

Testimony for the Record

Submitted to the U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship

For the Hearing: "American Entrepreneurship for 250 Years: Driving Innovation, Growth and Opportunity"

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Dear Chair Ernst, Ranking Member Markey, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the 235 team members at Grappone Automotive in Bow, and Concord, New Hampshire, thank you for your service to our great country, and for inviting me here today to tell you a little bit about the Grappone Automotive story.

My paternal great-great-grandfathers both immigrated from southern Italy to the United States in 1891, leaving behind not only grinding poverty and government oppression, but most of their family members. Like the millions of other European immigrants during that time, they risked it all to make a better life in America. A son of one of my great-great grandfathers and a daughter of the other are my great-grandparents Rocco Grappone and Emanuela D'Orlando. They came to this country around the turn of the 20th century, one a stone mason with a skilled trade to offer, the other an illiterate peasant farmer. They married in 1905, and after moves from Boston to New York City to Barre, Vermont, they finally settled in Concord, New Hampshire where they raised their seven surviving children. They had followed the granite for years, but stone cutting was a dangerous line of work and my great-grandmother Emanuela had always wanted her husband Rocco to find a different way to support the family.

Around 1920, Emanuela and her two eldest daughters went to work in a local factory, making parts for Ford Model Ts. Their savings, along with Rocco's earnings from the stone shed and the money made by their children who sold vegetables and wild berries door to door, amounted to enough to purchase a single gas pump not far from their house in the Italian section of Concord. They had considered buying a piggery, but decided to take their chances on the automobile craze.

Business was not as brisk as the prior owner had told them it would be - in fact, false receipts had been manufactured by him to convince the Grappones that they had made the right decision in buying the filling station - but they persevered. Understanding that the sale of gas alone wouldn't sustain them, they began servicing and then selling cars, becoming an Oldsmobile distributor in 1927.

Their son John, my grandfather, began working at Grappone and Sons in grade school, and worked there for 79 years until his death at age 92. My grandmother, his wife of 71 years, continued to report to the Ford showroom every day even after his death until she was 98 years old. Their son Robert, my father, spent a 60-year career at Grappone until his retirement last year, and after 28 years in the business I became the company's president on January 1 of this year. Our team is 235 people strong, and we are proud to partner with three of the world's top auto manufacturers: Ford, Mazda, and Honda. Over the last century our business has gone through many, many iterations. An entrepreneurial spirit has gotten us to where we are, and I have faith that it will lead us soundly into the next century of business.

The auto industry is dynamic and is arguably as entrepreneurial an industry as our country has ever produced. The local dealers who connect the manufacturers to the end consumer are, in many cases, anchors in their communities. In New Hampshire alone, there are 158 new car and truck dealers who employ almost 12,500 people. Together we generate more than \$700 million in annual payroll, and support countless vendors, civic groups, and nonprofit organizations. It is not an overstatement to say that the word Grappone is as tied to community support in my home state as it is to selling cars, trucks, and parts. For many years we've committed 5% of our annual net profit to charitable causes.

To me, the presence of entrepreneurialism is a sign of a healthy business ecosystem. Entrepreneurs are, by nature, creative people, and where creativity exists, so does a sense of optimism. And where optimism shines its face, fear is not in the driver's seat. A long-held vision of mine is to create a workplace in which the team feels a sense of agency, to understand not just *that* their contributions matter, but also *how*. It is also important to our company that our team members feel a responsibility to give back to the community that supports us by buying and servicing their cars at Grappone. When team members ask if they can help build a kit car with a local high school, or host an event in our community room, or teach a young person about their trade, I see this vision come to life. I am proud to say that some of our team members have taken the brave step to have businesses of their own, in addition to working their day jobs alongside me. The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well at Grappone Automotive.

It is alive and well all across New Hampshire. On Monday this week I went back to my alma mater - the University of New Hampshire - and toured one of their farms where research and manual labor work alongside each other every day to grow food for the dining hall and local soup kitchens; then, on the other side of campus, I experienced the Olson Advanced Manufacturing Center, a coworking facility that serves as a pipeline for trained, skilled workers who will be able to successfully step into the state's manufacturing sector with practical knowledge and experience. Entrepreneurial companies from all across the globe call the Olson Center their home, and New Hampshire is a great beneficiary. From the farm to the

manufacturing floor, we talked about how to adapt and learn and invent and share, all tools found in the entrepreneur's toolbox.

My husband and I have three children, and one is very interested in coming into the family business after he's finished college and seen some more of the world. I am grateful every day that my ancestors chose a life of curiosity and hard work. Because they followed their entrepreneurial spirits, the fifth generation of Grappones can step into the business and carry on the tradition of caring for our team, guests, and community with integrity, kindness, and respect.

Thank you very much for your time today.