

GM Opens New Innovation Center at Its Warren Campus

by Jim Stickford

May 13 was a busy day for GM. Members of the media got the first look at the new Innovation Center on the company's Tech Center campus in Warren, and company CEO Dan Akerson announced that a new data center will be built at the Milford Proving Ground.

Attendees included Gov. Rick Snyder, Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel and U.S. Representative Sander Levin.

The automaker is spending \$100 million for the companion site to its new Enterprise Data Center in Warren.

The two facilities are replacing a network of 23 data centers operated by GM and three information technology suppliers around the world.

The \$130 million enterprise in Warren will serve as the computing backbone for the automaker's global operations.

The center, benchmarked against the best in the world, says GM, is the capstone of GM's efforts to transform its IT operations to help the company work smarter and faster from the design studio to the factory to the showroom floor, Akerson said.

The facility is the first of two Information Technology Operations and Command centers that

bring in-house GM's global IT infrastructure and consolidate a network of multiple sites. The two centers will integrate and streamline all aspects of product development, manufacturing, marketing, sales and OnStar applications to speed access to any GM employee anywhere in the world.

"Having a single nerve center for our global operations will get newer vehicle designs and technologies into our customers' hands quicker and improve the bottom line," Akerson said.

"IT is back home where it should be, and it further drives unnecessary complexity from our businesses while improving our operational efficiency and better supporting our business strategy."

Congressman Levin said at the announcement that GM's investment in IT was not inevitable. Many thought the company should go bankrupt, he said, and only through the work and vision of people like Akerson has it been able to come back and invest in its infrastructure and, "ultimately, in America."

For example, crash test simulations enabled by super-computing generate data that is analyzed and applied in vehicle design and development or refinement of safety technologies, sav-



GM CEO Dan Akerson unveils plans for a new tech facility to be built in Milford.

ing \$350,000 for each physical crash test avoided.

An application that enables Global Product Development

teams to make tooling payments to suppliers at key points throughout the development cycle helps suppliers prioritize the

timing of critical parts and reduce their overall engineering ex-

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TARDEC Director, General Discuss How Auto Suppliers Can Become Significant Contributors to Defense

by Jim Stickford

Representatives from Detroit's military establishment met in Troy on May 15 to discuss how they could work with the area's automotive companies to take advantage of business opportunities available through the defense department.

David Thomas, director of the National Automotive Center (NAC) at the Army's Tank Automotive Research, Development and Engineering Center (TARDEC) in Warren was a speaker at the event and said that even with today's reality of sequestration of the budget, there are opportunities for automotive suppliers to become military suppliers.

"I am here because I want to work with auto people," Thomas said. "The NAC was created to leverage commercial automotive technology so that it can be applied to military vehicles."

Thomas said that recently the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Army have been collaborating on finding ways to develop lightweighting technology for motor vehicles as a way of improving fuel efficiency.

He said they're working on how to weld advanced materials such as aluminum and magnesium onto today's military vehicles – and how to do it in such a way that the materials can stand up to the rough use that comes with military vehicles being used in the field.

"We're sharing costs with the DOE," Thomas said. "Ford, Chrysler and GM, they're all working on this and we share what we learn with each other.



Gen. Mike Stone

So it's possible that rather than using so much steel, the military vehicles of the future will be made up of a mix of steel, aluminum, magnesium, carbon fiber and plastics."

Lightweighting is not only im-

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GM to Sell Rebadged Nissan as City Express

GM and Nissan announced last week that the companies have signed an agreement for Nissan to produce a small cargo vehicle that GM will sell in the United States and Canada.

GM will procure the vehicle from Nissan and distribute it through the Chevrolet dealer network. GM expects the Chevrolet City Express, based on the Nissan NV200, to be available for sale in the fall of 2014.

"Our fleet customers have asked us for an entry in the commercial small van segment, so this addition to the Chevrolet portfolio will strengthen our position with fleets and our commercial customers," said Ed Peper, U.S. vice president of GM Fleet and Commercial Sales.

Joe Castelli, Nissan vice president, Commercial Vehicles and Fleet, added, "Working with partners to expand markets for our innovative products enhances Nissan's growth and manufacturing efficiency by leveraging our capacity to meet growing demand in this space."

Nissan currently sells a version of the vehicle as the NV200

in numerous markets globally, including the United States and Canada. The Nissan NV200, a compact commercial vehicle, is a previous winner of the International Van of the Year Award.

According to a joint news release, cost of ownership for the vehicle is among the lowest in the class due to low running costs, the efficiency of the en-

gines and drivetrains, and a safety structure that helps to minimize crash damage.

It was first launched in Japan as the Nissan NV200 Vanette in May of 2009, and in Europe in autumn 2009. It is a front-engine, front-wheel-drive van built on Nissan's B platform.

The price of the Chevrolet City Express will be announced later.



The 2015 Chevrolet City Express will be built by Nissan in Mexico.

It Takes a Village for Successful Car Design These Days

by Jim Stickford

No one can go it alone.

That was the message at the Automotive Hall of Fame in Dearborn May 14.

Automobile design and manufacturing have always been a complicated job, but in today's world – when vehicle models are refreshed or redesigned in just two years instead of the former six – it has become impossible for companies to "do the designs

in their own four walls."

At least, that's what Stan Przybylinski, vice president of Research for CIMdata, said at a special media day sponsored by Dassault Systemes.

Przybylinski was one of several speakers who talked about issues of production and where the auto industry is going in terms of manufacturing processes and what types of materials will be used to make the cars of the future.

Przybylinski said that determining the Product Life Management (PLM) of a car is more difficult these days because cars are so much more complicated. OEMs rely more than ever on the work of their suppliers.

"It's become very complicated," Przybylinski said. "Automakers must design for everything and that means global designs and global competition. Automakers are seeing competition coming from places they never

would have imagined only a few years ago."

He cited Korea as a great example. A decade ago, Hyundai was a much smaller company, but it's growth on the world stage has been impressive, he said.

Przybylinski said he expects China to become a bigger player in the years to come. He went on to point out that one of the difficulties in being a global player is

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