



From Model T to Taliano's and beyond



1921

1940

PHOTOS COURTESY HISTORIC TAKOMA FROM "THE TAKOMA ENTERPRISE"

1921: The original one-story Hendrick Motor Works was the first structure on Carroll Avenue where Taliano's now stands. It folded in 1930 as a result of the Depression, but reopened as Takoma Motor Company under the leadership of J. Milton Derrick.

1940: The expansion of Takoma Motor Company created the mission style storefront familiar today, occupied by Taliano's and Rerun.

One of the seven local sites caught up in the past year's development fervor lies on the Maryland side of Carroll Avenue. The parcel, encompassing the Taliano's/Rerun storefront and extending in an "L" shape over to Westmoreland Avenue, is slated for condos and additional retail space.

However, for six decades before the arrival of Taliano's, this site served as the automotive center of Takoma Park. The large bay window once proudly displayed the latest model Ford automobiles.

Before 1888, the intersection at Carroll and Laurel Avenues was a wooded expanse four blocks from the commercial activity surrounding the train station. Takoma Park founder Benjamin Franklin Gilbert was the first to build here, constructing a rustic log cabin. Modeled after the iconic symbol of

William Henry Harrison's presidential campaign, the cabin was the first incarnation of a Takoma Park "community center."

Gilbert soon added a 10-story observation tower next door so prospective buyers could survey the land available for purchase. When a new streetcar line opened in 1898, the second to link Takoma Park with downtown DC, the log cabin marked the trolley turnaround.

Twenty years later, the cabin and tower were gone, replaced by two blocks of storefronts to take advantage of the commercial opportunities provided by the customers waiting for the streetcar. It is ironic that one of the major businesses to open up at the turnaround was Hendrick Motor Works, offering those new-fangled inventions that would eventually replace

streetcars. Hendrick Motors occupied a one-story cement structure on the Carroll Avenue site where Taliano's now stands.

Gilbert could hardly have imagined how automobiles would alter the suburb he created. As early as 1912, an underpass had transformed Cedar Avenue's grade-level crossing at the railroad tracks. Later, in 1935, new highways such as Piney Branch Road and New Hampshire Avenue would carve the way for further suburban expansion.

Henry Ford's Model T put cars in everyone's reach. Introduced in 1909 at a cost of \$850, Ford eventually sold 15 million Model Ts. By 1928, they were priced at a mere \$260. For folks in Takoma Park, Hendrick Motors was their entry into this novel world of individualized transportation.

But first America had to survive the Depression years, which were difficult times for car dealers who depended on credit. In 1930, Hendrick Motor Works folded. One of the Hendrick salesmen, J. Milton Derrick was willing to gamble, however. He took over the dealership and reopened it as Takoma Motor Company, with an exclusive franchise to sell Fords.

In addition to the Carroll Avenue showroom, Derrick took over the service area on Westmoreland with its capacity of 15 cars. He understood that selling cars was only the start. Customers needed help to keep their cars running. By 1940 he was ready to expand the showroom as well as the repair and maintenance sides of the business.

The resulting two-story storefront with

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large display window is the same one we see today. In addition to the salesroom, the service entrance next door opened on a parts and accessory department offering 22,000 different items, a repair center, a paint shop and tire center. There was even something for the kids. One local resident, Dorothy Barnes, remembers that there was a water fountain inside the salesroom. On hot days it provided a welcome break on the long walk home from Takoma (DC) Elementary on Piney Branch Road.

For two more decades, Takoma Motors remained an integral part of Old Takoma, before giving way for Murphy Auto Parts in the mid-60s. Car dealers needed larger quarters elsewhere, but the site remained a source of car parts for local residents until the mid-1980s when pressure to develop forced more changes.

Local developer John Carleton purchased both the storefront and the Westmoreland space with the idea of creating a mini mall. Travis Price, the architect who designed the project, has fond memories of Carleton conducting business from the front seat of a pink Cadillac parked in the old Ford display window.

The remodeled salesroom was occupied by Taliano's, while the service section next door housed a series of retail enterprises over the years, including the much-lamented Chuck and Dave's Book Store, and the current occupant, Rerun.

The service area along Westmoreland was cleaned up, but the mini mall never quite worked out. Small shops shared the space with a dialysis clinic. Studio One Artists, whose clients included Mary Chapin Carpenter, occupied the bungalow house on the property.

Now 20 years later developer Stylianos Christofides is making plans to attract new residents with upscale condominiums and additional retail space on the site. Although the design is in flux, Christofides states his



Milton Derrick, Ford dealer and founder of Takoma Motor Co., assured the buying public in 1940 "that a Ford car purchased now is far from experimental having had 37 years of continuous engineering behind it."

commitment to restore, "not just the windowline and the limestone facade, but as much of the historic fabric of the interior" as possible. The restoration will require Taliano's and the other businesses to vacate the building, at some point within the next year. Only time will tell whether the project gives new life to the old Takoma Motors.

Note: Much of the information for this article is from the July 1941 edition of The Takoma Enterprise, a newspaper printed twice a year beginning in 1907 by Frank Skinner. It is an invaluable resource which captures the life of the community.



The original service entrance for Hendrick Motor Works was on today's Westmoreland (then called Elm) around the corner from the main store. It could service five cars at one time. In 1928 it was expanded to a capacity of 15 cars. The 1940 expansion created a service entrance on Carroll Avenue, but this remained the repair garage.

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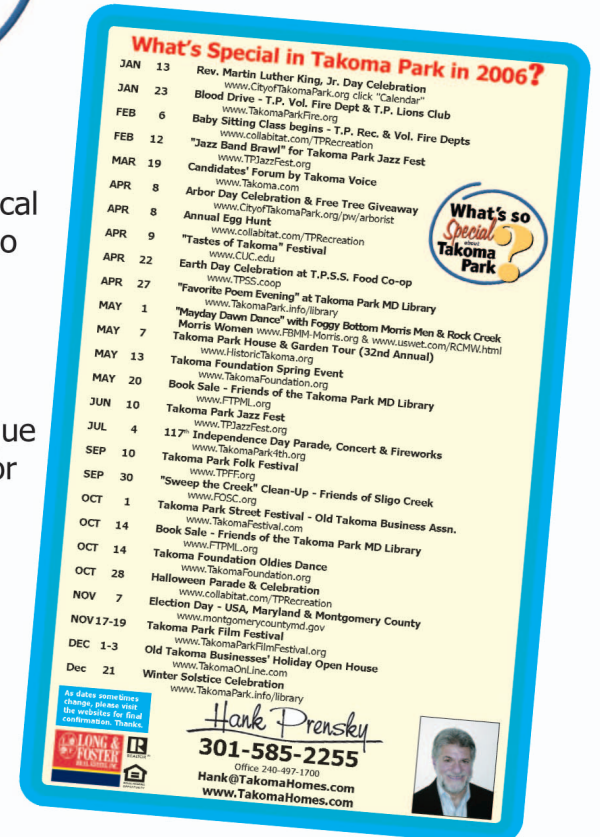


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