



Whitacre Gives Tech Center Employees Big Salute for GM's Quick Turnaround

by Jim Stickford

Former GM CEO Ed Whitacre visited his old stomping grounds at the Tech Center's VEC building on Feb. 18 to sell copies of his new book, "American Turnaround: Reinventing AT&T and GM and the Way We Do Business in the USA."

Whitacre, who ran GM during the critical months after the company came out of bankruptcy, was well received by Tech Center employees.

Ginny Schmidt, an engineer who works in intellectual property, waited in line to get her copy of Whitacre's book autographed.

"I've always been a fan of Mr. Whitacre," Schmidt said. "I supported him when he was here. I've been here at GM for 13 years and I got his book because I wanted to see what were his insights of our company. I remember those times and I wish he stayed around here longer. I liked his personable, approachable style of leadership. That's why I want to read his book."

Robert Harris, a systems manager at GM's global supply department, said he too was a fan of Whitacre.

"I want to read how we did it, how we survived as a company," Harris said. "I was here when we lived it, now I want to see how we did it. We were just working hard and didn't look at what we were doing as making history."

Also on hand was Whitacre's collaborator, former *Wall Street Journal* reporter Leslie Cauley. She said they worked on the book for a little over a year.

"The biggest surprise I got from writing the book was learning about Ed's background," Cauley said. "I worked as a business journalist covering the telecom industry, and he was with

AT&T for many years, but I didn't know much about his personal life. It was nice to learn about his path. He's from Texas and his family was a union family. His father worked for the railroad. His is the quintessential American story. His life is uplifting and it's never really been covered."

Though she spent much time covering the telecom industry, Cauley never covered the auto business and said learning about that was also an experience.

"This book has a lot of what is done at the Tech Center," Cauley said. "It played a huge role in GM's comeback, and most people don't know about that."

Whitacre said he decided to write the book after his friends and family encouraged him to write about his career.

"I finally succumbed. The hardest thing about writing this book, aside from all the hard work, was telling the truth without hurting people's feelings," Whitacre said. "They're all good people, but some had to be moved, things had to be changed. I agonized over that a lot."

Whitacre said he was retired from AT&T when he was asked to take over GM by the Obama administration. He first said no, but they kept asking and said that it was a public service to run GM, and that was the clincher.

Ultimately, Whitacre said he was glad he took the job. He also credits the work done at the Tech Center for playing a huge role in saving the company.

"The Tech Center turned the company around," Whitacre said.

"Saving GM was about designing, building and selling the best cars in the world. The workers are responsible. They brought GM back, not Ed Whitacre. They all did an excellent job."

Whitacre said he had heard a lot about the Detroit business world.

"I always heard about the Detroit business culture, but I didn't see anything terrible. It wasn't any different from anywhere else," Whitacre said. "The biggest factor in GM's turnaround was the change in attitude. We simplified things so we could get the hell out of the way of our people so that they could do what they could do. Remember, the quality turnaround happened pretty quickly."

Prior to visiting the Tech Center, Whitacre stopped in at GM's headquarters in Detroit. He said it was nice "seeing the old gang."

"I always felt that GM was a family, from the assembly line to the top," Whitacre said. "I knew the turnaround would happen fast. I had a gut feeling, but we didn't fix everything. But the people here want to work, their attitudes are good and that's good for the company."

Whitacre said he always drove GM products. His favorite GM vehicle is the CTS-V.

"I won't be without one unless GM stops making it," Whitacre said. "It's a good car."

Ed Whitacre was at the Tech Center to sell copies of his new biography.

GM Turns Off Lights for the Birds

The Detroit Audubon Society recently recognized General Motors for its continued participation in a program that helps birds avoid crashing into illuminated buildings during migratory night flights.

GM encourages employees at its world headquarters in Detroit to turn off their lights at night during spring and fall migrations, from March through May and from August through October to avoid attracting birds.

The automaker is participating for the seventh year in Safe Passage Great Lakes, a joint program of the Detroit Audubon Society and Michigan Audubon.

"General Motors has been an eager and committed partner of this initiative since its inception," said Fred Charbonneau, Detroit Audubon Society board member. "GM's continued support of Safe Passage Great Lakes is a testament to its commitment to wildlife protection."

The U.S. Forest Service estimates that as many as half-a-billion birds die each year due to collisions with buildings. Many

species of birds migrate at night, using the stars to navigate. Attracted by lights left on overnight in multi-story buildings, birds collide into windows or become disoriented, circling the building until they die of exhaustion.

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