



Sports Unlimited will celebrate its 50th year of operation in 2025. The dealership is led by (L to R) Allison Kriniak, Jimmy Kriniak, Jim Kriniak, Doreen Kriniak, Billy Ciborn and Shirley Ciborn. Doreen Kriniak owns the business with her husband, Jim. Jimmy Kriniak is Doreen and Jim's son. Allison Kriniak is Jimmy's wife. Shirley Ciborn and Billy Ciborn are Doreen Kriniak's mother and stepfather.

Unlimited Loyalty

An RV dealership nestled along Thunder Bay in Michigan has found a half-century of success working exclusively with one RV manufacturer: Jayco.

By RV News Staff | Photos by Danyale Jobin Photography

Potential RV buyers in eastern Michigan willing to drive to tiny Alpena, which hugs Thunder Bay along the west shore of Lake Huron, have something in store for them. The trip includes a 99-mile stretch of scenic two-lane road along the lake north of Bay City.

At the journey's end, travelers can visit Doreen Kriniak. Kriniak owns Sports Unlimited, a combination RV, ATV, side-by-side and snowmobile dealership founded by her father in 1974.

Although the dealership sells Yamaha and Suzuki ATVs and Yamaha side-by-side vehicles and snowmobiles, only one RV brand option is available.

"We are an exclusive Jayco dealership, and we have been from day one," Kriniak said. "I grew up with them, and it is the only thing I'll sell."

Kriniak's father, Jim, stumbled across Jayco while traveling to northern Indiana to find manufacturers for his fledgling RV dealership.

"At the time, we had one Concord travel trailer on the lot," Kriniak said. "He was driving through Indiana with his dad when they saw a Jayco haul-away truck pass. He told his dad, 'We've gotta follow that truck!'"

Kriniak said her father copied the phone number posted on truck's rear and found a phone booth to make the call. Jayco officials asked them to visit that same day.

Jayco execs were impressed with the young man and his lofty ideas for his tiny dealership. In 1974, Jayco manufactured only fifth wheels, travel trailers and pop-up RVs. Kriniak said her father wanted to sell pop-ups.

A Jayco sales rep came to Alpena the next week with a pop-up trailer in tow and taught Jim Kriniak and his staff how to set up and sell the trailer in their parking lot.

"That is how we got started," she said. "Now, we have a really nice building on 5 acres of land with five employees."

Sports Unlimited usually carries 30-40 new Jayco trailers and 10-20 used RVs on its lot. The dealership's 5,000-square-foot showroom shares RV display space with ATVs and snowmobiles, depending on the season.

"My dad wanted to sell a variety of outdoor vehicles so that we would always be busy," she said. "We like to think that we can cover most any outdoor vehicle need, but that is not always the case. Just yesterday, I had a lady come in and ask me for a boat anchor. I have also been asked if we have hockey skates. It does not happen often, but it does happen."

Exclusively Jayco

Kriniak's ties to the Jayco brand run deep. She said her early impressions were that Jayco made an excellent RV, and her job was simply to sell it.

The dealership's single-brand focus simplified handling the dealership's inventory and service for her husband and son, who both are named Jim.

“Before us, there was not a Jayco anywhere near here. I think we are the last original family-owned dealership for Jayco in the state of Michigan.”

— Doreen Kriniak

"My husband treats every unit like he owns it," she said. "If there is a scratch in the woodwork, it gets fixed. If the door is not straight, it gets straightened. He spends hours prepping because we want that high level of customer satisfaction when the customer leaves our lot."

Kriniak and her husband met at the dealership during high school.

Her father hired him because "he knew how to wash a car right." The couple have been married for 44 years.

Their son also works at the dealership, and Jim Jr.'s wife joins them during the summer.

Having new and used Jayco RVs on the lot provides an easy selection for Alpena-area residents and those willing to make the long drive up Highway 23.

"Pretty much all of my used RVs are Jaycos because I took them back in trade," Kriniak said. "We see a lot of steady customers who trade about every five to 10 years. I already delivered my first 2025 Jayco model to a guy who has had seven other Jayco's over the years."

Kriniak's closest "competitor" is 62 miles south. The competitor is Jay's RV Center, based in East Tawas, Michigan, a town with a population of 2,600.

Kriniak's family owns Jay's RV Center, although they keep each dealership's operations and the books separate.

Kriniak said she has never been tempted to add other brands to the dealership's lot.

"We just never saw the need," she said. "Jayco has always treated us great."



Missy Anderson is Sports Unlimited's service writer and works in the parts department.



Jimmy Kriniak, vice president of sales and warranty administrator, emails a follow-up survey to an RV buyer.



Shirley Cilborn checks her schedule to confirm an appointment with a consumer considering buying an RV.



Allison Kriniak, parts and accessories manager, replenishes RV bubble levelers in Sports Unlimited's parts and accessories store.



(L to R) Husband and wife Jim and Doreen Kriniak met at the dealership when Doreen Kriniak's father, Jim Edgley, hired Jim Kriniak to work there. The couple have been married for 44 years.



(L to R) Doreen Kriniak and Shirley Cilborn have sold all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, side-by-side vehicles and snowmobiles since Jim Edgley opened the store in 1974.

The relationship grew so close over the years that Jayco's then-owner Wilbur Bontrager flew his own airplane from Elkhart, Indiana, to Alpena to attend Kriniak's wedding in 1980.

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“We built a name for Jayco in Alpena,” Kriniak said. “Before us, there was not a Jayco anywhere near here. I think we are the last original family-owned dealership for Jayco in the state of Michigan.”

Reborn by Fire

Kriniak said her father started the business in a remodeled pole barn.

“The place had three different ceilings and four different walls,” Kriniak remembered. “You know what you do when you just keep remodeling.”

That all changed Sept. 23, 2015, while Kriniak and her son were returning from a trip to Elkhart Extravaganza and Jayco's Indiana plant with a pop-up in tow.

“I will never forget it,” she said. “It was my son's birthday, and he got a call on his cell from a friend asking him what part of our business was on fire. I was not that worried because I thought my husband might just be burning some old boxes.”

Jim Jr. told his mom not to look at her phone, called his friend back and discovered the friend was on his way

to the dealership with his own excavator to help fight the fire.

Kriniak said, “We made that seven-hour trip back in about four hours with a 26-foot trailer behind us.”

A solid wall of black smoke greeted them. The dealership's building was gone.

Although devastated, Kriniak did not skip a beat.

“The next morning, we went to Walmart and got everything we needed,” she said. “I opened up a toy hauler and that became my office. I sold a used RV from that trailer by noon that first day.”

When Kriniak finally visited the ashes of her former office, she faced one thing she could not immediately overcome. The floor was littered with her Jayco awards and broken commemorative plates

that Jayco sends to dealers each Christmas.

“They were just lying there alongside a burned-up snowmobile,” she said. “I had started collecting the plates in 1977 and got one each year featuring a different bird.”

Ironically, among the first calls Kriniak received after the fire was from Jayco Regional Sales Manager Micah Hicks.

“The first thing I told him was that all of my plates were gone,” she said. “He went to Wilbur (Bontrager) and told him that I was fussing about the plates. They replaced every one of them, along with all my awards. That tells you something about the way they ran their company. If you just sell their brand, they really take care of you.”

Hicks said Kriniak is among Jayco's longest-standing customers.

“She has to be one of the top five in terms of longevity,



(L to R) Anderson, Doreen Kriniak and Jennifer Newhouse, receptionist and title clerk, work at the parts and service desk, where Sports Unlimited displays commemorative plates. The company's plates were destroyed in a 2015 fire, but Jayco replaced them and other awards damaged in the blaze.

and we appreciate those relationships,” Hicks said. “Doreen is a great legacy to Jayco and is a wonderful example of how we want our dealers to be. She is also an example of how we treat our dealers over the years.”

Hicks said there are challenges in working with a dealership in such a remote region of Michigan. He said the benefits far outweigh those obstacles.

“There is a uniqueness and a personal touch that she gives to her customers,” Hicks said, “and that is such a huge plus.”

Up From the Ashes

Kriniak and her family never considered closing the business after the 2015 fire. She said the family knew they provided a product their community strongly desired.

“We are in a town of just 25,000 people, and there is nobody else that sells RVs,” she said. “We are the only game in town.”

Sports Unlimited rebuilt immediately and now resides in a state-of-the-art facility with two large service bays, along with a big showroom, store and parts department.

The company's most profitable year was shortly before the pandemic when Kriniak and her team sold 132 rigs.

“We have not done quite that well in the past five years,” she said, remembering the shortages during the Covid outbreak. “During the pandemic, we got down to one 15-foot trailer in inventory. That was it. I told people that I was practicing being retired.”

Kriniak credits her father's foresight in carrying four-wheelers and snowmobiles for helping through those lean years.

She said, “He was trying to make sure we were busy all year around, and we were.”

When Kriniak assumed the business from her father in the early 1990s, she said she advertised a lot on TV and radio stations and some billboards. Since the pandemic, she has largely avoided advertising by relying on her local market.

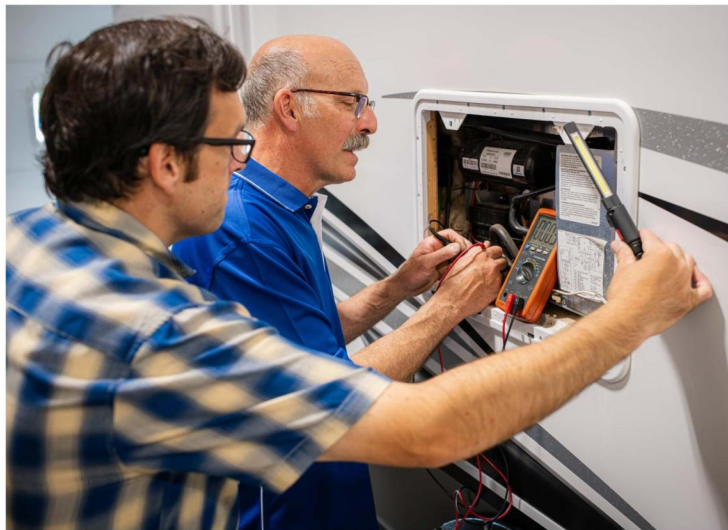
“I did not feel we had to (advertise). Now, it is just word of mouth and satisfied customers. I would say 90% of the people in our area campgrounds are in Jaycos.”



Newhouse runs a title search on an RV trade-in.



Doreen Kriniak took over as Sports Unlimited's owner about 30 years ago.



(L to R) Jimmy Kriniak and his father, Jim Kriniak, the dealership's service manager, work together to diagnose an electrical issue.



Sports Unlimited's small staff stocks 40 to 60 RVs, depending on the season. The store has a 5,000-square-foot showroom.

“We have three generations working in the business right now, so there is no worry about what happens next. If you come to work every day and treat people the way you want to be treated, everything will turn out OK. It always has, even through the tragedies. We always make it.”

— Doreen Kriniak

Celebrating 50 Years

On April 1, 2025, Sports Unlimited is planning an open house to celebrate 50 years in business in Alpena. The celebration started in July when Jayco honored Sports Unlimited at its Dealer Homecoming event in Las Vegas for achieving a 50-year relationship with the manufacturer.

Every new Jayco RV that rolls off Sports Unlimited's lot in 2025 will feature a special 50th-anniversary sticker. Kriniak said she also plans to do 50 special giveaways around Alpena to include the town in the celebration.

Although Kriniak and husband have spent their entire careers at the dealership, Kriniak said she has no plans to slow down...despite the brief stint “practicing being retired.”

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is no worry about what happens next,” she said. “If you come to work every day and treat people the way you want to be treated, everything will turn out OK. It always has, even through the tragedies. We always make it.”

Kriniak said she cannot see a day when she will not have a hand in the dealership.

“I do plan to get away for a while and see the USA,” she said. “I would like to travel around and see places I have never had a chance to see because we are so busy every summer.”

When she travels, she is adamant she will do so in a Jayco.

“I have my own Jayco Hummingbird,” she said, referencing Jayco's small travel trailer. “That little RV will do me for the rest of my life. My tech husband does not want anything bigger, either.” **RVN**