York Times/CBS poll reported on Aug. 24 indicated that 61 percent of the respondents believed the United States is already in a recession. The number of food stamp recipients has also increased by 1.3 million between May 1989 and May 1990, and many states are reporting sharp increases in welfare rolls.

Unions can still point to impressive wage differentials to bolster their arguments for union membership. In March of this year, labor union members earned an average of \$499 per week, \$78 more than the \$421 weekly average for unorganized workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statis-

tics.

After "non-wage benefits", such as pensions and health insurance, are factored in, union workers have an average "total compensation" advantage of \$317 every week. Moreover, these figures do not take into account provisions in union contracts for greater job security and stock ownership plans, which are seldom available to non-union blue collar workers.

The union advantage is even greater for women and minorities. In 1988, the most recent year for which statistics are available, the BLS reported that African-American union members

the difference between U.S. and European work life is union membership. About 85 percent of the European labor force is unionized--just the opposite of the United States.

Trade unions will nonetheless remain a potent force for social change in our society, because their influence extends far beyond the size of the rank and file. Non-union workers have also benefited from such reforms as social security, health insurance, job safety regulations, unemployment insurance and worker's compensation. None of these benefits could have been realized without the labor movement's leadership.

Despite pockets of discrimination in a few trade unions (mostly in the building trades), labor unions have consistently championed the cause of racial equality in the United States. "The labor movement has moved more progressively and faster in supporting the black movement than has any other institution in America," explains Benjamin Hooks, executive director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

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averaged \$138 more in weekly earnings than non-union black workers. For Hispanic and women workers, the weekly differential was \$130 and \$103 respectively.

Unions have also begun to develop a more creative menu of benefits, such as union-owned banking and low-interest charge card services. Some unions are experimenting with pre-paid legal services, group life and auto insurance policies for their members.

U.S. unions lag behind their counterparts in other industrialized nations in vacation benefits, holidays and shorter work weeks. The French union movement has achieved a national guarantee of five weeks paid vacation for every worker, regardless of seniority and 14 national holidays, compared to 10 holidays and an average of 2 1/2 weeks vacation for American workers. German workers have 17 holidays and six weeks guaranteed vacation.

The most important reason for

"The labor movement has moved more progressively and faster in supporting the black movement than has any other institution in America," explains Benjamin Hooks, executive director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The labor movement's legislative agenda for the current Congress includes bills to strengthen civil rights, controls on air pollution and greater availability of quality, affordable child care and housing.

It is becoming clear that a more active and influential labor movement is a prerequisite for correcting a host of social and economic injustices facing the nation. As former Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall has put it, "We are not likely to reverse the negative trends in income distribution unless unions get a whole lot stronger than they are." With this commitment, the 1990s can bring decent living standards for working people of all races.

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