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POPLAR BLUFF - The names Blackwell and Baldwin have become synonymous in Southeast Missouri over the past four decades, as seen at car dealerships, along billboards and on vehicles cruising the highways.

What began with an earnest handshake agreement between Harry Blackwell of Naylor and Poplar Bluff native Roger Baldwin, ended up in a legal battle over a year ago, and reached a settlement outside of court last week.

Baldwin now owns the three dealerships on South Westwood Boulevard, while Blackwell operates the business in Dexter, plus he has acquired two additional dealerships in Malden, upon being bought out of the Poplar Bluff operation.

“My family is now in business in Dexter and Dunklin County, and we are excited about the future of these dealerships,” Blackwell said. “I want to humbly thank all of our friends and customers who, over the years, have blessed our family to no end.”

Under recommendation by the parties, the consolidated case was dismissed with prejudice Feb. 16 by Presiding Circuit Judge Michael Pritchett in Butler County, and Stoddard County Presiding Circuit Judge Stephen Sharp executed the joint stipulation the previous

day.

The three multiple-count civil suits that ensued between Baldwin and his wife Jan against Blackwell and his wife Vivian, each individually and on behalf of their respective trusts, began Nov. 18, 2010.

Baldwin filed the original petition, requesting liquidation and later for the courts to appoint the sheriff of each county to auction off the real estate and divide the proceeds among the parties since, the lawsuit states, “irreconcilable differences have arisen between the partners.” Attorney Jasper Edmundson Jr. of Poplar Bluff and Ray Nickle of Jonesboro represented the plaintiff.

With the legal counsel of Joseph Blanton Jr. of Sikeston and Steve Walsh of Poplar Bluff, defendant Blackwell counterclaimed that the corporations should be sold to himself or a third party, or divided among the partners with payment of the difference in value, since Baldwin’s actions allegedly caused the “breakdown in the relationship.”

The dispute raised question as to whether Blackwell and Baldwin were in a Missouri general business partnership to begin with, or just shareholders of motor vehicle dealerships, as the venture between the owners was formed by oral agreement, not a written contract, “for no specified term of existence.”

TIMELINE

Blackwell-Baldwin opened its first dealership in 1973, the Oldsmobile Cadillac division where Raben Tire is currently located in Poplar Bluff, according to history on its former website.

In 1985, the duo bought out GMC and Ford dealerships in Poplar Bluff and the following year, acquired Lincoln, Mercury, Toyota, Pontiac and Buick operations.

Lastly, they purchased Scism Motors in Bloomfield in 1997, which was relocated to Dexter two years later. Today the dealership, solely owned by Blackwell, includes Chrysler, Dodge and Jeep models.

On Jan. 12, former Lincoln Lacy Motors in Malden, now called Harry Blackwell Motors, announced that Blackwell purchased the operation from Jim Lincoln. There are two Dunklin County locations, according to general manager Charlie Thacker, one that includes Ford, Chrysler, Dodge and Jeep and the other, Chevrolet, GMC and Buick.

During a brief interview, Baldwin said: “It’s too early to say a whole lot right now,” but he would release a statement once he gets the signage at his businesses in town updated.

Asked why he decided to stay in the business, he replied: “Just family.”

Descendants of both Baldwin and Blackwell have followed in their parents’ footprints in the auto dealer business.

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