

NADA Academy Graduate Balances Love of the Car Business with Music



TYSONS, Va. (May 3, 2016) – After 46 years of playing the piano and 30 years working in auto retailing, Rick Zuccaro says he’s finally figured out a way to be a musician and work in the car business at the same time.

Zuccaro, vice president of sales for the Carbone Auto Group in Utica, N.Y., was [one of 36 dealership employees](#) from the U.S. and Canada who recently graduated from the National Automobile Dealers Association (NADA) Academy in Tysons, Va. As a parting gift, he surprised his classmates by renting a keyboard and public address system to perform at their graduation ceremony.

“I truly enjoyed my NADA Academy experience, and feel it was extremely beneficial to my career,” he said. “All the instructors were nothing short of phenomenal, and all shared their wealth of knowledge so willingly. My classmates were very talented and incredible people. I will cherish the friendships I made at NADA.”

NADA Academy programs are designed to prepare current and future dealership leaders to excel in their positions and improve the financial results of each dealership department, says Allen Phibbs, director of the NADA Academy.

The yearlong program consists of six intensive weeks of classroom sessions at NADA headquarters, which includes Financial Management, Fixed Operations 1 (Parts), Fixed Operations 2 (Service), Variable Operations 1 (Pre-Owned Vehicles), Variable Operations 2 (New Vehicles), and Business Leadership, followed by hands-on practical experience back at the students’ respective dealerships.

In 1982, Zuccaro graduated from Utica College, a division of Syracuse University, with a bachelor’s degree in accounting, but his dream was to be a professional musician. He worked as a musician for four years after college, and entered the car business in 1986.

He quickly became the top salesperson at Carbone Dodge Jaguar in Yorkville, N.Y., and was promoted to Carbone Honda in Yorkville in 1988. He climbed the ranks as floor manager, lease manager and sales manager, and eventually became the general sales manager.

In 1993, while still plugging away as a musician and working at Carbone Honda, Zuccaro wrote four sales training manuals and became a certified national trainer for Chevrolet’s lease training reimbursement program from 1995 to 1997. He continued his sales training and consulting business in upstate New York through 1999, training more than 11,000 salespeople and sales managers for the automobile business.

In January 2000, Zuccaro moved to Los Angeles, performing there and in Las Vegas to pursue his music career, but because of the high cost of living in California, he returned to auto retailing and was hired by the First Automotive Group in Simi Valley, Calif., as a floor manager. In three months he worked his way up to general sales manager and corporate sales trainer.

“I did convince the owners to put a baby grand piano on the showroom floor, so I could perform for the customers,” he said.

While working as the general sales manager at First Automotive Group, its Honda franchise won four American Honda President’s Awards.

“I finally realized that I really didn’t want to travel extensively as a musician, and that I had truly grown to love the car business, which is not what I had anticipated,” he said. “So that’s when I decided I had become a car guy and a musician.”

In 2001, Zuccaro married Jennifer Carbone, the daughter of second-generation dealer, Don Carbone, and his wife, Edie. He met her at the dealership's Christmas party in Utica in 1988. Their daughters, Danielle and Sienna, were born in Hollywood, Calif., and in 2006 they moved back to Utica, where Jennifer works as a pediatric intensive care cardiologist.

Today, Zuccaro, continues to play the keyboard and sings in a [Billy Joel tribute band](#) putting on concerts. He also donates Yamaha digital pianos to the elementary schools where he performs.

“My goal is to inspire children to challenge themselves by playing an instrument, and enjoy becoming more diverse,” he added.

Later this year, Zuccaro plans to release the song portfolio he's been writing and recording over the years, titled “Songs of a Lifetime.”

For his next performance, the Carbone Auto Group is hosting a fundraising event at the historic Stanley Theater in Utica on July 9, 2016.

“I can't thank the Carbone Auto Group and the NADA Academy enough for encouraging me to reach new heights and making this journey such an amazing one,” he said.

The first Carbone dealership was founded by Joseph Carbone in 1929. Today, the third-generation family-run business owns and operates 21 dealer franchises in New York and Vermont, and is ranked in the top-100 dealership groups in the country.

For more information about the NADA Academy, visit nada.org/academy or call 800.557.6232.