

WOMEN TO WATCH**Woman with Drive**

name: Irma Elder

who she is: Car dealership owner. Her business was voted one of the top 50 woman-owned businesses in America by Working Woman magazine. Elder also serves on the board of several Detroit institutions and is active in many charities. In 1997, she was named one of the world's leading women entrepreneurs in Paris, France.

the biz: The business grossed \$381 million in 1997. She employs approximately 250 people throughout her dealerships, which include Troy Ford, Jaguar-Saab and Aston Martin Lagonda of Troy; Signature Lincoln-Mercury Jeep Eagle in Owosso; and Jaguar Select Editions of Plymouth.

how she got there: She was raising three



adolescent children when her husband died in 1983 and she inherited the business, which at that time consisted solely of Troy Ford.

how homemaking helped her business skills:

"Most women don't realize how much they learn as housewives. There's management skills -- managing your husband and children's schedules; managing your own time; and learning how to manage money. I was very active on committees at my children's schools. It's amazing what we learn from raising funds and serving lunch."

her influences: "My parents are my heroes. I learned about integrity, honesty, respect for other people, hard work and determination from them. My father, an entrepreneur, was aggressive, a hard worker and good marketer.

on becoming a businesswoman: "I was a very shy homemaker before going into the business, but everyone has an innate ability to survive."

her advice: "It's all right to dream and to work hard at making your dreams happen. Always be positive."

to those wanting to get into the industry:

"Get a job in a dealership or apply for a job in a corporation. Start by selling or working in an office. You *must* love it -- you spend so much time doing it!"

by Cindy Frenkel Kanter

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