

Monaco Motor Coach

By Edwin Battistella

The recreational vehicle (RV) industry had its beginning in 1968, when entrepreneurs Bob Lee, Ray Mehaffey, Glenn Hancock, and John McCabe started Caribou Manufacturing in Junction City, Oregon. When Caribou introduced the Monaco motor home in 1971, the company established a sales and distribution network throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Caribou caught the attention of businessman and Eugene mayor Brian Obie, who bought the company in 1974. Later renamed the Monaco Coach Corporation, the company became one of Lane County's largest employers and one of the nation's premiere manufacturers of big diesel motor coaches.

Over the years, Monaco expanded and reinvented itself several times. In 1984, the company purchased Chrysler Corporation's Roadmaster Chassis Division. Obie sold Monaco to Warrick Industries in 1987. Led by its president, Kay Toolson, the Monaco Coach Corporation added three manufacturing facilities in Indiana and, in 1993, became a publicly traded company. Monaco acquired Harley-Davidson's Holiday Rambler Division in 1996 and Safari Motor Coach in 2001 and operated factories in Bend and near Burns.

From the late 1990s, Monaco routinely posted revenues of several hundred million dollars. At its high point in 2006, the company employed 6,000 workers nationally, about half of them in Oregon. It also supported other Oregon businesses that provided materials and parts for RVs, such as paint, metal, upholstery, and electronics.

Facing an industry-wide decline, loss of consumer confidence, and the tightening of consumer credit, the RV industry collapsed in 2008. Monaco entered Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in March 2009 and terminated all but 220 workers at its Coburg facility. In early June 2009, Navistar International purchased the bulk of Monaco's assets for \$47 million.

Sources

"RVs in Oregon." *The Register-Guard* (Eugene, OR), Sunday, January 11, 2009.

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http://oregonhist-oep-dev.azurewebsites.net/articles/monaco_motor_coach/