

Friday Feature

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A Closet for Classics

Retired attorney runs The Woodward Warehouse for classic car enthusiasts

BY SHEILA PURSLOWE
Legal News

Thousands of people who will enjoy collector and specialty vehicles in Saturday's Woodward Dream Cruise might wonder — where do these beauties go to rest between outings?

For many it's at The Woodward Warehouse, a modern, state-of-the-art classic car storage facility and clubhouse at 4260 Edgeland in Royal Oak, near the hub of the August 15 Dream Cruise.

The Woodward Warehouse — the only one of its kind in Michigan — was the brainchild of Troy resident Joe Polito, who founded the facility three years ago after retiring from a 35-year career as an environmental attorney and partner at Honigman Miller in Detroit.

An avid collector of cars since the age of 16, the Detroit native — a graduate of Wayne State University and the University of Michigan Law School — was storing his 11 classic cars at his home, cottage, and with several family members until his wife Blenda urged him to store them in one place.

Polito — who still owns a 63 Corvette Stingray Roadster that was a high school graduation gift from his father — currently owns 19 classic vehicles, including a 1931 Cadillac 355A; 1950 Ford; 1954, two 1963 (Coupe and Roadster), 1977, 1985 and 2003 Chevrolet Corvettes; 1955 Ford F-100; 1964 Ford Galaxy 500; 1966 Olds Toronado; 1968 Dodge Charger; 1981 Chrysler Imperial; two 1981 and a 1982 DeLorean DMC-12; 2006 Cadillac XLR; 2006 Pontiac Solstice; and a 1953 Chevy, his very first wheels at the age of 16.

"During the last two years, I've made a concerted effort to re-acquire all the cool cars I had when I was young," he says. "I think I'm done for a while!"

Polito sank \$500,000 into his dream of The Woodward Warehouse, turning a vacant and abandoned building into a haven for car buffs. He visited five similar facilities around the U.S. for inspiration, and added his own unique touches.

The 14,000-square-foot, climate-controlled storage facility, decorated with automobile art,

framed automotive posters, and other auto-related memorabilia, operates along the lines of a yacht or country club. Members pay a monthly rate to store their cars, motorcycles, and trucks, and a separate membership fee. The garage can house around 65 vehicles at full capacity.

Vehicles stored in the Warehouse include a burgundy 1950 Ford Custom Coronado; a Kermit green 1971 Porsche; a Daytona Blue 1963 Chevrolet Corvete Fuelie Stingray split window coupe; a burgundy 1966 Olds Toronado; a blue 1958 Buick Skylark convertible; and numerous other classics, including Polito's recent favorite, a 1931 Cadillac Towne Sedan — "that looks like it just rolled off the assembly line at the old Cadillac Fort Street plant," he says.

The facility previously stored the 1952 Triumph motorcycle ridden by actor Henry Winkler who played Arthur Fonzarelli (aka "Fonzie" or "the Fonzie") in the "Happy Days" TV series. The "Fonzie" bike, owned by a friend of Polito's, is currently on display at the Gilmore Museum in Hickory Corners north of Battle Creek.

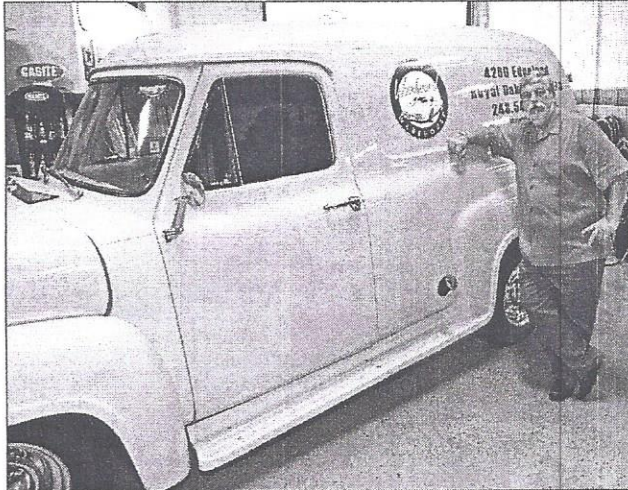
"It's a not-too-well known, but fantastic car museum which is definitely worth a visit," Polito says. "We're hoping the Fonzie's bike will return one day to The Woodward Warehouse."

Members enjoy the 24/7 privileges of a private lounge, outdoor patio, conference room, car hoists and tools, an auto detailing area, cigar room, a shower, game room with a pool table and pinball machines, seven flat screen TVs, kitchen and laundry room, as well as car brokerage and concierge services and surveillance cameras that enable members to keep an eye on their "babies" remotely.

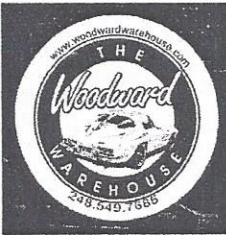
"We also have an upright piano in our cigar room that's available for members to play and enjoy," Polito says. "I play it a lot too!"

There is also a "social membership" for car lovers who don't have vehicles to store; and a membership level for those who just want storage and not have clubhouse privileges. Memberships help cover operating costs.

"The Woodward Warehouse provides a unique haven for car enthusiasts," Polito explains. "Our members can enjoy their vehicles all year round, be confident they are being well kept and main-



MLaw alumnus Joe Polito founded The Woodward Warehouse classic car storage facility and clubhouse in Royal Oak after retiring from a 35-year career as an environmental attorney and partner at Honigman Miller.



tained at all times — including during our harsh Detroit winters — have easy access to their cars when they want to take them out for a spin, and enjoy the many amenities our club offers, including enjoying the camaraderie of other car enthusiasts.

Some of those enthusiasts started cruising Woodward Avenue in the early '50s, including one of Polito's best friends, George DeLorean, younger brother of John DeLorean, the genius behind the DMC gull wing stainless steel car of the early 1980s that sports his name.

"These guys know everything there is to know about cars and what people were doing cruising Woodward and racing on the local drag strips back in the day," Polito says. "They usually are at The Woodward Warehouse for 'Cars and Coffee' on Saturdays to reminisce about the good old days on Woodward Avenue."

About 40 percent of the vehicles housed at

The Woodward Warehouse will head out for the Dream Cruise, notes Polito, who plans on doing a lot of driving during Dream Cruise Week.

"I will likely be driving a black 1968 Dodge Charger and a 1966 Burgundy Olds Toronado," he says.

In addition, a long-time member, Pilot Transport (a division of United Haulers) will host a private Dream Cruise party at The Woodward Warehouse on Saturday for about 350 people.

"The Dream Cruise, originally intended as a Saturday only event — it's the largest car show in the entire world," Polito says. "Last time I checked, attendance is estimated to be slightly in excess of one million people, with about 40,000 plus classic cars, with many people attending from out of state."

The Dream Cruise, while still officially only on Saturday, now extends throughout the prece-

eding week, with the police usually having to shut down Woodward Avenue at about 9 p.m. on the preceding weeknights because of the traffic, he notes.

"In fact, many people start congregating on Woodward Avenue and driving the famed street in June to enjoy the summer weather and the classic cars," he adds. "Nowhere else in the world can you see so many and varied classic gems at one time!"

The Woodward Warehouse is available for tours by appointment during the week and open to the public during "Cars and Coffee," 10 a.m. to noon, every Saturday from May to October. The car haven also hosts tech talks and restoration lectures, presentations, charity events and educational seminars, and is available for private events.

For more information, visit www.woodward-warehouse.com or call (248) 549-7688.



The Woodward Warehouse can house up to 65 vehicles, and is decorated with automobile art, framed automotive posters, and other auto-related memorabilia.

Photos by John Melu



The Woodward Warehouse is a 14,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art climate-controlled storage facility for classic cars, as well as a private clubhouse.



Club members can relax in the private lounge.



The clubhouse includes a game room with a pool table and pinball machines.