

# Glenn E. Thomas Dodge Chrysler Jeep Co. Celebrates 100 Years

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For most Americans, a car is just a means of getting to and fro, but for the Thomas and the Davis families, the automobile has been a livelihood passed down from generation to generation.

This year the Glenn E. Thomas Dodge Chrysler Jeep Company in Signal Hill celebrates its 100th year of selling cars in the Long Beach area. Owner Bob Davis estimates that the company has sold more than 100,000 vehicles in its 100-year history. The year 2009 also marks the dealership's 75th year as a Chrysler franchise.

## The Early Years

The Glenn E. Thomas Company, established in 1909 by Samuel L. Thomas, was originally called the Long Beach Auto Company. The tiny dealership on Pacific Avenue was housed in a 50-by-75-foot building and sold vehicles made by the E-M-F Company and later the Studebaker Corporation.

When Samuel passed away in 1918, his son Glenn E. Thomas took over and renamed the business. The venture continued to thrive under its new ownership, expanding in 1926 to a larger location on the corner of Anaheim Street and Elm Avenue.

The dealership had already lived to tell the tale of WWI, the Great Depression, a magnitude 6.25 earthquake in Long Beach and the Dust Bowl by the time it celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1934. That same year, Glenn E. Thomas decided to enter into a franchise agreement with Chrysler to sell its Dodge line of cars and trucks.

## Thomas Meets Davis

In 1944, Monte Davis, a young Navy fighter pilot home on leave, met Thomas during a duck-hunting trip in Brigham City, Utah. The two men became friends, and when Davis said he hoped to someday leave his small Utah hometown, Thomas kept a job at the dealership waiting for Davis' return from WWII.

"It's a kind of good old American story," Monte's son Bob Davis says. "Those stories aren't as frequent nowadays."

Climbing the ladder from the parts department to sales manager and then to general manager, Monte Davis became the sole owner of the company in 1968. However, the new owner didn't want to change the name.

"We have always kept the dealership's name," Bob Davis says. "Both my dad and myself had a lot of respect for Mr. Thomas and the way he did business. Mr. Thomas had always said that our family was the only one he would allow to put his name on a building."

Bob Davis remembers Thomas as a businessman and "total gentleman" with a passion for cars.

"We gave Mr. Thomas a car to drive every year, and every year he drove it, I would ask, 'How do you like that car, Mr. Thomas?'" Bob Davis says. "And he would always say, 'Bob, that is the finest automobile I have ever driven.' It didn't matter what the car was; he just had a love for a new car."



From left, Brad Davis, John Davis and Bob Davis smile in front of a photograph of, left to right, Lou Gehrig, Glenn E. Thomas and Babe Ruth on a duck-hunting trip taken in 1927.

## Three Generations Of The Davis Family

Bob Davis, 58, has been working in the car business most of his life. As a teenager, he became an old hand at washing cars, stocking parts and doing odd jobs around the dealership. And like his father, Davis worked his way up through the different departments at the Glenn E. Thomas Company until he reached the top.

The veteran salesman says his favorite part of the car business is interacting with customers and employees, but he also enjoys witnessing the way Southern Californians are passionate about vehicles.

"A car is a part of a person's brand – especially in Southern California," Davis says. "One of the biggest thrills – especially when we get a new product out – it is really exciting for us to show people all the features . . . and see a guy's eyes light up."

He notes that many buyers "are just looking



Employees at the Glenn E. Thomas Dodge Chrysler Jeep Company enthusiastically form a human 100 in honor of the dealership's 100th anniversary.

for a good, dependable vehicle," but that some customers are passionate "like a little kid in a candy store" about particular automobiles.

The dealership relocated from Long Beach to its current space in Signal Hill in 1992 – the same year that Bob Davis took over the company. Since then, his sons John Davis and Brad Davis have become the third generation of the Davis family to work for the Glenn E. Thomas Company.

John Davis, now the general manager, has worked full time at the dealership for almost a decade, but the 33-year-old – like his father and his grandfather – started off at the wash rack and worked his way up. And every day John Davis comes to work, he always brings the little selling tips and advice his grandpa gave him over the years.

"I worked with my grandfather for a long time, and at one point I shared an office with him," John Davis says. "He had a lot of good



The photograph above was taken in the early 1920s of Glenn E. Thomas Company workers. Glenn E. Thomas is pictured at the wheel of the car. At right is the showroom of the Glenn E. Thomas Company during a new-model announcement event. (Photographs provided by Glenn E. Thomas Dodge, Chrysler Jeep Company.)

sayings, and a lot of wisdom about the car business and taking care of customers."

He says his grandpa taught him the importance of taking care of the customer and treating the customer with the type of service you

would want to receive. John Davis believes the key to the Glenn E. Thomas Company's success has been the relationship and trust that the company has earned with its customers.

"To this day, we still have generations who

have bought – from the parents, the grandparents, the children and the children's children – who have bought cars from our family," he says.

Brad Davis, 28, has also been a familiar face at the dealership from a young age. He is currently the Internet manager for the company, working to keep the historic Glenn E. Thomas Company up to date with the 21st century.

But even through technological changes and shifts in economic trends, Brad Davis is confident the dealership will be around for Davis generations to come because of the personal, family atmosphere that separates the dealership from its competitors.

"We have been around. And we've been through good times and bad," Brad Davis says. "We will be here for the next 50, 60, 100 years."

With two young boys and a baby girl due in a few months, John Davis says his own children may carry on the family tradition in the auto industry. And Brad Davis' son, who just turned 1 in August, may also grow up to be part of the Glenn E. Thomas history. But both fathers say they will be happy either way – as long as their kids find something that they can enjoy as much as John and Brad Davis enjoy their work at the Glenn E. Thomas Company.

## A History Of Excellence

Since its inception, the Glenn E. Thomas Company has been a staple in the Long Beach community and has been recognized nationally for its excellence in sales and service.

In 1963, the dealership received Chrysler's Award of Excellence based on sales and customer satisfaction scores, and the dealership continued to achieve Chrysler's Award of Excellence consecutively for the next 20 years. In 1984, the dealership was one of five dealerships in Southern California to earn a "Five Star" Award, and the Glenn E. Thomas Company is one of three dealerships in the world to earn this award every year since 1984.

The Glenn E. Thomas Company is the third-largest volume Dodge dealership in California and the oldest established Charger dealer in the country.

The dealership is known locally for its contribution to community service by providing community car washes every weekend to benefit charities, high schools and other community groups. ■