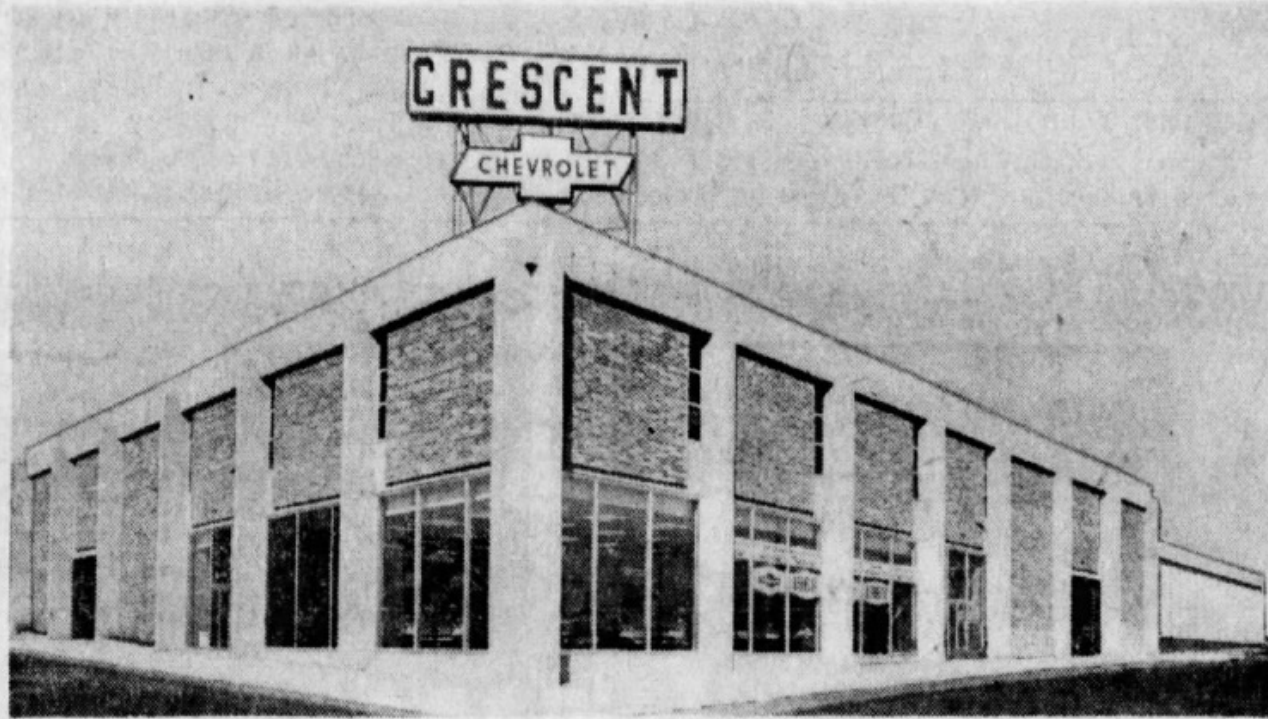


Des Moines Sunday Register **COMMERCE**



Dec. 8, 1968



Crescent to New Home

City of
Des Moines
Landmark
Nomination:
*Crescent
Chevrolet
Rooftop Sign*

555 Seventeenth Street
Des Moines, Iowa

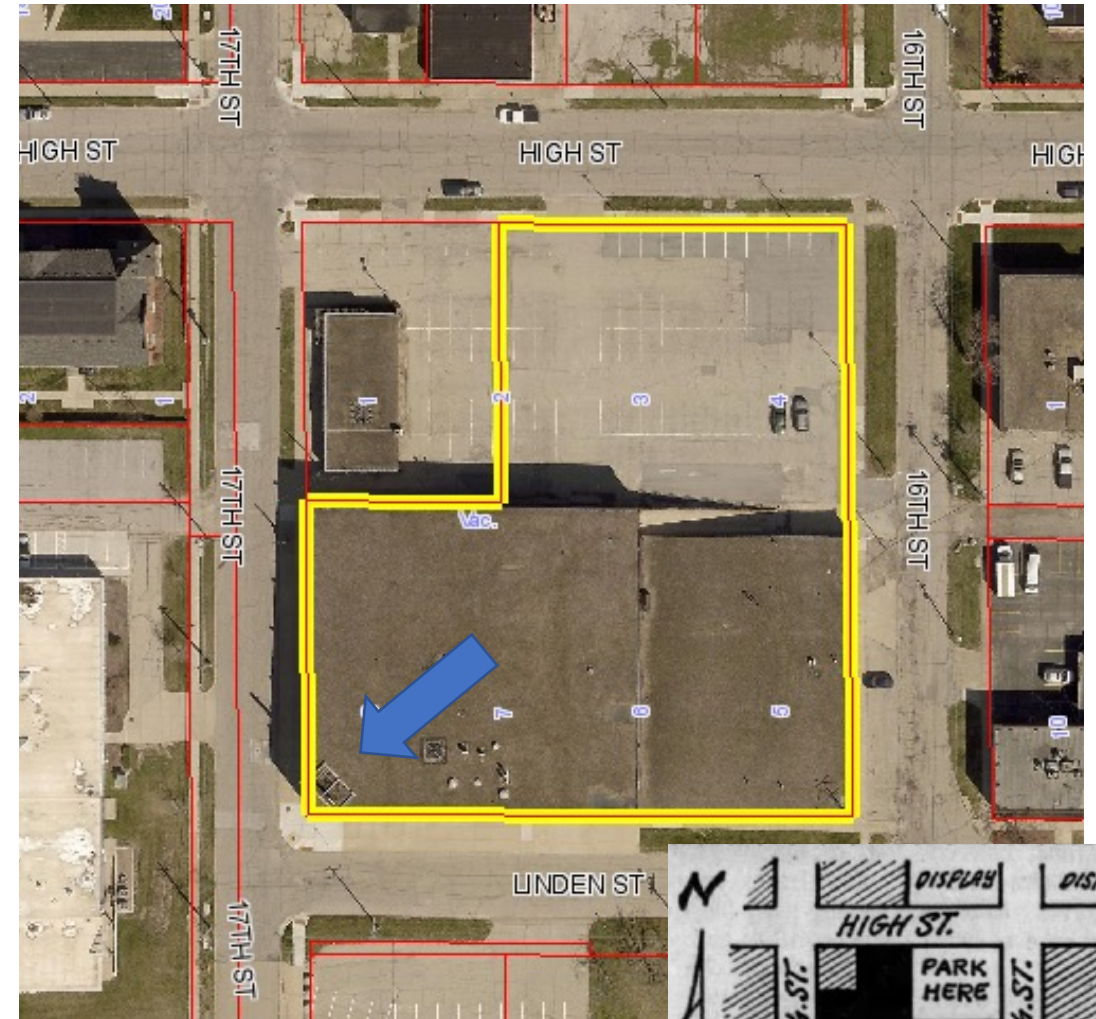
Crescent Chevrolet Sign: Rooftop Renaissance

- Completed in 1968, this locally rare-surviving rooftop sign was an on-premise sign for the new Crescent Chevrolet auto dealership within downtown Des Moines' "auto row."
- Developed atop the last 2-story auto dealership to be built downtown, the Crescent sign remained a beacon from 1968 through 2007. It is ready to shine again as the building is given new life.

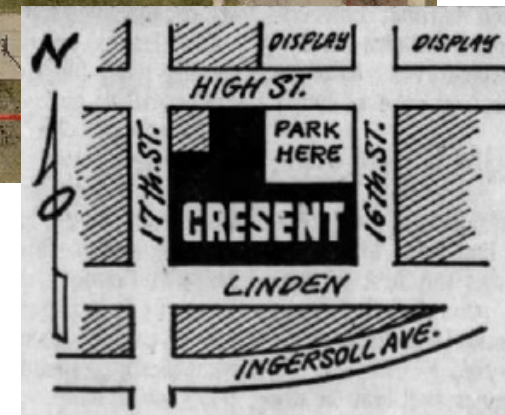


Crescent Sign Location

- The Crescent sign is located on the rooftop of the former Crescent Chevrolet auto dealership, located between 16th and 17th streets at Linden Street, just off Ingersoll Avenue.
- The two-story former auto dealership building has a flat roof, and the sign is mounted at the southwest corner at an angle.
- The Crescent sign is representative of postwar internally lit acrylic panel sign technology, which replaced neon signs.



1968 ad and 2021 Polk County Assessor map



Crescent Sign Overview

- The single-faced projecting rooftop sign features metal-framed internally illuminated plastic-faced sign cabinets with adhered plastic dimensional letters centered and cemented to the white translucent acrylic sign faces.
- The word “CRESCENT” dominates due to its location at the top of the sign, letter size, visual weight of the font, and bright red letter color.



View from street looking up and northeast

Crescent Sign Elements

- The sign is headlined by the word “CRESCENT” spelled out in eight large capital red letters mounted horizontally within a red-painted rectangular metal frame.
- The secondary element is the lower slanted bowtie-shaped lighted sign cabinet framed in blue-painted metal; “CHEVROLET” is spelled out in smaller blue letters (faded, broken letter E).



Crescent Sign Elements

- The use of red, white, and blue colors within the sign patriotically advertised the American-made automobiles manufactured by the Chevrolet Division of General Motors Company.
- Red paint (failing) outlines the “CRESCENT” letter boxes; blue paint (faded) outlines the “CHEVROLET” bowtie logo shape.



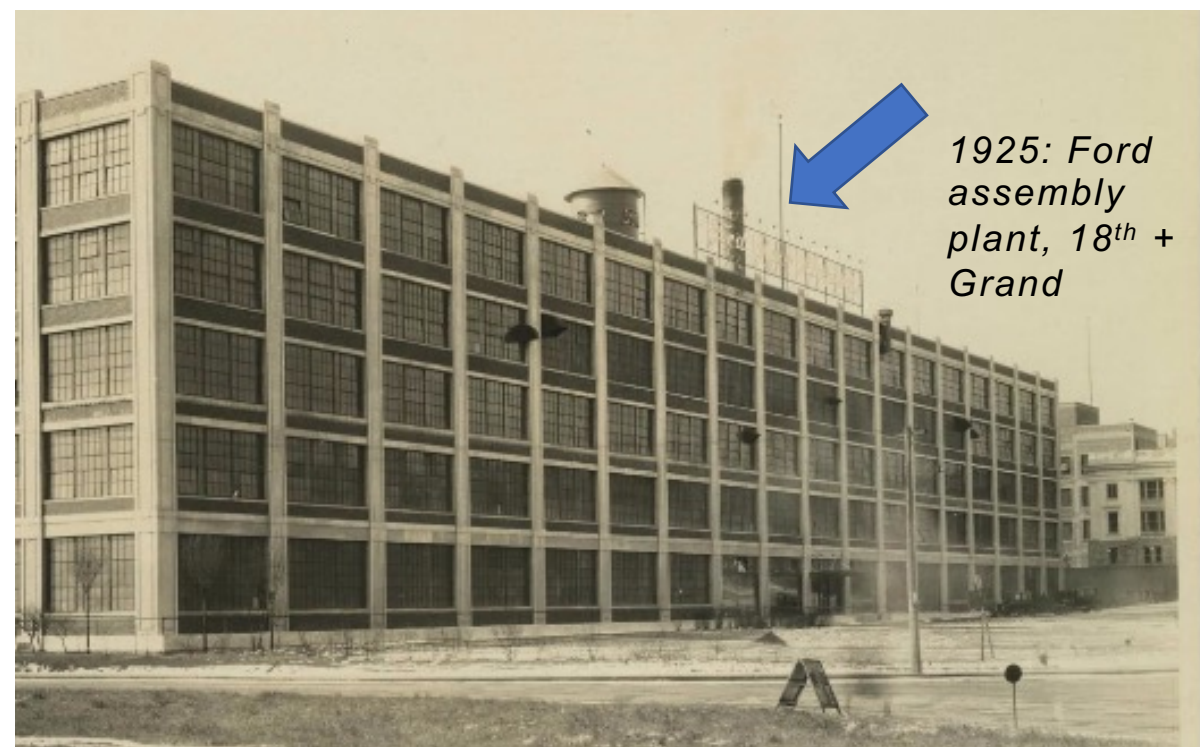
Crescent Sign Elements

All of the metal-framed light cabinets are affixed to steel scaffolding, with metal conduit providing power connection for the interior fluorescent lighting. Rust is present.



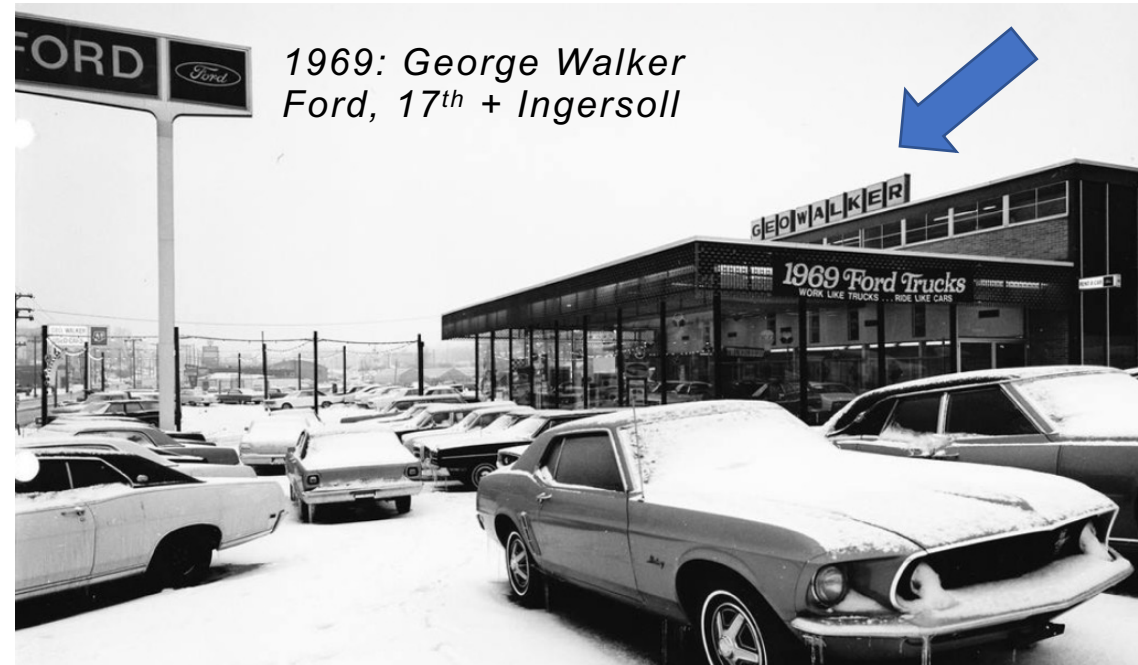
Historical Background: DSM CBD Rooftop Signs

- The 20th century required eye-catching commercial signage due to faster-paced auto traffic (as compared to horse-driven and foot traffic).
- Early on, electric signs were celebrated in Des Moines for showcasing businesses in a “new light.” Neon signs added artistic glow. But internally lit signs prevailed: The break-resistant lightweight translucent plastic panels produced a softer, diffused light that was easier to read from behind a windshield.



Historical Background: DSM CBD Rooftop Signs

- The Crescent sign is a locally rare-surviving rooftop sign in the central business district, which once boasted a plethora of rooftop signs advertising automobiles, hotels, insurance, and gasoline, to name but a few.
- Within the CBD, the downtown auto row area featured a number of buildings with rooftop signs, including the Ford auto plant, various auto dealerships, and the Meadow Gold plant.



Historical Background: DSM CBD Rooftop Signs

- Tastes changed, and in 1969 the city enacted an ordinance to control “sign and billboard clutter.” The regulation limited new signs and phased out non-conforming ones—including rooftop mounts.
- Rooftop signs in Des Moines also have been lost over time due to weather events, business changes, aesthetic decisions, and removal of buildings.
- Today, there are few remaining commercial rooftop signs of 50 years or older in and around the Des Moines central business district.

Sign, Housing Ordinances Clear 2nd City Council Hurdle

Two controversial ordinances — one to control sign and billboard clutter in Des Moines, the other to revise the city housing code — were passed on second reading Monday night by the City Council.

Both bills once more to

The housi drawn shar

opponent of the ordinance, said many tenants “don’t need the council to manufacture an excuse for them not to pay their rent.”

Councilman Jack Woods also spoke against the section

law, is included in the State Code.

Within 15 Years

Several opponents of the ordinance, including Scott, said it tramples on the constitutional rights of property owners.

The sign ordinance says all

1969:
“Controversial”
sign ordinance

D.M. ORDINANCE UPHELD

Des Moines Tribune Page 19
Fri., July 7, 1972

Rules Sign Law Is Legal

By Richard Hatfield

A three-year-old Des Moines city ordinance regulating the size and location of signs and billboards is legal, constitutional and not discriminatory, a district court judge has ruled.

The sign law was challenged if Polk County District Court

trary nor discriminatory.”

Bown also said that a municipality may provide for the termination of non-conforming signs “if the period of amortization of the investment . . . is just and reasonable.” He ruled that the timetable for requiring non-conforming signs to be removed in Des Moines is just

pensive signs being removed first.

Until 1984

Under terms of the ordinance, each year a more expensive class of non-conforming signs must be taken down until 1984 when all signs, including those valued at more than \$6,000, must either conform to

1972: Sign
ordinance
upheld

D.M. sign law faces major test Signs —

Continued from Page One
Zoning Enforcement Officer Barry Vosler.

Among the appeals to be considered by the board is one on behalf of Travelers Insurance Companies, located in West Des Moines, which has a sign atop the Insurance Exchange Building at Fifth and Grand avenues distinguished by a neon-lit umbrella.

According to Vosler, the problem with the Travelers sign is that it is technically an “off-premises” sign, and comes under the definition of a



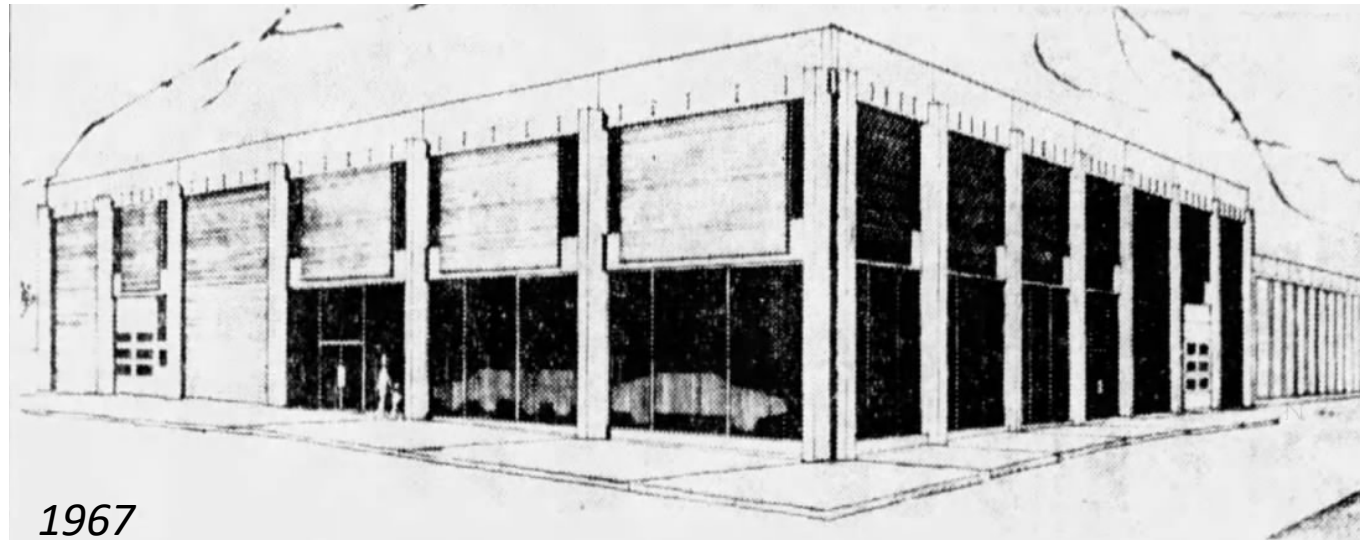
TRIBUNE PHOTO
National Travelers Life Co. sign on top of Insurance Exchange building.

1980: Sign
ordinance
challenged

by 70 square feet and theater owner.

Crescent Sign History

- Chevrolet, founded in 1911, differentiated itself in the early crowded auto marketplace with a distinct brand logo—a slanted bowtie-shaped nameplate.
- Crescent Chevrolet was established in downtown Des Moines in 1931, and later advertised itself as Polk County's oldest Chevy dealer.
- Crescent Chevrolet was one of 30-some auto dealers selling new vehicles downtown in the booming postwar era.



1967

Crescent Chevrolet project. Architects are Dougher-Frevert-Ramsey of Des Moines.

NEW BUILDING FOR CRESCENT

A \$1 million complex to house Crescent Chevrolet Co. of Des Moines will be built on the north side of Ingersoll avenue between Sixteenth and Seventeenth streets.

J. R. Piggott, owner of Crescent, the oldest Chevrolet dealership in Polk County, said new car, truck, parts and service departments will be moved to the new facility from the present location at Fifth street

Crescent Sign History

- After a competing Chevy dealer moved to a suburban Merle Hay Road location in 1967, Crescent publicized plans to move from 5th and Keo into a new \$1 million facility at “17th and Ingersoll” the following year.
- Signs were key for attracting potential customers: Crescent installed the 1968 rooftop sign atop its new 2-story masonry and concrete showroom and service building.

MOVING TIME!
After 37 Years at 5th & Keo
CRESCENT CHEVROLET
Has Moved Their
NEW CAR SALES
PARTS & SERVICE DEPTS.
to New Facilities at
17th & INGERSOLL
DOWNTOWN DES MOINES
350 Brand New Chevys
In Stock — Ready to Go
Discount Prices on All Models
Plenty of Easy Parking on Our
Big Parking Lot—Drive In!
Crescent Chevrolet Co.
17th & INGERSOLL 288-7041

1968

WHO? Bob Brown
Chevrolet

WHAT? Has moved the
used car and
truck lot

WHERE? To Fabulous
Chevyland — 10
acres — 4224
Merle Hay Rd.

For 150 OK cars and
trucks now on display.
Sales Depts. open 'til 9
weekdays.

BOB BROWN CHEVROLET
"IOWA'S LARGEST AND FINEST"
24 MERLE HAY RD. 1 block north of Merle Hay
Shopping Plaza—1 mile south
of Interstate 80.
255-2501 ● 276-2801

1967

Crescent Sign History

- The Crescent sign was angled to catch the eyes of motorists entering downtown from busy Ingersoll and Grand Aves.
- The rooftop sign was located above the corner showroom windows, which offered floor-to-ceiling views of the autos — some 80 to 90 displayed indoors.

1968

NEW 1968 CHEVROLETS

FINAL CLOSE-OUT

25 Left to Choose From
ALL DISPLAYED INSIDE!

- 1—Bel Air 4 Door Sedan
- 6—Bel Air Wagons—6 and 9 Passenger
- 3—Impala Wagons
- 7—Impala 4 Door Hardtops
- 3—Impala Custom Coupes
- 2—Impala Sport Coupes
- 3—Caprice Sedans

ALL SERVICED & READY FOR DELIVERY
5 YEAR/50,000 MILE WARRANTY

SHOP INSIDE IN COMFORT

CRESCENT CHEVROLET CO.
17th & Ingersoll

Welcome to
CRESCENT CHEVROLET'S
NEW HOME

North of Ingersoll at 555
17th Street
Downtown
Des Moines




J. R. Piggott,
Pres.



Showroom Entrance on 17th or Linden Streets
 Service Entrance south side of building
 Parts Entrance on 16th Street
 Body & Paint Shop on High Street
 Enter Customer Parking lot from 16th or High Street

*Meet the
Management
Team . . .*



Ralph Shay
Sales Department



Al Mayer
Fleet Department



William Heitritter
Service Department



Stu Ulius
Parts & Mds.



James E. Doud
Finance & Insurance



"Griff" Griffith
Body & Paint Shop



William R. Jensen
Used Cars & Trucks

Shop In Comfort
Rain or Shine . . .

90
new Chevrolets displayed
under roof at all times

**500 NEW & USED CARS & TRUCKS
TO CHOOSE FROM**
Many Brand New 1968's for
immediate clearance

New and Used Car Departments open evenings until 9:00 p.m.

CRESCENT CHEVROLET CO.
17th and Ingersoll Phone 288-7041

Crescent Sign History

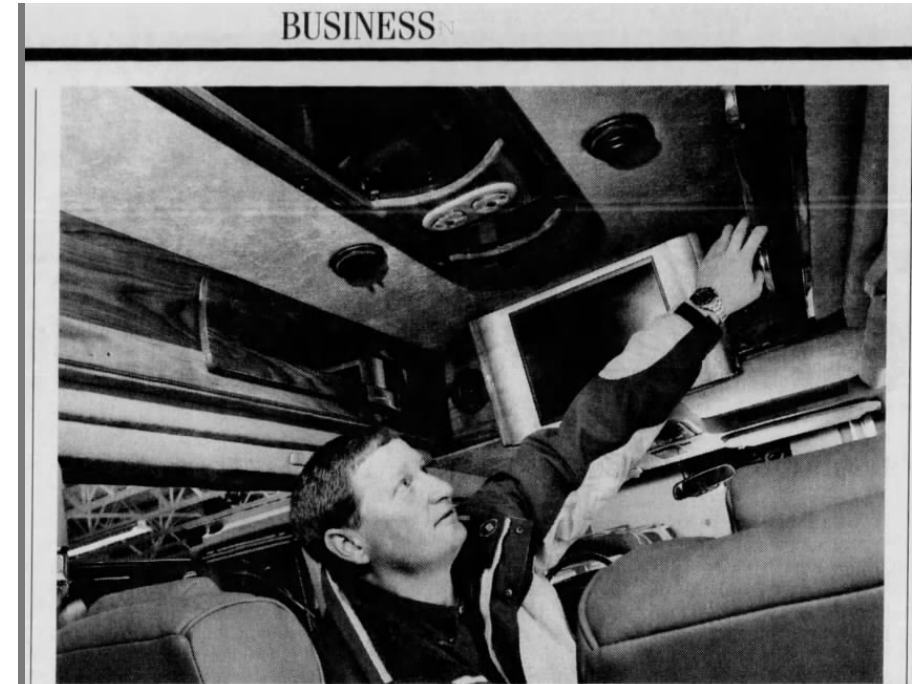
- Bill Jensen worked for Crescent starting in 1949 and later owned the downtown dealership from 1980 until his retirement in 2007.
- Jensen touted Crescent's competitive advantage over surface parking lot dealerships—the large indoor showroom kept patrons and autos protected from the weather.

1996



Lights Out: 2007 Dealership Closure

- Jensen retired in 2007 and sold the dealership, which was noted at the time as the last new auto dealership downtown.
- The new owners relocated the 76-year-old dealership to a suburban location.
- The sign has remained in place, but unused. As such, there is evidence of deferred maintenance.



REGISTER FILE PHOTO
Jim Jensen of Crescent Chevrolet shows the wood- and leather-trimmed interior of a Chevrolet conversion van equipped with television in 2005.

Downtown fixture Crescent to close doors after 76 years

CRESCENT, from Page 1D

Losing a long-standing business like Crescent Chevrolet is disappointing, said Tim Leach, vice president of economic development for the Downtown Community Alliance.

"It's a different day for car dealerships," he said. "It seems

is likely he and his father, Bill Jensen, who is president of the company, will continue to operate the dealership's used-car center at 1821 Ingersoll Ave.

Deery Bros. moved into the greater Des Moines car market when it bought Wright Chevrolet in Carlisle in 2005.

Deery Bros., which is oper-

on 5 acres. Deery said he expects the new shop will sell about 200 cars a month.

Pleasant Hill is a growing area with access to a highway system, making it a great location for a dealership, he said.

When the Pleasant Hill store is completed, Deery Chevrolet will move there from Carlisle.

Community Impact

- The Crescent Chevrolet internally lit rooftop sign shone as a visual landmark in downtown Des Moines during the dealership's operation on site, 1968-2007.

Photo circa 2007 by John David Larson, Lost Des Moines

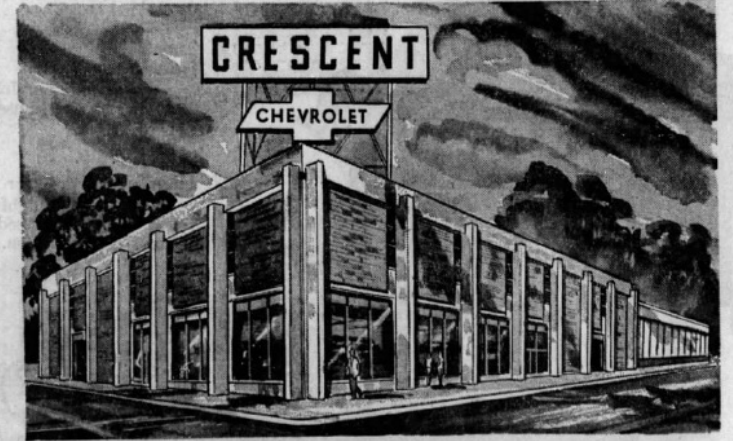


Community Impact

- The 1968 Crescent sign embodies the dealership's confident investment in the downtown Des Moines central business district.
- The Crescent rooftop sign remains a rare surviving example of rooftop signage installed prior to the 1969 city sign ordinance.
- And the sign continues to mark the northern edge of Des Moines' postwar auto row.

1968

The Sales Technicians
of
CRESCENT CHEVROLET CO.
Wish All Their Customers a
VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS



COME SEE THEM IN THEIR NEW FACILITY AT
555 17TH -- 17TH & INGERSOLL



Harold Koethe



Joe Newman



John Wood



Dennis Wilson



Charles Gregg



Al Narland



Jim Haggerty



Mike McIntosh

COME BROWSE IN HEATED COMFORT AMONG 90 NEW CHEVROLETS
DISPLAYED UNDER ROOF — OVER 200 NEW CHEVROLET
CARS AND TRUCKS IN STOCK — READY FOR IMMEDIATE DELIVERY

CRESCENT CHEVROLET CO.
17th and Ingersoll

Conclusion

- The sign continues to reflect the legacy of Crescent Chevrolet's 1968 investment in downtown Des Moines – and the dealership's longtime service to the community.
- The Crescent Chevrolet rooftop sign remains as a potent reminder of downtown Des Moines's commercial auto row heritage.

Des Moines Sunday Register **COMMERCE**

★ Dec. 8, 1968



Crescent to New Home

J. R. Piggott, president, has moved his Crescent Chevrolet Co. to new facilities at Seventeenth and Ingersoll after more than 37 years at Fifth and Keosauqua Way. The building, containing 60,000 square feet of space, includes service stalls for 40 mechanics, display space for 90 new automobiles, offices, and a double deck parts department with entrance on Sixteenth st. Piggott, who purchased the firm in 1935, purchased and removed houses and buildings from 14 different parcels of land to accommodate the new facility.

Thank you

- Questions?
- Do you have a personal connection to the Crescent rooftop sign?
Architectural historian Jennifer Irsfeld James, MAHP, would like to hear your story.



