

Auto Industry Peers Praise Auburn Hills Chamber Event

by Jim Stickford

The first Auto.Tech.Connect networking event, held at the Rochester Mills Production Brewery in Auburn Hills on Nov. 15, was a success, said Denise Asker, executive director of the Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce.

"We decided to sponsor the event after we noticed that while the city is an epicenter of automotive talent, there wasn't any kind of event like this - a place where auto people could come together and network," Asker said.

"So when some people at Delphi approached us and said that while the chamber puts on a lot of events, would we consider holding some sort of industry exclusive event because they just wanted to network with their peers."

So Asker and the Auburn Hills chamber organized Auto.Tech.Connect. She said the gathering on Nov. 15 was well-attended with about 35 people showing up. She said she considers that a good turnout for a first-time event.

The location offered two advantages, Asker said. First, the brewery is a new Auburn Hills business that had the chance to show off what they can do to local business people.

The business has been in operation for less than a year. Second, attendees had the opportunity to sample the brewery's wares while networking.

For now, Asker said, the plan is to hold regular networking events where people can get together. There are no plans to hold events where guest speakers can give presentations.

"Now that may change," Asker said. "We are still evolving. But when we suggested adding content to the gatherings, members



David Youngman, left, tends the tap room for the Auto.Tech.Connect event.

said that they have plenty of events like that they can already attend, what they are looking is a place where they can network."

Jeffrey Harrison, business development manager for Customized Manufacturing and Assembly, said he came to the gathering because he saw it as a connection to the greater auto business world.

His company does low-volume assembly for OEMs, and they are always on the lookout for new contacts and business.

Tim Granchi is with Gibbs Amphibian, the company that will be making amphibious vehicles in Auburn Hills. When asked why he came to the gathering, he joked, "beer."

But he added that he heard about the brewery and wanted to see it, and, of course, he wants to stay on top of what's happening in Auburn Hills.

Nick Tebeau is an engineer with Leoni's. He manages the company's visions solutions division.

"I think the idea of holding a

networking event is great," Tebeau said. "The key to making the event successful is to dial in people with common interests and concerns."

"So, for this event, we don't need to have lawyers or accountants. Having auto people works. I mean I love flowers, but I didn't come here to meet a florist. And there is the beer. It's better than I expected."

Kelly Kirkpatrick, director of development for engineering and computer science at Oakland University, said things are going well at the university. They have an amazing group of students and enrollment is on the rise.

One way the university can serve its student population, Kirkpatrick said, is by connecting with local tech companies to see if any might have an interest in learning what the school is doing and seeing if any of the businesses are interested in taking interns from the school.

"We want to keep in touch with local businesses," Kirkpatrick said. "We are also trying to connect



The Auto.Tech.Connect group met Thursday at the Rochester Mills Production Brewery. Marketing Director David Youngman, center with cap, explains the process in the brewhouse area, where the brew kettle, mash tun, lauter tun and hot-and-cold "liquor tank" are located.

with the larger area in and around Auburn Hills.

"It's part of the mission of the school to connect with the community and an event like Auto.Tech.Connect is the perfect way to do that."

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Disney, Chevy Designers Link to Develop Epcot Ride

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maximum level of innovation, Disney and GM team members made sure that the core values of both brands would be accurately represented throughout the Test Track experience.

"At Chevrolet, the diversity of talent on our team allows us to consistently produce sophisticated, refined and detailed design - but we don't typically design through the eyes of a 12-year-old," said Jeff Mylenek, GM Design manager, Global Exhibit and Merchandising Design.

Working with Walt Disney Imagineering, we were inspired to see our brand story from a more youthful perspective and really opened the parameters on how to approach this design challenge."

Efforts were focused on creating a future-focused experience, while giving guests an authentic look at the actual automotive design process and a chance to create their own designs.

General Motors spokesman David Barnas discussed the guest experience at the "re-imagined" attraction in a little more detail. Asked if the redeveloped Test

Track really gives guests the experience of being an automotive designer, he affirmed that it does.

"It really takes into consideration that a guest is really immersed in what it's like to be an automotive designer, including while you're waiting in line to get into the experience," Barnas explained.

"It's one of the more popular rides at EPCOT. When you get there, you walk to a computer or a kiosk-type area and you actually sketch your own car . . . You take that with you on the electronic device, and you test it, you validate it along the way throughout the experience, as you get on the actual physical ride itself, and it gives you the impression, the feeling of how your car is actually performing on the ride.

"And then when you finish the ride, you can trace it virtually on computer simulators against other participants; you can email it to yourself, and you can develop a

(15-second) commercial as well (on a simulator), so it's all very immersive and it's all very interactive.

"At the old GM Test Track . . . you were a little bit more of an observer. This time, on the new Chevrolet Test Track, you are very much a participant, all the way through from sketching your own car and being able to interact with it."

The upgraded Test Track experience allows the whole family, including children, to participate in the design experience, he noted.

And while the aim of the Chevrolet Test Track, which opens Dec. 6, is largely to entertain, could the experience inspire the next generation of auto designers?

Barnas said, "It's really aimed at families, which means children as well . . . That would be great if we had young boys or young girls who eventually wanted to

become Chevrolet designers, we would love that - it would be fantastic."

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