

Tech Center Engineer Champions Hispanic HIT

This week figures to be quite a busy one in the life of GM Tech Center MP Lead Engineer Diana Ortega.

She's a board member of the Hispanic Initiative Team (HIT), and employee resource group within General Motors and they are hosting an Hispanic Heritage Celebration dinner Oct. 10 at the Venetian Club in Madison Heights that she is organizing.

With more than 100 people slated to attend, the dinner is already a success. That, and they managed to recruit new GM Chief Diversity Officer Ken Barrett as the keynote speaker. He and 20 GM plant managers will be in attendance to learn more about the Hispanic market and culture.

Ortega works at the Vehicle Engineering Center at the GM Tech Center in Warren and she took a few minutes out of her busy schedule to discuss the upcoming dinner, her career path and other matters of interest.

"I've worked at GM for 14 years, I'm a manufacturing engineer, a lead engineer," Ortega said.

"(I've worked on) the Chevrolet Sonic, the Cadillac SRX, previous truck programs, full-size truck. Chevy Cruze, so many.

"I started my career in Pontiac, at Pontiac East Assembly, the truck plant. I started there, then went on to Truck, main campus, which was there in Pontiac, then I moved here in 2005. I even did an international assignment - I

lived in Mexico for two years - Silao Assembly, which was right in the middle of the country.

"I've been involved with the Affinity group for about 5 years, but I'm now a board member as of January 2012. One of my first tasks was to lead the team on the planning for an All Peoples Meeting - we had one in May, and then now we're having Hispanic Heritage in October."

Ortega is pleased that more than 100 people will attend this function and that so many GM executives and business leaders have promised to be on hand, offering support for her cause.

"The Hispanic Heritage Celebration is more social, the one in May is more state of business," she said. "The May one was about connecting with our customers, so we had (GM Vice President) Alicia Boler-Davis come in and talk about the customer experience and the Hispanic market, and how we tie that in. It was very interesting.

"The event in May was about 75, so it was a full house. This event, we gear to over 100 folks. We have Latino community partners, followed by GM employees.

"We have a lot of goals. Our main goals are to promote Hispanic development and professional development. The other is to reinforce our community involvement - to help bridge that. The third would be Workplace of Choice initiatives as well, making sure we're the top candidate's pick when



GM Tech Center Engineer Diana Ortega at the VEC.

we're out there recruiting. "I sit on a recruiting team, that's another role I started in June. I'm part of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers recruiting team here at GM."

Ortega herself is a graduate of the University of Detroit Mercy (engineering) and also she received her MBA from the University of Michigan - Flint. "I went to work full-time and then did an aggressive 24-month MBA (program)," she recalled.

As far as external recruiting goes, Ortega said that the University of Puerto Rico and several

University of Texas campuses have been generating Hispanic engineering talent for General Motors of late.

She's a member of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers as well as the National Society of Hispanic MBAs.

All of the education and work has paid off for her. Now, she's extending her hand to her fellow Latinos to help them move up the food chain in the auto industry as well. Overall, Ortega described engineering as a very challenging, but also satisfying profession for her.

While Paris Show Sizzles, Europe's Car Sales Fizzle

By LORI HINNANT
Associated Press

PARIS (AP) - Carmakers prepared for a future of lower sales in Europe, labor strife and uncertainty as they set out the latest models at the Paris Auto Show last week.

France's carmakers will be aiming for the mass market with their launches at the auto show, which had its media preview last week. The show is now open to the public.

France's Peugeot, Citroen and Renault see the event as a chance to show off their latest models to a hometown crowd.

France produced 2.2 million cars last year, compared to 3.5 million in 2005. The industry employs 30 percent fewer people in France than it did 10 years ago, and more job cuts are imminent.

European data show new passenger car registrations dropped 8.9 percent in August, the 11th consecutive monthly decline. And the industry is well over capacity, selling far fewer cars than factories already running on reduced capacity can produce.

Rebecca Lindland, director of research for IHS Automotive, said the current downturn is no blip. Car manufacturers are facing a long-term reduction in demand in Europe.

Even as far out as 2020, the forecast "really never gets above 15.5 million units," down from 17.5 million in 2007. Plant closures, which many carmakers have been calling for, are "incredibly difficult politically but (are) incredibly necessary."

"If you can't change demand, you have to change supply," she said.

Only three plants have shut down in Europe since the debt crisis took hold in 2010, according to auto industry consultants Alix Partners in a June report. Peugeot has proposed closing one factory in France this year, but the plan has run into opposition from France's powerful unions and the government.

PSA Peugeot Citroen chief executive Philippe Varin insisted last week that the only solution is to close plants, no matter how politically difficult.

"This situation is not tenable over the long term," he said.

Sergio Marchionne, CEO of Fiat and Chrysler, has long advocated that the European Union coordinate such decisions and help carmakers restructure - since individual countries tend to fight just to save plants on their home turf.

"I think it would be much more beneficial if this became a European problem as opposed to a national problem," he said.



The 1937 Chevrolet Coach with a front bench seat. The 2013 Chevrolet Impala is the last North American passenger car in the industry to offer a front bench seat.



The 1963 Chevrolet Impala Sport Sedan with a front bench seat. Only 1 in 10 Impala buyers chose the \$195 option last year on the LS and LT models.

Impala Will Mark End of an Era as Bench Seats Go Away

DETROIT - When the 2014 Chevrolet Impala arrives next year, it will put to rest a fixture of automobiles since the days of the horseless carriage - the front bench seat.

The outgoing Impala is the last passenger car in production in North America to offer three-across front seating, an option that ends with the introduction of Chevy's redesigned flagship sedan.

The passing of the front bench seat into automotive history is expected to transpire without notice from many car buyers. Only 1 in 10 Impala buyers chose the \$195 option last year on the LS and LT models. For many of today's car buyers, front bucket seats are the norm - a trend that General Motors designers expect will continue.

"A lot of people prefer bucket seats because they're sporty, even in models that aren't sports cars," said Clay Dean, GM director of design.

"Our customers also appreciate

having the center console as a convenient place to store their phone and other personal items."

The first Chevrolet ever manufactured, the Series C Classic Six of 1911, featured a front bench seat. Chevrolet will continue to offer bench seats on pickup trucks and sport utilities.

The need for six-passenger sedans is largely being met today by SUVs or crossovers, such as the Chevrolet Suburban and Traverse, which offer seating for up to eight.

"There is certain nostalgia for bench seats, like being able to snuggle up with your date at a drive-in movie, and some cus-

tomers still like them," Dean said.

"You never know, we might see bench seats re-emerge someday, possibly in very small cars like the EN-V urban mobility concept vehicle, in which the feeling of open space may be very desirable."

Special Olympics Michigan Soccer Finals Needs Volunteers

by Jennifer Knightstep

This time of year, volunteer opportunities abound.

There's the local soup kitchen, the church carnival, and the school PTA, to name a few, and while all of these are worthy causes, there's another event that needs volunteers, one that shouldn't be overlooked - the Special Olympics Michigan Soccer Finals.

The soccer finals, post-game dinner, and formal dance are scheduled for Oct. 19-20 at War-

ren's Halmich Park and the General Motors Vehicle Engineering Center.

More than 1,100 athletes are eagerly anticipating this year's events. All that's missing is a small army of volunteers to make it all happen, from keeping score at the soccer field to bussing tables at the dinner and even busting moves on the dance floor.

This is the General Motors Tech Center's 32nd year hosting the Special Olympics Michigan Soccer Finals, but according to GM's Joseph Wrobel, none of it would be possible without the

commitment of the volunteers.

"Imagine all of the work involved in hosting a Thanksgiving dinner for your family and friends," he said. "Now imagine holding a dinner and dance for 1,200 athletes and coaches and coordinating a few hundred soccer games, too."

Wrobel adds that he's looking forward to this year's event, and that he knows, from anecdotes from the athletes and coaches, that this is an event they look forward to all year, too.

The soccer finals begin with an

opening ceremony on Friday, Oct. 19, then the games begin at 2:30 p.m. at Halmich Park (at 3001 East 13 Mile Road) and the GM Vehicle Engineering Center (30901 Van Dyke Avenue).

The games will end at about 6 p.m., followed by dinner and dancing 6-10 p.m. at the GM VEC.

On Saturday, the soccer games begin at Halmich Park at 8:30 a.m. and continue until 4 p.m.

To volunteer, contact Dan Ekonen at ekone1dk@cmich.edu, or contact Ekonen by phone at 989-774-7203.