

WHEN THE PEOPLE MAKE *the Place*



THE QUIET LEADERSHIP BEHIND SESI MOTORS' ENDURING LEGACY

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Walk inside the doors, and you'll feel it. Talk to someone who works there, and you'll experience it. Ask someone who purchased a car there, and you'll hear it.

Things are different at Sesi Lincoln, Mazda, and Volvo.

Not louder. Not flashier. Just more deliberate and intentional. Nearly 80 years after opening as one of the original Lincoln-Mercury dealerships—backed by Henry Ford himself—the business has endured in an industry defined by constant change. But longevity isn't really the point. What sets Sesi Motors apart is an old-school commitment to doing things the right way: taking time with people, investing in relationships, and treating service as something personal, not transactional.

It's the kind of difference you don't need explained—you feel it. And once you do, it's hard to imagine trusting your car to anyone else.

That feeling goes back generations.

Current owner Joe Sesi's uncle—also named Joe and often referred to as "Uncle Joe"—immigrated from what was then Mesopotamia to the United States shortly after World War I when he was 16 years old. He began delivering produce through Detroit's Eastern Market, learning business from the ground up before opening his own grocery store, New Center Market, in 1932 at the height of the Great Depression. There, his work ethic and magnetic presence drew people in and led to a lifelong friendship—and eventual business partnership—with Alan Chapel. Through that relationship, Uncle Joe was introduced to Henry Ford, who saw something exceptional not just in the business, but in the man behind it. In postwar America, as demand for cars surged, Ford looked for trusted leaders to carry the brand forward, resulting in Uncle Joe and Chapel being awarded one of the original seven Lincoln-Mercury dealerships, which opened in Ypsilanti in 1946.

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Nearly two decades later, in 1963, Uncle Joe once again paved the way, helping his brother's family come to the United States amid political instability in Iraq. The younger Joe Sesi arrived with his parents and seven siblings; the eighth was born just 10 days after they arrived in the U.S. It was a moment defined by hard work, resilience, and family—one that quietly set the foundation for how the business would continue to grow.

In Ypsilanti, the Sesi family became known not for selling cars, but for how they treated people. The dealership became more than a place to buy a car—it became a gathering place, built on generosity, consistency, and a deep commitment to the community.

Sesi reflects on the lessons passed down from his uncle and his father, describing them as “very simple,” yet foundational to how Sesi Motors has operated for nearly 80 years, making it one of the longest-standing dealerships of its kind. It begins with a strong work ethic—“You’ve got to get up every day and do what you’re supposed to do, and do it well,” he says—paired with a clear understanding of the business itself.

“We sell cars,” Sesi says, “but at the end of the day, we’re in a service business. And service is built on relationships.”

That perspective stands in quiet contrast to an industry often driven by sales volume, inventory turn rates, and constant pressure to move faster. When asked how his approach holds up in that environment, Sesi gives a gentle smile. “Well,” he

says, “we do things a little differently around here.”

For Sesi, buying a car is never a one-and-done transaction. “If it were just a transaction,” he says, “you wouldn’t need dealerships.” Instead, he sees it as a long-term commitment on both sides. Cars are complex machines. “Something is going to go wrong at some point,” he says. What matters most is what happens next.

Those moments—when expectations are tested—are where trust is either reinforced or lost. At Sesi Motors, the results speak for themselves. “We have customers who’ve bought 50, 75, even 100

cars,” Sesi says. “That doesn’t happen without trust.”

But trust, he’s quick to note, isn’t something you ask customers for. It’s something you build from the inside out.

In an industry known for high turnover, where as many as 70 to 80 percent of employees change each year, Sesi Motors looks markedly different. Employees who’ve been with the company for 15, 25, 35-plus years are the norm, not the exception. Sesi traces

that stability back to a simple belief: people aren’t interchangeable. “Employees have families. They have lives,” he says. “You have to honor that.”

That belief has shaped meaningful decisions over time, including the choice to close on Saturdays—an uncommon move in automotive retail. “For years, this was a six-day-a-week business with long hours and no balance,” Sesi says. “That’s one of the reasons turnover is so high.” The shift required conviction, but it paid off: deeper expertise, stronger continuity, and a cohesive

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sales, finance, and service team—one that works in unison and is invested in more than just the next sale.

That cohesion shows up most clearly in the service drive. Customers are greeted by name—and just as often, employees are too. They know one another’s families. They remember details. Over time, those everyday interactions turn into something deeper. Customers bring employees donuts, check in on milestones, and show up for weddings and graduations.

Sesi pauses when he talks about it, almost amused. “That’s when you know you’ve got a great business,” he says—not because everything goes perfectly, but because people care enough to show up for one another.

That kind of connection doesn’t happen by accident. It’s built by employees who stay—who know one another well and feel supported enough to invest in the people they serve. And when something does go wrong—as it inevitably will with a machine—customers aren’t passed between departments or handed off to strangers. They’re met by familiar faces who understand the full picture and feel accountable for the outcome. “When the right people are in the right place, and they support each other,” Sesi says, “that’s when the magic happens.”

That mindset reveals how Sesi defines excellence—not by volume or velocity, but by how the work gets done. Showing up. Following through. Making decisions that hold up over time. It’s an approach that traces back to Uncle Joe, whose ambition was never simply to grow a business, but to build one that could endure for a hundred years. “To do what you do really well, consistently, for that long,” Sesi says, “that’s the mark of excellence.”

That long view extends beyond the dealership. For Sesi, investing in the community isn’t separate from how he leads—it’s part of the same responsibility. Over decades, that commitment has taken many forms, from supporting the arts and education to helping steward long-standing community institutions. “The community makes you successful,” he says. “You have to support it—consistently.” It’s the same principle that guides every part of the business: take responsibility, do the work, and think long-term.

And perhaps that’s what sets Sesi Motors apart—the reason it feels different the moment you walk in. Excellence here isn’t claimed. It’s earned through consistency, relationships, care, and the steady practice of doing things the right way.

Learn more at sesimotors.com.