Tech Center News

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Warren Library To Offer Garden Tips On May 23

The Warren Public Library is presenting "Basics of Herb, Patio and Container Gardening" on Thursday, May 23, starting at 6 p.m.

Those attending will learn how to prepare their gardens for the growing season and how to select the best plants and herbs for the Southern Michigan region, whether for a patio garden or a large plot.

The lecture will be held in the conference room next to the Civic Center Library. To register, call 586-574-4564.

Got News?

If you have solid business news for this paper, please contact us at News@TechCenterNews.com.

GM Opens New Innovation Center at Its Warren Campus

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penses by millions of dollars.

Chevrolet tracked sales data of last year's Impala in markets where car buyers traded in non-GM models, enabling a jump-start to sales of the new 2014 Impala in markets where it previously underperformed.

The enterprise data center and a companion data center at the Milford Proving Ground are part of a previously announced plan to transform GM's global IT footprint from 23 facilities to two by 2015. Construction of the $100 million data center expansion in Milford will begin this summer.

The center is expected to open in July 2014. Like the Warren data center, the Milford facility will focus on high-power computing, using much the same equipment and material. The value of IT equipment for Milford is estimated at $158 million.

The Milford location was chosen because it is more than 25 and less than 50 miles from Warren, allowing "mirrored" data, so if one facility is off line for any reason, the other will have the same data available without interruption.

"It's all about reducing risk and making sure no one event would affect both centers at the same time," said Curt Loehr, GM Information Technology project manager. "Each Center has its own utility feed using separate paths to provide uninterrupted power. We even checked weather data going back a half-century and Warren and Milford are affected by separate weather patterns."

GM is saving money by having the data centers on existing campuses, which have negotiated bulk utility rates, existing infrastructure and security.

All of this is part of a larger effort to make GM a world-class company, said Tim Cox, CIO – Global Development Services. Just a few years ago, about 85 percent of GM's IT work was done by contractors.

Akerson said that led to the creation of what he called shadow IT networks. GM's contractors didn't get always get the information to engineers and others fast enough.

The result was that employees would set up contracts of their own, often with the same companies GM already had contracts with, to get needed technical information in a much more timely fashion.

But by having GM, through its four newly-opened Enterprise Data Centers – located in Warren, Phoenix, Austin (Texas) and Atlanta – the company is able to control its data flow and designing programs to aid in the running of the company. They will employ between 1,200 and 1,400 people at the Warren Innovation Center alone.

"The shift is from trying to squeeze every nickle out of IT expenses to turning it into an area of innovation," Cox said.

Akerson said when he first took over GM and started emphasizing IT, a reporter asked him, "Don't you know that GM is a car company?"

"That attitude astounded me," Akerson said. "We've turned that notion on its head. There's not a world-class company in the world that doesn't excel at IT."

By creating its own IT solutions, GM will better be able to handle design, payments and production by producing programs suited to the company's specific needs, Cox said.

They are hiring thousands of programmers and they want 35 percent of them to be right out of college.

Ultimately, Akerson said, all this is about GM's desire to become the car leader.

"When I got here, there was a core of employees that were tired of being average, being good enough to be in the middle of the pack," Akerson said. "We're seeing the results of that desire right now. We've made great strides in moving from 'good enough' to being the best. There is a will to win here and the people understand what that takes."

Ford Having 'Super' Sales

Driven by strong sales of two of Ford's newest vehicles, the Ford Fusion and Escape, Ford's share of the "super segment," comprised of subcompacts, compacts, midsize sedans and small utilities, stands at 13 percent through the first four months of 2013 – representing a gain of 2 share points compared to the same period last year.

The future success of automakers in the United States will in large part be based on market gains in four key vehicle segments – subcompacts, compacts, midsize sedans and small utility vehicles.

Combined, these four segments represent more than half of all new vehicle sales in the U.S. In 2004 the super segment was only 35 percent of the total overall market.

"Ford's share has grown this year faster than all other automakers," said Erich Merkle, Ford U.S. sales analyst. "The driving force behind this is our phenomenal rate of growth in the super segment and our continued success with these key vehicles in the long-dominated Japanese regions of the country.

It Takes a Village for Successful Car Design These Days

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that each market has its own rules and regulations, and that vehicles must be designed and made to fit these rules, increasing the complexity of the whole process.

So for OEMs to stay competitive, they are relying more than ever on new technologies and softwares, he said, technologies they might not be that familiar with.

It's now possible to change the performance of new cars just by changing the software used to operate the vehicle, Przybylinski said. He has a friend who designs hydraulic brakes. When he last spoke with his friend, he was told that he's not a brake designer, he's a software designer.

But achieving quality isn't as simple as embracing the concept of quality, Przybylinski said, adding that OEMs must have systems in place throughout the entire design process and these systems must be embraced by everyone, from in-house engineers to contractors to suppliers who make the parts and design their own systems that they supply to car companies.

"PLM is a strategy that must support the product from ideation to the end of the life of the product," Przybylinski said. "That means when you design something, you have to know how the vehicle and its parts will be recycled at the end of the car's life."

That's part of "designing for everything." The batteries of electric cars just can't be thrown in a landfill. OEMs must have some sense of what to do with those batteries when designing electric cars.

Jim Staargaard, president of Plasan Carbon Composites, said his company is only a few years old. Its first plant is in Vermont and makes carbon fiber parts the traditional way, which takes them about 90 minutes to convert carbon fiber into parts like a hood or roof. On the other hand, their new Grand Rapids plant uses a new method that allows them to shorten that time to 17 minutes.

Staargaard said the company is working on making that time even shorter by coming up with new formulas for carbon fiber that will be easier to press and mold.

He said they didn't wait until they could reduce processing times of carbon fiber production further, because it's important to have revenue now while developing better materials and processes for the future.

With the emphasis on lightweighting by OEMs, suppliers will continue to work in improving substances like carbon fiber. The problem, Staargaard said, is that people don't know as much about carbon fiber as they do about steel or aluminum. It's easy to program the characteristics of steel into a computer so that engineers can design parts on computers.

They can't do that now with carbon fiber. So having a company like Dassault Systemes, with its processes helps companies like his, Staargaard said.

The future of the car business will depend on separate companies being on the same page when developing complicated vehicles that use more computer code than today's F-15 fighter.

"We're the Marines on the beach," Staargaard said. "We're educating the OEMs on just what can be done."

Michael LaLande, director of Transportation and Mobility for Dassault Systemes, said reaching a target of zero defects means starting at the beginning of the design process.

It's now possible to create 3D computer constructs that can accurately show how parts and vehicles will perform in real life without having to build expensive prototypes. That's done by all parties being connected at every stage of production. Dassault specializes in that, LaLande said.

By being connected in real time, OEMs and suppliers can communicate quickly and get the turnaround times they need to stay competitive in a global market that is constantly introducing new players, he said. That's the future and it's here now.