

Everything is BIG By David Ross About Escondido's New Lexus Dealership

Most people first find out about the Lexus Escondido Center when they see its giant 1,296 square foot, high-resolution TV screen from the I-15.

The screen, located 450 feet from the freeway, cannot be used for “advertising” and will feature the works of local artists, seascapes, landscapes and historic landmarks from around the world, but it will draw attention to the Escondido Auto Park.

But just about everything is BIG at the “super luxury” Lexus Escondido auto dealership that opened at 1205 Auto Park Way in December. At 330,000 square feet, it is easily the biggest car dealership in San Diego County and may be one of the biggest in the country, although similar ones have opened in Florida and Orange County.

According to General Sales Manager, Marc Bechard, the dealership is a longtime dream of owner Judy Jones-Cone of Fairbanks Ranch.

“We’ve been building for two years, and we actually started on the project seven years ago,” says Bechard.

Mrs. Jones-Cone, who also owns the Toyota Carlsbad and Lexus Carlsbad automotive family, commissioned a study to find an area that didn’t have a Lexus dealership and determined that Escondido was the ideal location.

“We are a mom and pop business,” says Bechard, who notes that the owner likes to stay “under the radar,” except for a few causes, such as a non-profit foundation dedicated to children. You’ll find references to that foundation throughout the center: a fountain with statues of children that greets visitors when they walk into the huge glass-encased lobby, and large screens throughout

the dealership featuring scenes of children.

Water is a dominant theme in the center, which also has a large mirror pool out front that reflects the building and surrounding palm trees. Water comes from a well that was drilled under the pre-owned automobile lot. Well water is also used to wash the cars and on landscaping.

Building the dealership, which cost about \$30 million, might seem counterintuitive in the current economic climate where several area dealerships have closed, but Bechard believes the figures show that it is in just such an economy that a car like the Lexus is a good value.

“We’ve been blessed with a great name and a good product,” he observes.

The dealership has about 60 employees and 155 cars. But with three levels, including a parking lot on the roof, the dealership can easily store and display as many as 800 cars.

“The Lexus is without doubt a ‘high-end’ vehicle in the same league as BMW and Mercedes Benz. Our average customer is a repeat customer,” says Bechard. “People buy them for their reliability and durability, but quality and luxury are the most popular motive.”

The most popular models are the RX-350, a sport utility vehicle, and the EX-350, a mid-size luxury sedan.

“A lot of people who buy a Lexus do their own research and find out what a good value it is,” says Bechard. “That is even more true when you consider that today you can pay thirty thousand dollars for a new car that isn’t even a luxury car.” The average pre-owned

luxury



Photos courtesy of Lexus Escondido

car will cost you \$27,000.

The dealership didn’t have a grand opening in December. That will probably happen when the planned upscale restaurant with a capacity for 150 diners opens on the third level. A flower shop and more retail boutiques are also coming.

On the entry level near the entrance is the Cyber Café on 9th, operated by Damon & Barbara Parker of Escondido Joe’s Café. There is also a complimentary WiFi business center, a golf simulator and a kid’s recreation area—even a small library with massage chairs.

The west outdoor area on level three is an outdoor event area with outdoor fire pits, tables and a capacity of over 300 guests. This space is available for private and public parties, weddings, concerts and other events. The East-outdoor area is a more intimate setting for up to 150 guests with the ability to showcase movies or live concerts.

Because, you see, the development isn’t just a car dealership, it’s a business center. The Lexus Escondido dealership is inside the Lexus Center and uses about two thirds of the space, including the entire second floor. But it also has about 50,000 sq. ft. that can be used for other retail and office space.

“People have no idea how many operations meetings and design meetings we had over the years to make sure this was absolute-

ly perfect,” recalls Bechard. “I went to meetings about meetings! Until you actually do a project this big, you don’t know how much is involved. Getting it perfect was one of the reasons why it took so long to actually get built. Every ‘i’ was dotted, every ‘t’ was crossed.”

The center is a “green facility,” that uses low output bulbs, timed lighters and is oriented to maximize sunlight, and it was built using recycled steel and concrete. The exterior glass coating cuts down on energy transfers.

“That’s another reason we built it so large, to ensure a controlled environment,” says Bechard.

For those interested in renting conference space in the center, contact Peggy Kelcher at 760-496-2931.

Operating hours for Lexus Escondido sales are Monday through Friday 8 a.m.–9 p.m. Saturday sales hours are from 8 a.m.–6 p.m. Sunday sales hours are from 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Lexus Escondido service hours are Monday through Friday from 7 a.m.–6 p.m.

