

40

WOOD
AUTOMOTIVE
GROUP

years

WOODRIDGE



THE AUTOMOTIVE GROUP THAT FAMILY BUILT

BY RENNAY CRAATS

Staff from the Wood Automotive Group, Cavalcade Auto Acceptance and flagship dealership Woodridge Ford Lincoln celebrate 40 years of service.



The original Woodridge Ford Lincoln location on MacLeod Trail South and The new Woodridge Ford Lincoln location in Douglasdale.

Gerry Wood never set out to become one of Alberta’s largest automobile retailers. He planned to arrive in Canada from Scotland, travel the country and then head to Papua New Guinea to visit his brother. He made it as far as Calgary in 1969 before he ran out of money. Gerry sent word of his predicament home and when his message, “No mon, no fun. Your son,” elicited a response of, “Too bad. So sad. Your dad,” Gerry knew he would have to find a way to make his own way in life.

Gerry used his Scottish heritage and experience working at his father’s small Ford dealership near Glasgow to land a job in sales then management at Maclin Ford in Calgary. In 1972, Gerry met the love of his life, Elaine, and they started planning their life together. From the beginning, they formed a powerful partnership, growing their family as they were growing their company.

“Gerry is a man who is driven, and every day is an adventure,” says Elaine Wood.

That drive impelled Gerry to use every dollar he had and then some to purchase a General Motors dealership in Vulcan in 1979 and with Elaine by his side – and a lot of hard work – the dealership was successful.

THE EVOLUTION OF WAG

Southridge Lincoln Mercury of Calgary was struggling, and Ford of Canada knew Gerry was the right man to turn it around. He was offered the business with a long-term building lease and had to come up with 20 per cent of the operating company with the balance paid over four years.

“We begged and borrowed to get our first dealership and we didn’t have a lot of money when we were coming back to Calgary, but we sold a lot of cars along the way,” says Gerry Wood, founder and president of Wood Automotive Group (WAG).

Southridge became Woodridge Ford Lincoln, and in his early years at the helm, Woodridge recorded the highest sales volume of new Mercury and Ford cars in Canada and became Ford’s top leasing dealer in the country. He became the first dealership to offer service on Saturdays and partnered with an import dealership to add Village Honda to his portfolio in 1987. He led fearlessly, pushing beyond expectations while providing incredible personalized service.

When Ford was establishing another dealership in Calgary, Gerry was first in line. After all, he owned the



The new Village Honda location in the Northwest Auto Mall.



1987, Calgary Flames players Mike Vernon, Brett Hull and Tim Hunter join the Sunshine Girls, Sales Manager Joe Chiarizio and Gerry Wood at the opening of the original Village Honda.

leading dealership in town and in 1991 had expanded his brand with the opening of Woodridge's satellite store, Okotoks Ford Lincoln. Ford made the only decision it could.

"We awarded Gerry two stores in Calgary, and it's a very rare situation to give one dealer two stores in the same location. But because of his abilities and success, we did it," says Jim O'Connor, long-time Ford of Canada executive.

With Ford's blessing, Advantage Ford joined the Wood Automotive Group in 1995 followed by Big 4 Motors in 1996, the Driverz Auto preowned showroom in 2015, South Centre Volkswagen in 2021 and Okotoks Volkswagen – the first VW satellite store in Canada – in 2022.

These incredible achievements wouldn't have been possible without the tireless efforts of Elaine. She's been Gerry's right hand for 50 years as they weathered the tough times and celebrated the victories together. She offered input to grow the business while taking care of everything at home and

dedicating herself to a myriad of charitable efforts to raise up the communities around them. It's fitting that the Group bears the Wood name, as every member of the family has poured themselves into making it a success.

Gerry and Elaine's sons, Cailean and Rory, worked their way up the company and are now executive leaders dedicated to continuing WAG's focus on family, community, customer relationships and operational excellence. Their daughter, Megan, is the shining star in administration who keeps her brothers on their toes and a smile on everyone's faces. The Wood children carry their parents' high service standards and customer-first approach in their DNA, which ensures WAG is in great hands. The entire team refuses to rest on its laurels and is committed to measured growth as it charges into the future.

"We're constantly on the hunt for future acquisitions but we have to make sure they fit into what we're about. We're not going to put ourselves in a position that forces us to compromise who we are," says Rory Wood, vice president parts and service, WAG.

Who they are is a family of 650 people who proudly walk through the doors of WAG locations daily. They work with and not for the Wood family, who in turn value their team and do all they can to facilitate their happiness and success. WAG promotes from within whenever possible, investing in and nurturing their staff.

"The WAG staff is the WAG family because we all work together as a team. We are 'Gerry' and 'Elaine,' not Mr. and Mrs.," says Elaine. She says it's the details that make the difference, and "when we go the extra mile, there's never a traffic jam."



The Plan – Woodridge's ground-breaking 2-year lease program was tops in all of Canada.



September 2009 - Calgary Flames President Ken King and Calgary Flames General Manager Darryl Sutter present the official Calgary White Hat to Ford of Canada President David Mondragon at the grand opening of the Woodridge Ford Lincoln new location in Douglasdale.

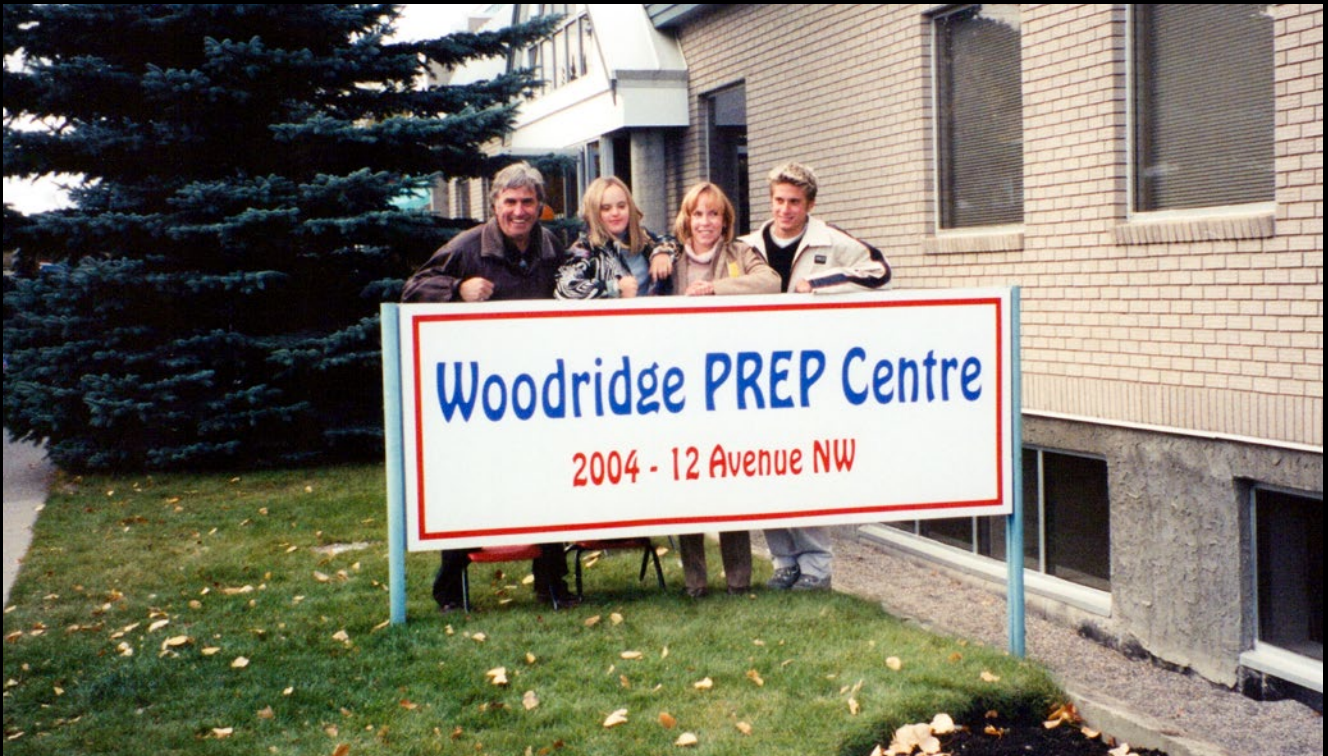
While their product is automobiles, the company is built on relationships, and whether that's with manufacturers, customers or between colleagues, these relationships are strong and enduring. The WAG family shares in life's celebrations and challenges, and the culture of inclusion, respect and family permeates from the top down making WAG an exceptional organization to be part of. This is evidenced by the fact that not only does WAG have customers dating back decades, but the Group also has many 20-, 25- and 30-year employees who have spent their entire careers working for the company.

These employees helped build the company's all-encompassing services with the All Makes Collision Centre, Woodridge Ford Fleet, Wood Auto Rentals, the used car Megalot, Cavalcade Auto Acceptance, and seven independent dealerships. The Group has renovated or built new facilities for a number of dealerships to better serve customers, and, after the success of South Centre Volkswagen, VW recently awarded WAG with Calgary's newest Volkswagen location. This unique dealership will join Big 4 Motors as anchor tenants at Taza Park on the Tsuut'ina Nation in 2024.



October 1995, Calgary Mayor Al Duerr, Ford of Canada President Mark Hutchins, Gerry's father James Wood, General Manager Dick Lau and Gerry Wood cut the ribbon to open Advantage Ford.

The car industry is always evolving and with the growth of electric vehicles, automation and technological advancements, Wood Automotive Group remains on the cutting edge. Gerry has always been a student of the business and a visionary for the industry, bringing innovation and out-of-the-box thinking to customers for their benefit.



2003, Gerry, Elaine, Megan and Cailean Wood unveil the new Woodridge PREP Centre sign.

“Gerry is a forward thinker in the business, and he garners such respect, both from his local community and within corporate organizations like Ford. His opinion was always sought out, whether it was in building business strategy or discussions that needed to be had with government,” says Gerald Wood, president of the Motor Dealers Association of Alberta and long-time Prairie Region Manager for Ford of Canada.

That respect landed Gerry and his executive team on various boards and committees over the years including the National Dealer Council and the Canadian Automobile Dealers Association. WAG is also a long-time supporter of the automotive business administration, marketing and trades programs in Alberta’s postsecondary institutes as well as automotive training programs in high schools to keep funnelling great people into the industry.

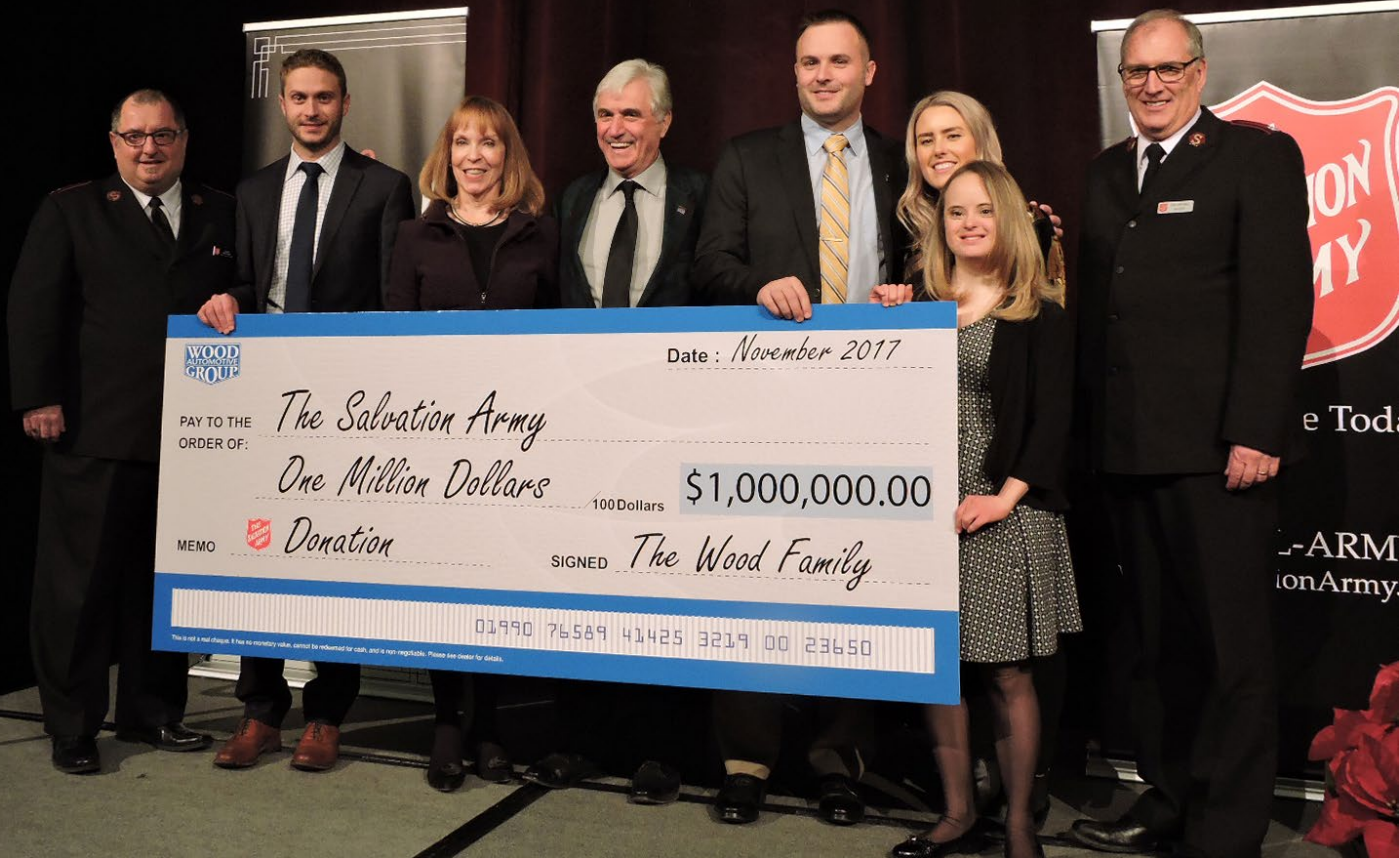
Gerry’s leadership and hard work led to him receiving countless excellence awards and honours, most notably being given Ford of Canada’s Top President’s Award 15 times over the years, being inducted into the prestigious Calgary Business Hall of Fame in 2017 and being appointed a Member of the Order of Canada in 2018 for his incredible philanthropic contributions.



Ford of Canada President Jim O’Connor was Gerry’s special guest at the Woodridge Charity Golf Tournament.



The Wood family (back row L-R) Cailean Wood, Amy Wood, Gerry Wood, Elaine Wood, Rory Wood and (front row) Megan Wood



The Wood Family has donated almost \$1.5 million dollars for The Salvation Army Community Resource Centre in the SE community of Forest Lawn.

WAG GIVES BACK

Philanthropy has been an important element of the Wood family's success. Coming from humble beginnings himself, Gerry honours those who helped him by paying it forward.

"The community has done so much for us as a family and we feel it's very important and our duty to give back to the community," says Cailean Wood, vice president sales and marketing, WAG.

Gerry's father was the only car dealer who would customize vehicles with hand controls or foot steering for people with disabilities, so Gerry was exposed to helping others early on. He believes "you have to give to get" and he has put that adage into practice.

The family's impact is felt through their support of hundreds of local charities, from sponsoring amateur sports teams to donating to major charities to stocking food bank shelves. One of Gerry's favourite partnerships is with Kidsport; people drop gently used sporting equipment at dealerships and, to date, they have distributed 12,000 pieces of equipment to keep kids on the court, floor, field or ice.

Over the years, WAG has donated more than \$15 million to various organizations and continues to give both time and resources to help those in need.

"We don't advertise it a lot. We care about people, and we are in the community to be of service," says Elaine.

They've always helped others but having their daughter, Megan, grounded the couple and changed how they approached their business while reinforcing the need to give back. When Megan was born there weren't many resources for children with Down syndrome and their families. Elaine and Gerry discovered The PREP Program, an organization that provides educational and therapeutic support to empower children with Down syndrome to be active members of the community. It opened new doors for Megan.

The Woodridge Charity Golf Tournament became a successful fundraiser that ran from 1985 to 2015. Proceeds went to establish the Woodridge PREP Centre, where hundreds of children and their families find valuable resources and workshops that help Down syndrome children build critical life skills. As Megan has grown up, graduated from PREP and then college and become a valued part of WAG, she has also become a role model for children with Down



The WAG dealerships are official drop off locations for the Calgary Flames Sports Bank and KidSport Calgary, delivering more than 12,000 gently used items – so all kids can play.

syndrome along with an inspiration to everyone in the company.

The family has also left their mark on the Salvation Army, with Gerry serving on its Advisory Board since 2007 and supporting the organization’s campaigns. Better still, his involvement with events like the Christmas Kettle campaign influences other sponsors to participate, bringing in even more funds.

“We are honoured and proud to have Gerry Wood and the Wood Automotive Group as long-time supporters of ours,” says Lt. Colonel Brian Venables, Salvation Army acting commander, Alberta and Northern Territories division. “Without the Woods, it would be tougher to raise money. We are indebted to them.”

The family is happy to help. When they heard that the Salvation Army was hoping to bring multiple missions under one roof, they jumped into action. With friend Dick Van Grieken of Telsec Property Corporation, they purchased a former Target location in Forest Lawn that the Salvation Army could repurpose as a community resource centre offering literacy and English as a second language programs, counselling, food distribution and a youth centre. With the Wood family’s help, the Salvation Army has the space to grow its programs to better help the community.

“Our parents have always taught us to look out for people who may need some help and I’m very proud of how we step up to support the community to make Calgary a better place to live,” says Megan Wood.



The Woodridge Charity Golf Tournament raised millions of dollars for the Woodridge PREP Centre, a school and resource centre for Down syndrome students and their families.



July 2022 Cutting the ribbon to officially open Okotoks Volkswagen, the newest member of the Wood Automotive Group.



Big 4 Motors, the first Chrysler Dodge Jeep and Ram dealership in Canada build entirely on Indigenous land is set to open in Taza Park on the Tsuut'ina Nation.

THE NEXT CHAPTER OF WAG

There are few dealers in Canada who have had the kind of industry and community impact that the Woods and the staff at WAG have had. Over the past 40 years, the Group has grown and evolved bringing Calgary drivers the gamut of car brands and models backed by WAG's brand of superior service.

Even though Gerry Wood has stepped back from operations, it will be business as usual for clients and staff; his children and their exceptional team are ready to take the Group to the next level. Using their parent's example of hard work and a commitment to people and community, Cailean, Rory and Megan, and the generations that come after them, are just getting started. The future is very bright for the Wood Automotive Group and the legacy of care for others lives on.



Powered by Wood Automotive Group

Wood Automotive Group

- Woodridge Ford Lincoln • Advantage Ford • Okotoks Ford Lincoln • Village Honda
- Big 4 Motors (Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram) • South Centre Volkswagen • Okotoks Volkswagen • Driverz Auto
- Cavalcade Auto Acceptance • All Makes Collision Repair Centre • Wood Auto Rentals

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