

# Supplier Offers Program to Eliminate Traffic Points

by Stefanie Carano  
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Detroit Auto Scene

Troy-based O/E Learning is providing drivers the chance to avoid points on their license for speeding tickets and other small offenses.

The class has come about as the result of a new Michigan law scheduled to have been enacted Dec. 31, which states that drivers who receive a ticket for a minor moving violation can avoid points on their license if they complete the Basic Driver Improvement Course, or BDIC.

O/E Learning was approved by the Secretary of State to administer the course.

Based in Troy, the company has been providing classes and training programs since 1984, primarily for the Detroit automakers.

"General Motors is our long-standing client, as well as the automotive supply base that supports them," said O/E Learning President

Brian Makowski. "We do a lot of safety, quality training for them."

Curriculum for BDIC has been provided by the National Safety Council and will be administered by O/E Learning.

"The total time for the course is three to four hours, depending on the options you choose for the course," Makowski said. "It's an adaptive curriculum."

A test is included at the end of the BDIC, which Makowski said consists of about 25-35 questions and takes about 30 minutes to complete.

After receiving their ticket, drivers will be notified whether they are eligible for the course. From the date of their notification, they have 60 days to present the Secretary of State with a certificate of completion in order to avoid points on their license.

In order to be eligible for the course, drivers must have a valid, working drivers license and have two or fewer

points on their record. Those who received a ticket while driving a commercial vehicle, whose ticket violation was four or more points or whose ticket violation was a criminal offense, are not eligible.

While points can be avoided, drivers still have to pay any fines associated with their ticket and pay for the cost of the course. By law, the course cannot cost more than \$100.

The BDIC is an online course, though Makowski said the company plans to provide the course at their headquarters, located at 2125 Butterfield Ave., #300N in Troy, and will most likely set up a specific training center in specific geographic locations for those without access to a computer.

Makowski said that studies conducted by the National Safety Council indicate that more than 70 percent of drivers who participated in the driver safety training program had no collisions or any viola-



Brian Makowski, president of O/E Learning in Troy.

tions in a nine-year period after taking the course.

Makowski said the course provides a unique opportunity for drivers. Not only can they avoid points on their license, but they can also avoid higher insurance costs, too.

Other states, including California, have offered this type of option in lieu of points on licenses for years.

# No Retirement in Sight For Aging Baby Boomers

OMAHA, Neb. – As Baby Boomers began to turn 65 years old on Jan. 1, some 71 percent of Americans believe they should be encouraged to work past normal retirement age, according to a survey conducted by the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion.

The national survey, "The New Reality of 2011: Baby Boomers at 65" was commissioned by Home Instead Senior Care and provides a multi-generational perspective as those born into America's post-World War II population reach retirement age.

Home Instead CEO Roger Baumgart said, "We are encouraged to see there is opportunity for intergenerational collaboration to ensure that seniors in America age successfully."

The greatest concerns of Baby Boomers – the 77 million Americans born between Jan. 1, 1946 and Dec. 31, 1964 – about life after 65 are finances (48 percent) and health (34 percent).

While most Americans believe they should provide for retirees, many fear our society and economy will pay a stiff price for the post-war population explosion in the U.S.

Some 61 percent worry that Baby Boomers will bankrupt

the Social Security system, while 59 percent believe the needs of aging Boomers may overload the healthcare system.

Meanwhile, younger generations diverge from their elders in some key areas.

Thirty-one percent of Millennials feel that Boomers should be encouraged to retire, versus just 8 percent of the Silent-Greatest generation and 16 percent of Boomers themselves. Likewise, 37 percent of Millennials believe they should bear no responsibility to provide for retirees.

The report details the findings from a telephone survey taken between Dec. 2-8, 2010, of 1,029 adults in the continental U.S., and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

For full results, visit Home-Instead.com.

Otherwise, Baby Boomers reaching the traditional "retirement" age of 65 on Jan. 1 of this year is just one more example of the proverbial pig-passing-through-a-python type of impact that the Boomers continue to have on greater society.

The leading edge of the Baby Boom, those born from about 1946 to 1952, are the ones who generally fought the Vietnam War abroad, led the hippie movement at home and today are leading the entire generation to the traditional retirement of age of 65 and beyond.

Boomers continue to be an economic and employment force to be reckoned with.

# Toyota Pays \$10 Million To Settle 'Lexus' Lawsuit

LOS ANGELES (AP) – Toyota Motor Corp. agreed to pay \$10 million to the family of four people killed in a runaway Lexus crash that led to recalls of millions of the automaker's vehicles, attorneys said last week.

John Gomez, a lawyer who represents the victims' family, and Larry N. Willis, who represents the dealership that lent the Lexus to the family, confirmed the settlement amount of \$10 million.

Toyota, which did not admit or deny liability in the settlement, fought to keep the settlement amount confidential, but the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper and The Associated Press argued that the public's interest in the case outweighed confidentiality concerns.

A Superior Court judge last week agreed, but imposed a gag order in case the family wanted to appeal. They did not appeal, allowing lawyers to release the amount.

Toyota said in a statement it was disappointed the amount had been made public.

"As is common in these cases, these parties agreed to keep the amount confidential, in part to protect the families from unwanted solicitations and to allow them to move on from this difficult period," the automaker said.

The August 2009 crash killed off-duty California Highway Patrol Officer Mark Saylor, 45, his wife, their daughter and Saylor's brother-in-law Chris Lastrella.

They were killed on a suburban San Diego freeway when their car reached speeds of more than 120 mph, struck a sport utility vehicle, launched off an embankment, rolled several times and burst into flames.

Investigators determined that a wrong-size floor mat trapped the accelerator and caused the crash.

Toyota recalled millions of cars to replace floor mats that it said could cause the accelerator to jam. The carmaker later recalled millions more vehicles to replace gas pedals that it said could stick.

The case was considered the strongest of hundreds of lawsuits that have since been filed and consolidated before a federal judge in Orange County over claims stemming from sudden acceleration in several Toyota models, and brake glitches with the company's Prius hybrid.

Toyota and the plaintiffs sought to keep the settlement amount in the Lexus case

confidential, with the automaker arguing the release of the settlement details could affect pending litigation and hurt its reputation.

Superior Court Judge Anthony Mohr, however, said the public's right to the details outweighed those concerns, and he denied a motion to keep the settlement sealed.

Mohr also extended a gag order until late Wednesday in order to give either side the chance to seek a stay, and up to 10 days to decide whether to pull the settlement altogether.

Tim Pestotnik, a lawyer who represented the Saylor family, said his clients opted not to pursue a stay or appeal the judge's order allowing the release of the settlement amount.

"The families seek only privacy and peace at this time," Pestotnik said.

Toyota said Bob Baker Lexus' interest in making the settlement amount public was to shift the focus away from the dealership as the business continues its own litigation with the families and said it would continue to "defend itself vigorously against the misleading allegations Bob Baker Lexus is making against Toyota."

The carmaker pointed out in its statement that the dealership installed a larger, thicker SUV mat in the Lexus sedan without the plastic retaining clips and the accelerator pedal became trapped in the grooves of that mat.

But Willis, the dealership's Orange County attorney, said the investigation also found that floor mats were not the cause of the full throttle acceleration.

"What Toyota fails to mention is that the same official reports note that electronic components and mechanical causes may have been involved and causes of the accident, but could not be properly evaluated due to the extensive nature of the damage," he said in a statement.

Willis noted that Toyota has since incorporated a brake override system in Lexus vehicles.

"Such a system would have prevented this, or virtually any other sudden acceleration accident, whether such acceleration was caused by floor mats, sticking accelerator pedals or an electronic failure," he said.

Toyota, he said, has failed to step up and protect its dealer from lawsuits over its vehicle.



GM Romulus Engine employees get bikes for kids after raising \$7,800 for their annual Toys for Tots campaign.

# GM Romulus Employees Spread Holiday cheer

ROMULUS, Mich. – In the manufacturing environment, UAW-GM employees stress the importance of working together and achieving goals through teamwork.

This objective carries over outside the workplace and into activities that provide support for organizations in need.

Throughout 2010, the men and women of UAW Local 163 and GM's Romulus Engine plant have supported local charitable organizations through numerous fundrais-

ing events.

This year, the plant raised over \$7,800 for their annual Toys for Tots campaign. Funds raised were used to purchase a variety of bicycles and toys for children in the Romulus area.

The GM Romulus plant produces a variety of engines for GM's cars and trucks.

Plant fundraising activities included employee donations and special fundraising events, such as gate collections, jeans days, food sales and silent auctions.

"The generosity of our workforce has continued to exceed everyone's expectations. Employee contributions and support of our local charitable programs have distinguished UAW Local 163 and Romulus Engine as key members of the community," said Bob Crumley, chairman – UAW Local 163.

This year's fundraising efforts also included donations from many local restaurants and automotive suppliers in the Romulus area, as well as support from the Van Buren

Fire Department and Romulus High School students.

"We would like to thank the men and women of Romulus Engine for once again donating their time, effort and money to support those less fortunate in our local community," said Rick Sutton Romulus Engine plant manager.

"Their generosity is especially appreciated in these difficult economic times and we are very proud of their efforts."

Toys for Tots distributes the bikes to needy kids.

# China Surpasses Japan as World's No. 2 Economy

By MALCOLM FOSTER  
Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) – Japan has been overtaken by China as the world's No. 2 economy. Its flagship company, Toyota, recalled more than 10 million vehicles in an embarrassing safety crisis. Its fourth prime minister resigned in three years, and the government remains unable to jolt an economy entering its third decade of stagnation.

For once-confident Japan, 2010 may well mark a symbolic milestone in its slide from economic giant to what experts see as its likely destiny: a second-tier power with some standout companies but limited global influence.

As Japanese drink up at year-end parties known as "bonenkai," or "forget-the-year gatherings," this is one many will be happy to forget.

Problem is, there's little to look forward to. With a rapidly aging population, bulging national debt, political gridlock and a risk-averse culture slow to embrace change, Japan's prospects aren't promising. And a tense, high-seas spat with China has intensified fears of its neighbor as a military as well as economic threat.

A few optimists hope Japan can harness its strength in technology and its "Cool Japan" cultural appeal – from fashion and art to "anime" cartoons. The country needs to shed its reliance on manufacturing, they argue, and find new growth areas such as green energy, software engineering and health care for its elderly.

But talk to university students, and their outlook is bleak.

steady jobs and whether they can support families – concerns that have contributed to Japan's low fertility rate of 1.3 children per woman. Average household income has fallen 9 percent since 1993.

Makoto Miyazaki, a 22-year-old student at prestigious Keio University in Tokyo, senses forces outside his control – and Japan's – are going to dictate his future.

"Internationally, Japan is between big countries like China and the U.S. And Korea is becoming a major competitor – that's a big threat to Japan," he said. "I feel like we have fewer choices."

It's a startling contrast with the 1980s, when Japan was flush with cash and some experts believed its economy was poised to dominate the world.

Millions have given up the goal of lifetime employment at a major corporation and become "freeters," flitting among temporary jobs with few if any benefits. As companies cut costs, temporary workers have grown to a third of the work force, up from 16 percent in the mid-1980s.

Further, the population is projected to fall from 127 million to 90 million by 2055 – 40 percent of them over the age of 65. That's going to place a heavy tax burden on workers.

Economic difficulty is a chief reason more than 30,000 Japanese have committed suicide every year for the past 12 years.

Hopes for change from the Democratic Party, which toppled the long-ruling conservatives last year, have fizzled. The Democrats lost control of the upper house of parliament in July elections, setting the stage for political gridlock.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan has acknowledged Japan's declining status.

His prescription: "Open up the country." He advocates reducing trade barriers, loosening regulations and making the country a more attractive place to invest.

His Cabinet recently approved cutting the corporate tax rate by 5 percentage points to 35 percent and is weighing whether Japan should join a U.S.-led free trade zone, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, that would slash tariffs on everything from electronics to food.

Business leaders say doing so is vital, but farmers fear a flood of cheaper imports would ruin them. Analysts say it could be a vehicle for economic revival but also lead to job losses and social dislocation, especially in rural areas.

"Merely unleashing the forces of competition and the free market isn't going to do the trick because people who feel vulnerable will crawl back into whatever they have," said Koichi Nakano, a political science professor at Sophia University in Tokyo.

Nakano and others say sweeping changes are needed in both policy and mindset, from expanding the social safety net to overcoming a deep fear of failure that has constrained entrepreneurship and risk-taking – and Japan's economic potential.

About 77 percent of Japan's jobless aren't getting unemployment benefits, according to International Labor Organization data, in part because temporary workers don't qualify.

Japan can be innovative: It is the world leader in hybrid vehicles and industrial robots. Nintendo's "Wii" gaming

console is a hit in living rooms around the world. Entrepreneur Tadashi Yanai, Japan's richest person, built Fast Retailing Co. and its low-cost Uniqlo brand into one of Asia's biggest clothing retailers.

But Japan sometimes undermines itself by being insular. Its sophisticated mobile phone industry, for example, has failed to grow overseas because it operates on a network hardly used anywhere else – earning it the nickname "Galapagos Syndrome."

One optimist is Michael Alfant, an American who has worked in Japan for 20 years. He sees the country becoming more entrepreneurial and focusing on opportunities in service industries.

"Japan is reinventing itself," said Alfant, CEO of Fusion Systems, a startup software company, and the incoming president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan. "I'm very confident Japan will get there."

Any change is likely to come gradually.

A conformist, consensus-based culture means Japan is generally slow to make changes or respond to crises – as seen in Toyota Motor Corp.'s handling of its safety woes.

"One would think there would be more of a sense of urgency here," said Jeff Kingston, director of Asian Studies at Temple University's Tokyo campus.

"At best, Japan will muddle through, meaning it will avert catastrophe, but it is hard to see anything but bleak prospects in a country that should be doing better given its enormous strengths."

Japan, once the titan of Asia, now struggles on.