

What's in a name? Say Rockenbach and you're talking Grayslake

By Diana Kuyper, News-Sun, Jul. 8, 1986.

Anyone who knows anything about Grayslake, knows the name Rockenbach.

For 60 years, members of that family have been contributing in a myriad of ways to the village.

"I guess our family has been involved in just about everything at one time or another," said Doug Rockenbach, owner of Rockenbach Chevrolet on Route 120 in Grayslake.

Although there has never been a Rockenbach mayor, members of the family have been village trustees and one, Jim Rockenbach, is the current fire chief. There was a Rockenbach Hardware Store and there continues to be Rockenbach Real Estate and Rockenbach Plumbing. Every civic organization has had a Rockenbach as a member at one time or another.

It all began in 1926 when Doug's father, Bob, started the Chevrolet dealership on Route 120. "Our family came originally from Prairie View, and then the family moved to Crystal Lake," Doug explained. "My father was one of 14 children, and when he moved to Grayslake in 1926, it seemed logical that some of his brothers would follow, since he was the oldest boy."

Brothers George and Jim worked for Bob and another brother, Ray, later moved to Grayslake and owned a hardware store. "Rockenbachs moved here, started families and just became involved naturally," Doug said.

After Doug's dad started the car dealership, he expanded with a bus and trucking service. One of his jobs was to plow the Grayslake streets. On one of those plow jobs, he got into an accident with a front-end loader and was killed.

"It was 1944 and I was in the Army," Doug recalled. "After I was discharged, my mother, who is 86 now and lives in California, sold the car business to me and my two uncles, Jim and George."

Jim and Doug bought out George in 1957, and George formed Rockenbach Real Estate. In poor health for several years, George died last year.

Doug then bought out Jim in 1974. Jim is still the village's fire chief, a position he has held for 32 years.

Other Rockenbachs continue to be involved in the car business, however. "My brother Bob works for me in the parts department and my son Gregg manages a car wash on Route 83 I recently opened," Doug said.

Doug who has been active in the American Legion and is past president of the Lake County Easter Seals Society, now devotes himself primarily to his car business.

Gearing up for a 60th anniversary celebration later this year, the present showroom is undergoing a \$250,000 expansion. "We've probably

tripled in size since 1926," Doug Said.

"In 1926, my dad sold 25 cars," he continued. "Now, we sell about 1,600 new and used cars a year and have 65 employees."

As Rockenbach Chevrolet has expanded, there's never been a serious thought given to moving out of Grayslake.

"Some of the dealerships closer to Chicago do a lot more business than we do, but this is a good and affluent area to be in, too, and Grayslake is my home," Doug said. "I've lived here since 1926."

Doug added that in the customer satisfaction survey that Chevrolet conducts, Rockenbach's rating is one of the highest in the Chicago area. "That means more to us than rating highest in sales volume," he said.

Not content to just run his business (in true Rockenbach style), Doug is past president of the Chicago and Northwestern Indiana Chevrolet Dealers Association, and is on its board. He is also on the executive board of the Illinois New Car and Truck Dealers Association. He helped start the apprentice mechanics vocational training program in Lake County, as well.

Although car sales are good right now, it wasn't always that way, according to Doug. "When times were tough," he said, "we started some sales incentive programs that Chevrolet adopted nationwide."

Doug Rockenbach has been married to his wife, Bonnie, for 39 years and the couple has three children. Gregg, 36, lives in Grayslake; Gail, 34, in Lake Zurich, and Gary, 32, in San Francisco.

Although many Rockenbach children have left Grayslake, "I for one plan to stay here forever," Doug said. "We'll do bigger and better things, just like the village. We've grown with Grayslake. I think the Rockenbach name will be associated with Grayslake for a lot more years to come."