



Jack Fitzgerald, founder of Fitzgerald Auto Malls and a transformative figure in the automotive retail industry, passed away April 8, 2025. He was revered not just for building one of the most respected dealership networks in the country, but for redefining what it meant to be a **consumer advocate** in the auto business.

1936 - 2025

Jack's sales journey began in 1956 as a 20-year-old door-to-door salesman. With an extraordinary ability to connect with people, he quickly found his calling in the automotive world. For a decade, he was a top Ford salesman at Handley Ford, owned by Vincent Sheehy in Washington, D.C. In 1966, Jack took a bold step and purchased a stake in Diver Dodge, a dealership in Bethesda, Maryland. Two years later, he moved the renamed business "Colonial Dodge" to Rockville Pike—in MD a turning point that marked the beginning of the "FitzWay."

This customer-first philosophy, grounded in transparency, honesty, and respect, would become the hallmark of Fitzgerald Auto Malls. Jack was ahead of his time with his "no haggle – no hassle" pricing model, setting a new standard for fairness and trust in auto sales.

Jack believed that a business could thrive while serving the greater good. His dedication to public safety and education became evident through initiatives like the Fitzgerald Child Safety Seat Program, launched in partnership with Montgomery County, Maryland. Early in the National CPS Certification creation in the late 1990s, Jack became aware of the CPS process being developed and took notice. Sending staff through some of the earliest CPS classes the Fitzgerald CPS Program began.

Working with MANY regional partners in the DMV, the program gained local, Regional and National attention. The program gained momentum after a service customer and her sons survived a serious crash uninjured the day after their seat was checked after a service department visit, thanks to properly installed child seats. Inspired, Jack trained over 100 employees as certified NHTSA technicians. To date, Fitzgerald Auto Malls has completed more than 52,000 child safety seat inspections and installations, making a measurable impact on child passenger safety in the region. Ever the “car guy” Jack was proud that they held the record for the most car seats checked in a single day, 777. This was one of the first dealer-based inspection locations nationwide. As time moved on so did many dealerships, not Jacks dealerships. Over 20 years later the FitzWay CPS program continues.

As priorities changed in the government, Jack used his influence to ensure Montgomery County MD continued funding the counties CPS program. His intervention ensured the county would continue providing this service by securing a full time CPS coordinator position in the County. This position was filled by another MACPS Hall of Fame Member until her passing, Emilie Crown.



His advocacy extended beyond his dealerships. Jack served on numerous national dealer councils and industry associations, where he consistently championed higher standards of integrity. In 2009, a Washington Post reporter shadowed Jack for a “day in the life” article.

The resulting front-page feature unexpectedly propelled Jack as the leading voice in the fight to restore dealerships shuttered during the GM and Chrysler bankruptcies. His advocacy resulted in the passage of legislation that saved thousands of jobs across the nation.

Perhaps his most enduring contribution came in 2023 when Fitzgerald Auto Malls became the largest dealership group in the United States to transition to 100% employee ownership. On February 1, Jack announced the launch of the Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP), ensuring that the FitzWay would live on through its employee-owners. “I want to ensure that our employees keep their jobs long after I’m gone, and the FitzWay philosophy continues well into the future” he said. “There’s just no better way to go!”

A proud native of Washington, D.C., Jack Fitzgerald was known for his vibrant personality and wide-ranging passions beyond the automotive world. A devoted fan of the Washington Commanders, he rarely missed a game on television and took great joy in riding the emotional rollercoaster that came with supporting his hometown team. Jack also had a lifelong love of flying—he was a licensed pilot who found both joy and freedom in the skies. Renowned for his sharp sense of humor and distinctive charm, he had a soft spot for the mischievous Grinch, his favorite fictional character.

Today, Fitzgerald Auto Malls includes 20 franchises across Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Florida, employing over 1,800 people—including three generations of the Fitzgerald associates. Jack’s values of dignity, fairness, and customer advocacy continue to shape every interaction.

Thanks, Jack, for your commitment to your community!