

Defense Think-Tank Champions 'Arsenal of Innovation'

by Gerald Scott

The Defense Corridor Center for Collaboration and Synergy, or Defense C3S, as its known in Sterling Heights, is the quiet champion for the Arsenal of Innovation.

Defense C3S is one of several entities pushing for the Van Dyke and Mound Road defense corridors to rally around the new name, "Arsenal of Innovation."

That, of course, is a derivative of the more famous Arsenal of Democracy, which the larger Detroit auto industry was known for when it was supplying arms to the Allies during World War II.

By now, Arsenal of Democracy might be a little quaint, so a number of entities including Defense C3S have been pushing for the more recent, and perhaps more relevant, Arsenal of Innovation notion.

The Defense Corridor Center has been holding tours and briefings for TACOM Army officials and related military groups to explain this push.

Ron Lamparter, manager of Defense C3S, explained why the notion of a Defense Corridor, a more

modern name like Arsenal of Innovation and the promotion of STEM curriculum to local schoolkids all makes sense for the area.

"Michigan is still a major center for defense because a lot of the research, development and engineering you do here," Lamparter said.

"The vehicle may be built elsewhere – just like the vehicles they design at the GM Tech Center aren't all built here – but they're designed here.

"I think if more people were aware of how big the contribution that defense makes to our state economy, they'd be impressed.

"The MEDC publishes a number of \$2.7 to \$2.9 billion (annually). The payroll at the Detroit Arsenal alone has got to be close to \$1 billion.

"It's just grossly underestimated. If you start to expand the definition of 'defense' to include homeland security, which is closely related, Michigan National Guard, and aerospace, which is all tied in, the contribution is huge. I can't get my arms around it, but intuitively my gut tells me that (defense) is close to \$30 billion a

year and huge numbers of jobs."

Indeed, especially in the past five years, which saw the great contraction of the auto industry across Southeast Michigan, oftentimes it was defense contracts that helped keep many traditional auto suppliers alive.

It was also pointed out that as many as 500 suppliers in metro Detroit alone provide services and products to the defense industry.

What's more, the Detroit Arsenal has become the Department of Defense's center of expertise for ground robotics.

Although aerial drones, such as those used in Iraq and Afghanistan, get more attention than ground robotics, it was noted that the Army has over 10,000 ground robots in theater and someone has to design, develop and maintain all of those – why not the Detroit auto and defense industries, participants in the Defense Corridor roundtable asked.

"Robotics is robotics," Lamparter said. "The technology that goes into it is easily transferable. There is synergy between ground robotics, air robotics and under-

sea robotics – plus the robotics used to assemble cars."

Point being that in the 21st century and even counting cut-backs at the Pentagon, there is still plenty of national defense

business and contracts to be had and it would do this area well not to forget that, even as the Motor City crown is still worn proudly,

Defense is never far behind autos, is the larger point.



Defense Corridor / Center for Collaboration and Synergy (Defense C3S)'s Ron Lamparter, left, presents a framed "Arsenal of Innovation" poster to TACOM's Randal Gaereminc, center, and Randy Talbot. The Defense Corridor is championing military influence in the area.

GM Engineers, Designer Tell XTS Story

by Gerald Scott

If there's a car GM has been aching to brag about these days, it probably is the 2013 Cadillac XTS, which has been receiving rave reviews from customers and auto media alike.

It might be GM's most notable vehicle since the Chevrolet Volt's heralded debut two years ago.

As such, last week's SAE Detroit Section dinner meeting at the San Marino Club in Troy was effectively the XTS's coming-out party. This is where the design and engineering leaders from the GM Tech Center were able to tell an audience of their peers the "back story" to how the well-received car was designed and built.

Speaking on behalf of the car's development were Jeanne Merchant, vehicle chief engineer; Christine Park, Cadillac lead designer; and Mike Hichme, User Interface Design Group manager at General Motors. (Also, Renee Conneally, Program Engineering manager, was scheduled to participate but she had to call in sick that evening).

Merchant kicked off the evening for GM.

"We are so happy to be here tonight to talk about our beautiful XTS," she said.

"We all know that a car is so much more than the sum of its parts. All of us who love cars, in our complex, challenging and endlessly fascinating industry, know that every car has a story.

"But I know that the truly great cars are a 'love story,' like our XTS, where our team becomes like a family, overcomes many challenges and creates a timeless design, with amazing technology . . . this is where our story really begins.

"The inspiration for the XTS was the Cadillac XTS Platinum Concept Car, which debuted at the North American International Auto Show in 2010.

"Our mission was to fulfill the promise of this exceptional concept car with passion and integrity. Along the way, we developed the most technologically advanced production Cadillac ever built, wrapped in an elegant, modern, spacious and efficient package – a car that our dealers couldn't wait

to sell and that our customers have fallen in love with."

Indeed, the challenge for any new Cadillac seems to be that of living up to the brand's proud 20th century heritage, but by wrapping the car in 21st century trimmings.

Cadillac seems to have become GM's test-bed for its highest and most-useful new road technologies, including the CUE system, for customer user experience, a catchall for the in-vehicle infotainment systems.

And this particular Cadillac just bristles with high technology. GM's Merchant continues the story.

"Just like the concept car, the production version of the XTS

features a long sleek proportion . . . even the details have details and the fine points have finer points, inside and out," she said.

"The standard 19-inch and available 20-inch sculptured wheels are the perfect blend of aesthetics that complement the fluidity of the vehicle in motion, stiffness that reduces road (coarseness)."

There's nothing coarse about this car. A highlight of the evening was when Cadillac Lead Designer Christine Park used a temporary workstation and video screen to actually sketch out the original interior she'd designed for the car. She handed out 400 autographed copies of her XTS interior design.



The 2013 Cadillac XTS at the SAE Detroit Section dinner.

City Hall's 4th Annual College Fair Includes Major Universities

The city of Warren will be hosting its 4th annual College Fair night on Thursday, Sept. 27 from 6 - 8 p.m.

The event will be held in the Warren City Hall atrium at One City Square on Van Dyke in downtown Warren, across from the GM Tech Center.

The College Fair is described as a unique opportunity for local families and parents of high school-aged students to learn about colleges and universities and financial aid that may be available from each institution.

"I am again personally inviting all students interested in pursuing a higher education to attend

the 4th annual Warren College Fair," Mayor Jim Fouts said in a statement.

"Representatives from over 40 colleges and universities will be available to discuss how their programs can meet your educational goals. Last year, over 60 colleges and universities and over 1,200 individuals attended. I hope to see you there.

Among the schools scheduled to have representatives are Baker College, Eastern Michigan, Ferris State, Henry Ford Community College, ITT Technical Institute, Macomb Community College, Oakland University and many more.

Plex Systems Eyes Business at NDIA

Software service company Plex Systems, with two sites in Auburn Hills and one in Troy, had a presence at the big NDIA Fall Business Event last week.

"We are an ERP (enterprise resource planning) software company," explained Plex spokeswoman Katy Teer. "We track the manufacturing process from the design of the product until it's shipped out."

"We're prevalent in the auto industry, food and beverages and defense. We like to say we have an impact from 'the shop floor to the top floor.'"

Teer added that Plex is perhaps one of the few supplier firms that has been adding to its

staff, even through the recent economic downturn.

Plex is up to 250 people across three sites – two in Auburn Hills and one in Troy, as noted. They typically hire developers and engineers, Teer said.

So that explains Plex's presence at the National Defense Industrial Assn.'s Fall Business Event, where Plex had a booth alongside much larger defense contractors such as BAE Systems and General Dynamics Land Systems. Plex's methodologies tend to be "cloud based" and Internet-accessible, such that they can help a supplier track their parts or systems with online tools and programs.

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