



BUSINESS

Catching up with 'Clu'

Building consumer trust is key to success in the automobile industry

BY BILLY D. MOORE

FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Clarence "Clu" Larkins is back in the car business.

After seven years at Weston Pontiac GMC, Larkins has relocated and is the new Fleet Lease Sales Manager for Town & Country Ford in inner-northeast Portland.

Surely you remember Clu? He's from right here "in the hood." Mr. and Mrs. Larkins raised their children here and still own a home in northeast Portland.

Larkins has extensive experience in the customer service field. He started out in the airline industry, working for major carriers like Delta. In 1993, he joined the team at Weston Pontiac GMC and quickly rose up the sales ladder to become one of the company's top producers.

He lives by the motto that if you treat people the way you want to be treated, they will come back and do business with you again. It's this attitude that Larkins has taken to Town & Country's family of dealerships.

He has the experience to know that the customer comes first.

His former boss, Jay Weston said, "Customers and fellow employees alike enjoyed and respected Clarence's ability to sell, not just the car, but the dealership."

Some people think the sales are the most important part of a car deal, but that is so far from the truth. The ability to provide a client with the after care maintenance and product knowledge is what keeps people coming back, and Larkins will tell you that the money is in repeat business. Developing trust and the right attitude are the keys to continued success in the automobile industry.

Larkins left Weston Pontiac GMC in 1999 to realize a longtime goal of finishing his college education. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Portland State University in June of 2000.

Along the way he met and married his lovely wife, Marie. Who, by the way, is one of the top hair stylists in the Northwest. Together, they co-own a multi-purpose salon called MeRae's on Northeast 42nd across the street from Whitaker Middle School.

Plans for the future encompass developing the property into a diverse business complex and at some point, building a penthouse to live in. In the meantime, they are very active in their community and church, the Irvington Covenant Community Church.

Larkins, who sits on the Irvington Covenant Community Development Corporation board, and his wife are truly proud of the church's vision to



Clarence "Clu" Larkins, the new fleet lease sales manager at Town & Country Ford, directs customers to the northeast Portland auto dealership.

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

help low-income minorities have safe and livable housing.

The Larkins also plan to open a low-income financial institution dealing with estate plan-

ning and investment strategies for the less fortunate. They also hope to help the seasoned investor as well.

Back at Town & Country, the

new position of Fleet and Lease Manager is the springboard for better things to come.

As they like to say on line in the car business: UP!

Right now, Clarence Larkins is UP to the challenge of helping to lead Town & Country Ford and his community in the new millennium.

Diana's Fashion Boutique Closing

Diana McKnight, owner of Diana's Fashion Boutique at 2808 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. is closing her store after almost 8 years in business.

McKnight says that the downturn in the economy is largely responsible.

"Although many people enjoy the quality and style of our merchandise, not finding a

buyer will force me to close my doors," McKnight said.

Diana's Fashion Boutique sold unique fashions from around the world.

The store will close its doors on Saturday, March 23. Merchandise is being marked down by as much as 50 percent.

McKnight said her future plans would include work as a fashion consultant and expert.

Community Leader Takes Federal Post



Conrad Lee

Conrad Lee, an Asian-American businessman, engineer and community leader, is the new regional administrator at the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Born in China, Lee came to the United States to earn an engineering degree from the University of Michigan in 1962. From 1962-78, except for two years as a stockbroker, Lee worked for Boeing Co. in various capacities, including engineer, marketing sales manager and energy analyst. He received an MBA in finance and international business from the Univer-

sity of Washington in 1980.

"It is a rare honor and special pleasure for me to serve President Bush, along with the country I dearly love and my fellow Americans," Lee said. "I appreciate and value this country's democracy and economic/political system. I am blessed to have lived the American dream and that I am able to give back in some small way what I have so abundantly received."

The regional office serves Northwest states from its headquarters in Seattle.

High Tech Boost

(AP)—High-tech jobs are expected to boost Portland's faltering employment in coming years, according to a new 20-year economic forecast.

But the report shows the region won't dig itself out of the recession as fast as the rest of the nation because the area's economic slowdown was more severe and started earlier.

Employment is at its low point and should start its rebound early next year, according to the analysis by the regional government Metro.

The numbers show the Portland area will add 557,000 jobs and more than 894,000 new residents between 2000 and 2025.

Metro will use the report to determine how much land the area needs for housing and jobs during the next 20 years. It will decide late this year on where and how much to expand development in the region.

Portland's exaggerated slump during the past year doesn't erase the area's trajectory of fast growth, economists say.

That would put the Portland area on pace to grow faster than the rest of the country during the next three decades.



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Student Loan Payment Help Offered

(AP) — Area residents at risk of defaulting on their student loans in the midst of a tumbling economy can get a respite from payments while they weather the financial storm, state officials say.

The number of default claims filed in the state in the past year are more than quadruple those filed in the previous year, according to the Oregon Student Assistance Commission.

"It's only going to get worse as we see the unemployment rate get worse," OSAC spokesman Gene Evans said. "It's a direct correlation

between the economy and student loan payments."

OSAC wants borrowers to know that people who lose their jobs can apply for deferments that can run from 24 to 36 months over the life of the loan, depending on when the loans were taken out.

Depending on the type of loan, the federal government may even pick up the interest payments during the deferment. If not, the borrower can roll the interest into the loan while the deferment is in effect.

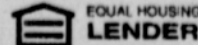
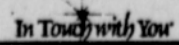
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