



Bobby Cochran/CW photo

Father-daughter duo, Don Harris and Leslie Vander Baan work together to sell cars.

On the road again

Consignment takes hassle out of buying, selling cars

by **Emily Brown**
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A blinking answering machine filled with messages from unfamiliar voices asking never-ending questions about mileage and reliability is a common occurrence when selling a used car. Leslie Vander Baan, 28, Automotive Consignments' owner, has found a way to nix the hassle of selling and buying used cars.

Automotive Consignments is the first dealership in the nation to specialize exclusively in a for-sale-by-owner market. Sellers bring their vehicles here to be sold without trading them in for below-market value and without the stress of finding a suitable buyer. Buyers save time by having a selection of cars immediately accessible without the retail markup that dealerships charge.

"I simplify the process by finding a way for people to buy and sell used cars to each other without all the headache and hassle," said Vander Baan.

Automotive Consignments welcomes any car priced to sell, as long as the ticket price isn't higher than the car's estimated worth. The dealership also offers a comprehensive list of services that can be tailored to each customer.

Although the business officially opened in 2003, Vander Baan worked from home for more than six months. On Jan. 15, 2004, she opened the dealership on Charlotte's "auto road," otherwise known as Independence Boulevard. When the business opened, Vander Baan's employee roster contained herself and just one other. "I had to lock the doors when I went on test drives," she said.

Automotive Consignments currently has more than a dozen employees and

more than 100 cars onsite. The business brought in \$1.3 million in revenue last year, Vander Baan said.

Growing up with a grandfather and father who were independent car dealers, Vander Baan said she knew she wanted to work in the car industry. Although it wasn't until she had trouble selling her own car that she thought of a car consignment dealership.

In 2005, after Vander Baan's father, Don Harris, retired, he and his wife, Donna, decided to partner with their daughter in the unconventional business. About working with her parents, Vander Baan said, "There is an immediate trust. I don't have to worry about my business partners sharing my best interest."

With cars priced from \$800 to \$80,000, Automotive Consignments offers purchase and finance options for everyone. "The level of customer service is the same regardless of what you are buying," Vander Baan said.

Automotive Consignments works with several national lenders and is one of a few dealers that has a guaranteed credit-approval program. "It can be really difficult if you are credit challenged to get the kind of customer service expected at a really fine dealership. We provide that," said Vander Baan. "I get to make people's day all day long. I had a woman cry and hug me on Saturday because I helped her buy her first car and finance it when no one else would give her that chance."

Automotive Consignments also offers vehicle history reports, registration and title work, advertisement and warranties for vehicles.

"Why I like this business and why I like what I do is because no day is the same. I don't like routine – every day I come in here and there is a new customer, a new car and a new situation," said Vander Baan. □