

2025 Automotive News 100 Leading Women



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Judith Schumacher-Tilton

Owner and Dealer Principal

Schumacher Chevrolet Auto Group

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Company location: Little Falls, N.J.

Age: 78

What drew you to the auto industry?

The death of my father. It was a family business that I had to keep going. After my father passed, my brother was the dealer principal of our family dealership. Four days after our father died, my brother found out he had terminal cancer. I told him that I would do the best I could do to keep our business going. And I did.

What was your first automotive job?

In 1998, taking over after losing my Dad and my brother's diagnosis.

What was your big break?

When I took over the business, I did not have any automotive experience. My big break was that General Motors stood by me and enabled me to stay on and become a Chevrolet dealer.



Automotive News 100 Leading Women: Judith Schumacher-Tilton

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What is the most significant challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it?

When I first took over the business, it was not really producing what it should have been monetarily. I was trying to grow the business and bring it back to where it

was. My dad had been sick, and obviously my brother was sick but didn't realize it, so it was a challenge to learn the car business and keep it.

You've been in the industry 27 years. What has been the most surprising change you've seen?

Technology, within the last six years, has evolved incredibly and, in a lot of instances, made the business easier. Paperwork is easier for the customer; shopping, being able to have online visibility for your vehicles.

Tell us about a lesson you've learned in your career.

Never give up.

What work achievement are you most proud of?

Growing the business in sometimes tougher environments. The greatest achievement is that I have a fabulous workforce. I have over 300 people. It's the people that work for you that make your business. And that, to me, would be my biggest achievement, that I've been able to hold on to really great people.

What's the most important risk you took?

Taking on the dealership in 1998.

What do you struggle with?

I can't really say I struggle with anything. I've learned to adapt, and that the choices you make in life bring you what you have. And so I've really learned to make better choices, because I don't want to struggle.

How do you avoid burnout?

I play a lot of golf.

What is your leadership philosophy?

I want to lead with respect. I feel that if I walk the talk, then my employees will respect me. And I also have a totally open-door policy: If there is an issue, I'm not above, ever, anyone coming to talk to me.

Who or what motivates you?

The love of the car industry. I love what I do.

How do you motivate people to go the extra mile?

I believe that passion and loving what you do in life motivates people. And I try and keep a culture that wants people to come to work and wants everyone to sell cars, and I really do believe that when the customer comes into the dealership, they feel that. They don't feel awkward; they feel a good culture.

What should be done to encourage women to enter the auto industry?

More positive interviews. I believe it's an industry many women didn't realize they could access. So I think that comes through marketing, that comes through articles, through events like this. It's very important.

What's the best advice you've ever received?

Never, never look back, because you're not going that way. Look forward.

What's the best part of your day?

When I come to work and I see all my employees, and I have two sons that work with me, and I see them every day of my life, and now my grandson, so that's the best part of my day.

Tell us about your family.

It's wonderful. I'm blessed. I have three children. I have six grandchildren, one of which, my oldest, is now in the business with me, and has the same drive and

passion that both my sons do.

What's your favorite weekend activity?

Golf!

What one thing makes you most proud?

I came into an industry knowing nothing about it, and it was sort of thrown at me. I embraced it, and I grew it into an auto group where we have six dealerships in northern New Jersey, and very successful. I'm very proud of that.

— *Julie Walker*

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