



BRIAN HENNIKER



WOODWARD WAREHOUSE

Yacht club for car people, without the funny jackets

BY PHIL BERG

■ YOU'VE NOTICED THE trend: Man caves called "car condos" have sprung up all around the country in various guises—from utilitarian workshops to decorator meccas.

Naturally, Detroit is growing its own.

This summer, the Woodward Warehouse opened in the suburb of Royal Oak, and, as of August's Woodward Dream Cruise, it housed the collections of 13 car nuts, as well as that of owner Joe Polito. A retired attorney, Polito has built a tall, clean garage for more than 50 cars, outfitting the former warehouse with accoutrements of a comfy lifestyle, paying for it all himself. He's accepting memberships to his vision of a car-club lifestyle but not scrambling to pay the rent.

"Build it, and they will come," Polito says, echoing a similar quote from the movie

Field of Dreams. His first car was a 1963 Corvette roadster, a high school graduation gift from his father in 1968. Today, he has 11 cars, including three DeLoreans, which he's kept in various storage places. "I've been collecting cars since I was 16. It's hard to enjoy your cars when they're scattered all over God's green earth."

The car-condo idea is not new: "A former GM executive friend of mine told me, '25 years ago, we were thinking of doing this,' but the idea never materialized; nobody could raise the money for a building," recalls Polito. These days, it's easier getting an empty building here, so he bought one a mile or so east of famed Woodward Avenue. "We deconstructed the offices inside to make room for the bays, and we put on a new roof. I went to five different . . . places around the country first to see how they do it."

The Woodward Warehouse features a lounge, kitchen, pool-table room, locker room,



ULTIMATEGARAGES.COM (3)

Above: Largest of three car-parking areas. Middle: Members' cars are parked in 50 bays in main garage. Top: Polito is restoring one of his DeLoreans; a banquet was set up during the Dream Cruise.

conference room for members' business meetings, reception area with a secretary, outdoor patio with grills and cigar room—all open 24/7. In addition, a former BMW salesman set up a classic-car broker service in the building. "When I retired . . . my wife said to get a building," Polito explains. "It keeps me busy. . . I've been working 12 hours a day to get this place going." Most of the work was done by Polito's friends, including painters, contractors and even his barber, who moonlights installing garage floors. There are also two detailers on staff

to keep members' cars clean.

Polito was right about "Build it, and they will come." After a few opening-day local news stories, businesses have been moving to partner with the club, including a restoration business, as well as artists who want to display car art on consignment. Polito's vision varies from similar ventures. He explains: "The difference is . . . we will sell social memberships, too. My idea is for everyone to hang out—it doesn't matter if they're doctors or linemen, they're all comfortable talking about cars." 🍷