

## 2025 Retail 40 Under 40



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### **TOM DEFELICE III, 39**

Vice president, general counsel

CIRCLE MOTOR GROUP

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He has loved cars since sitting in the back of a black BMW E31 — or the Batmobile, at least that’s what it looked like to a young Tom DeFelice III. His dad brought it home from the family’s BMW dealership.

Despite that love, the kid from New Jersey didn’t want to sell cars full time. At least not at first.

After working at his family’s Circle BMW dealership in Eatontown, N.J., including washing cars, stocking parts and being a salesman, DeFelice III wanted to try something else, at least for a while.

“I was sure that I wanted to forge my own path a little bit and not just assume a role at the dealership right after college, like maybe every other dealer kid,” DeFelice III said. “I wanted to do something on my own for a while and I landed on law school.”

Three schools, actually: DeFelice III earned a bachelor’s in economics from Boston University, a master’s in business administration from Monmouth University and his Juris Doctor from Seton Hall University. He still did some automotive work at his family’s dealership during summers off from college. He even earned a paycheck as a sales assistant at Herb Chambers BMW of Boston during a few college semesters in 2008.

DeFelice III’s legal career landed him at law firm Aboyoun Dobbs, where he specialized in auto dealership mergers and acquisitions, franchise law and corporate law.

After a call about a vacancy from his father, Tom DeFelice Jr., in spring 2020, he felt ready to return to the family business, representing a fourth generation of DeFelices in auto retail dating to 1946 when his great-grandfather bought a Chevrolet dealership.

Now vice president and general counsel for the group, DeFelice III’s legal experience helps fuel his endeavors in auto retail.

“It helps me to see the business from a 30,000-foot perspective,” DeFelice III said. “I rely on my great managers for their operational expertise and it allows me to work on the business.”

He has helped Circle BMW consistently increase sales, setting a record with 1,420 new vehicles sold in 2024, a nearly 24 percent increase from the store’s 2023 sales and a 76 percent increase from 2020, he said.

DeFelice III credits strong fixed operations for helping protect dealership profits from industry ups and downs.

That includes implementing a mobile service van to help customers with minor repairs, such as changing a tire, at their home or work, something he saw used by another BMW dealership.

He became the BMW dealership operator in 2021 and purchased a stake in his uncle's Chevrolet-Hyundai-Isuzu dealership in 2023.

DeFelice III dreams of growing the group via acquisitions and on June 9, began building that dream by purchasing two New Jersey dealerships from Group 1 Automotive Inc. with his father. The father-son duo also created Circle Motor Group, which comprises their three stores.

With his auto retail career on the upswing, DeFelice III, a married father of three, remains grateful for the outside experience, too.

"My dad encouraged me to find my own way," DeFelice III said. "He never pushed the store on me at all."

— Julie Walker

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