Tuskegee Airmen to Visit GM's Advanced Energy Lab

by Gerald Scott

The GM Veterans Day celebration figures to be a "keeper" this year, thanks to some World War II heroes who will be visiting.

Those heroes are the Tuskegee Airmen, several of which will be attending GM's annual Veterans Day celebration.

"Veterans Day this year is Nov. 11, a Sunday, so we decided to host our event on Nov. 9, the Friday before," said GM employee and event organizer, Mark Deppe.

"What's different this year is that the event is not being held at the Design Dome. Instead, it's going to be at the Advanced Energy Lab Auditorium (which was earlier called the GM Powertrain auditorium) on the GM Tech Center campus," he added.

"Last year, we had 220 people show up, so we're expecting the same size or more this year."

Indeed, the ranks of the Tuskegee Airmen were small to begin with during World War II, so the opportunity to meet and greet a couple of these African American airmen who made their names during World War II will be something that attendees will figure to especially enjoy and remember.

"I have a high school-aged son and it's important enough that I'm going to bring him in to see this," Deppe, a U.S. Navy veteran, pointed out. Deppe is organizing the show together with Bob Brinker from UAW Local 160. Every year, the GM Veterans Affinity group based in Warren hosts a large gathering for active and retired military veterans to gather and enjoy each other's company on or near the national Veterans Day.

Deppe said that the GM Veterans Affinity group, with chapters at GM facilities in Warren, Milford and Grand Blanc, now numbers more than 6,000 members.

Meanwhile, according to one history, the Tuskegee Airmen have a long and proud history, indeed.

The Tuskegee Airmen is the popular name of a group of African American pilots who fought in World War II. Formally, they formed the 332nd Fighter Group and the 477th Bombardment Group of the United States Army Air Corps, which later became the Air Force.

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first African-American military aviators in the United States armed forces. During World War II, African Americans in many U.S. states were still subject to the Jim Crow laws.

The American military was racially segregated, as was much of the federal government. The Tuskegee Airmen were subjected to racial discrimination, both within and outside the army. Despite these adversities, they trained and flew with distinction. All black military pilots who trained in the United States trained at Tuskegee, including five Haitians.

Although the 477th Bombardment Group "worked up" on North American B-25 Mitchell bombers, they never served in combat; the Tuskegee 332nd Fighter Group was the only operational unit, first sent overseas as part of Operation Torch, then seeing action in Sicily and Italy, before being deployed as bomber escorts in Europe, where they were very successful.

The Tuskegee Airmen initially were equipped with Curtiss P-40 Warhawks fighter-bomber aircraft, briefly with Bell P-39 Airacobras (March 1944), later with Republic P-47 Thunderbolts (June–July 1944), and finally with the aircraft with which they became most commonly associated, the North American P-51 Mustang (July 1944).

When the pilots of the 332nd Fighter Group painted the tails of their P-47s and later, P-51s, red, the nickname "Red Tails" was coined. Bomber crews applied a more effusive "Red-Tail Angels" sobriquet.

For visitor information, contact Mark Deppe by phone at 586-907-6085.

Major James A. Ellison returns the salute of Mac Ross, as he reviews the first class of Tuskegee cadets, flight line at U.S. Army Air Corps basic and advanced flying school, with Vultee BT-13 trainers in the background, Tuskegee, Alabama, 1941.

Portrait of Tuskegee Airman Edward M. Thomas, by Toni Frissell, March, 1945. GM will be hosting a contingent of Tuskegee Airmen at the Tech Center in Warren on Nov. 9.

GM Plans to Hire 10,000 Computer Experts Over 5 Years

By TOM KRISHER
AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) – Now hiring in Detroit: Software developers and programmers.

General Motors is moving past layoffs and the Motor City's rusty, low-tech image. It's setting out on its own to develop software and invent the most advanced gizmos for your car.

America's biggest automaker plans to hire up to 10,000 computer professionals in the next three to five years as it tries to lead the auto industry with cutting-edge technology.

It's a bold and expensive move, counter to the industry's history of buying software and other electronic applications from outside companies. Experts say it's also the start of a trend as manufacturers realize that software is among the few things that will set them apart from competitors.

"The companies that build the software themselves in general are going to have an advantage," says David Kirkpatrick, author of a book about Facebook and CEO of Techonomy Media Inc., a New York firm that specializes in setting up technology conferences. "If you outsource the development of software in particular to others, you can risk . . . your own ability to compete in the future."

General Motors Co. isn't alone in trying to move more technology development under its roof. But the plans of its biggest competitor, Ford Motor Co., aren't nearly as ambitious.

GM aims to bring 90 percent of its computer technology work into the company by recruiting workers to four new information technology centers around the nation. Ford recently joined GM, BMW AG and Renault-Nissan in opening a technology office in California's Silicon Valley, although it's staffed by only about 15 people.

GM's first "Information Technology Innovation Center" was announced last month in Austin, Texas, with plans to hire 500 programmers and software experts. And last week the carmaker unveiled plans to hire 1,500 more at a second computer center in Warren on the campus of its big tech center.

The other two sites haven't been revealed.

Staff at the centers will try to stay on top of software trends. They'll develop the latest ways to link smartphones with cars or control a vehicle's heating and air conditioning with voice commands. They'll also be counted on to invent technology that no one's thought of yet. And GM also sees long-term cost savings when the centers are fully in operation.

"We're currently seeking the next generation of game-changers to help us usher in a new age of automotive innovation," says GM Chief Information Officer Randy Mott, who was Hewlett-Packard's CIO until he joined GM in February.

Although there are shortages of programmers and software engineers in some parts of the country, GM should be able to recruit enough talent by setting up shop in four different regions, experts say.

With the tech-hub of Austin and GM's home base in Detroit already covered, the most likely locations for the next two centers are on the West Coast, experts say.

GM says it will offer competitive wages and benefits to pull in recent college graduates and experienced information technology professionals. The company's iconic brand status will help attract people, experts say.

But offering competitive pay will cost GM. Software engineers make $60,000 to $70,000 a year right out of college, and experienced workers can make more, says James Stoeckmann, senior compensation specialist for World at Work, an organization of human resources executives who deal with pay issues.

Expensive or not, the strategy is correct for GM as it tries to differentiate its products from other automakers, says Michael Robinet, managing director of IHS Automotive, an industry consulting firm.

With the gap in quality between brands shrinking, the way a car drives and its electronics soon will be the only things that set a company apart, he says.

Currently, GM and most automakers rely on outside companies for touch-screen and other technology. But often those companies sell the technology to multiple carmakers, or new software is sold in an expensive bidding war, Robinet says.

"If they have their own skunk works and they find a new technology, they are guaranteed to bring it to market first," he says.

Ford, for instance, worked with Microsoft Inc. on its pioneering Sync system, which brought voice activation technology into cars ahead of most competitors. But Ford only had exclusive use of the system for a year before Microsoft was able to license it to other companies, namely Hyundai and Kia.

Outside companies have so much expertise that it will take years for GM to catch up, making it unlikely that the company will completely walk away from outside firms, Robinet says.

Yet with software gaining so much importance in the way all companies operate, it's even possible that GM will find its next generation of leaders somewhere in the computer centers, says Kirkpatrick.

"CEOs of every company in the future are going to have to be software thinkers," he says.

GM IT employees, from left, Dan Krzywosinski, Neal Bond and Michelle Lauka. GM is opening an IT Innovation Center in Warren and plans to hire 1,500 high-tech employees for the center over the next several years.