

## Whitman Ford closing at end of April

—By Sheena Harrison



Jon Whitman, in a 2005 file photo, said he is closing Whitman Ford because of his frustration with a costly rezoning battle with Bedford Township.

TEMPERANCE — Whitman Ford in Bedford Township plans to close its doors at the end of this month, president and owner Jon Whitman said Wednesday.

The franchise will be sold back to Ford Motor Co. on April 29, Mr. Whitman said. Other Ford dealerships have been bidding for about 40 vehicles left in Whitman Ford's stock.

Mr. Whitman decided to shut down his business because of his frustration over a costly rezoning battle with Bedford Township.

"I think it's hopeless for us in Bedford," he said. "I don't think we'll ever be treated fair."

Whitman Ford has 35 employees, and sold 2,800 to 3,000 new and used vehicles last year. The dealership, located at 7555 Lewis Ave., was founded in 1950 by Mr. Whitman's grandfather and father.

Bedford Township's board voted in 2008 to rezone 34 acres owned by Mr. Whitman for commercial use. However, residents were concerned the move would allow Wal-Mart or other big-box stores to be built on the land, which sits near Whitman Ford.

Voters overturned the township board's rezoning decision during a May, 2009 referendum. Mr. Whitman sued the township in July, 2009, saying the township had been unreasonable, arbitrary, and capricious in decisions regarding the zoning of his land.

Monroe County Circuit Court Judge Joseph Costello, Jr. overturned the referendum result in January, and also allowed eight acres next to the dealership to be rezoned from residential to commercial property. Bedford officials decided not to appeal the court's decision.

Mr. Whitman said negative attention from the rezoning issue affected his sales.

"I think when all these people hate you, it has an impact on your business," said Mr. Whitman, 56.

Township Supervisor Walter Wilburn said he regrets that Bedford Township will lose its only auto dealership.

"I hate to see the business close, because I hate to see people lose jobs," he said.