

New vehicle sales rise

By [Toby Gorman - Nanaimo News Bulletin](#)

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After sales numbers that looked like they drove over a cliff last fall, new vehicle sales are once again making steady gains on Vancouver Island.

While strong sales are important to manufacturing sectors like Ontario, mid-Vancouver Islanders should also take note says Blair Qualey, president and CEO of the New Car Dealers Association of B.C.

“About one in seven jobs in B.C. are tied to the auto industry,” said Qualey.

“It’s a \$10-billion industry in B.C., which means government takes in \$1.5 billion in taxes from new cars annually.

“That’s a big contribution to things like social services and other programs that are important.”

Municipal governments also benefit through property taxes.

This time last year, with the economy poised on the edge of an abyss thanks to the collapse of financial institutions like Lehman Brothers, new car sales were off by as much as 20 per cent at Nanaimo’s 21 new car dealerships.

Across Canada, General Motors closed 240 dealerships, though just six in B.C. closed, including two in northern Vancouver Island communities.

“When a major dealership closes it’s a blow to the community,” said Qualey.

“Not only do communities lose employment, but they also lose their biggest philanthropists.

“Organizations like sports teams rely heavily on car dealerships. Dealerships have done well to continue to participate in community events despite difficult times.”

Qualey, who took over the association as president last fall, was in Nanaimo Thursday to visit dealerships.

Last January, thanks to price reductions and major incentives that included free financing by many car companies, sales improved by a timid 0.1 per cent.

From June to July, dealers saw a 1.5-per cent jump and with the recession easing, Qualey sees a bright future for dealerships.

By extension, it's a good time to be a consumer.

“There is great pricing, low interest rates, lots of incentives and basic vehicles that are loaded with new technology that wasn't in base models even two years ago,” said Qualey.

“It's a good time to buy.”

Along with offering cleaner running and more fuel efficient cars, the New Car Dealers Association of B.C. is also ensuring its dealer members – 374 in the province – reduce their own carbon footprint.

The organization hired a consultant to help reduce the footprint of dealerships through assessments of service bays, lighting, paper usage, travel and shipping methods at select B.C. dealerships.

The recommendations will be passed on to all provincial association members.