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THIS WEEK™ - FIRST IN THE HEART OF DETROIT

IN PRINT SINCE 1933

Mercedes-Benz Financial Hosts an Evening of Art

by Gerald Scott
News Dept.

In an era of corporate cutbacks, how refreshing to learn that Mercedes-Benz Financial Systems (MBFS) in Farmington Hills is a champion of all things artistic.

MBFS held its annual art show last Tuesday evening after work and the firm's own employees, local artists from the community, but especially including Cranbrook, all gathered for wine, cheese and a celebration of great art hanging on the walls.

"We believe that art plays a critical role in creating a dynamic work environment, an inquisitive culture and sparks creativity," the "Experiencing

Perspectives" invitation from MBFS to the local arts community reads.

"While our workplace might not be a gallery, it does house cutting-edge art from local artists and graduate students from Cranbrook Academy of Art," it says.

"To explore the art and the question of what role art can play in being a catalyst for change and inspiration, we invite you to join us for an evening celebrating the arts."

They're not kidding. Besides the dramatic artworks on display such as painting, framed photography and mixed-media creations, visitors were able to enjoy a brief but inspiring concert performance from Mosaic Youth Theater and a spoken poem about Detroit from a local high school teen.

This is the 4th annual art reception that MBFS has hosted in this impressive fashion.

"You may wonder why a company whose prime focus is to finance Mercedes cars and Freightliner trucks and Thomas-built buses and a few other things, why we put up so many pieces of art in our offices - and that's a good question," said Peter Zieringer, president and CEO of Mercedes-Benz Financial Services.

"While some of us here are big fans of art - that may play a role, I admit - but more importantly, art helps us create an environment that is creative, inspiring and thought-provoking. That is something we appreciate a lot.

"As with any other bank or financial services institution: we have a very simple business model, we buy money and we sell money and the piece in the middle that makes all the difference is our people.

"So we want to make sure we get the best people aboard, but we want to make sure that we provide a work environment that is creative, that is inspiring and that's fun to work and to create new ideas - and art is the catalyst to do that.

"Art, and pieces of art, challenge us on a constant basis to rethink what we know or what



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

The local auto industry got a rare peek at the two Andy Warhol original paintings hanging in the Mercedes-Benz Financial Services boardroom in Farmington Hills as part of MBFS' annual art day last week. Pictured is Leila Matta, manager of brand identity.

we think we know, and that helps us maintain a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

"If we are to stay competitive, we have to be willing to challenge what we think we know and we have to be able to depart on a journey to new horizons, and art is the perfect companion for that journey."

Cut out and frame the above quote - a bean counter endorsing art on an official basis, here in an era when corporate embrace of artistic endeavors largely dried up, nationally speaking, with the 2008-09 economic downturn.

And yet at MBFS, they are finding ways to make art relevant to their employees and customers who visit their large facility in Farmington Hills. In fact, the MBFS office space feels much more like a creative space like an ad agency than it does just the financial and accounting aspects of their business.

Art abounds everywhere. Not only was Cranbrook art on display, but also MBFS employees were able to have their personal art participate in the 4th annual art day function.

Brittany Bean, for example, a marketing department intern from Oakland University, had her self-portrait, using mixed

media based on newspaper clippings on display and she brought her whole family in to see her workspace and her displayed art.

Although she's a communications major, Bean created the artwork for an OU art class, so it did double-duty for her in terms of putting her name and creativity forward for this endeavor.

And yes, Bean got an "A" grade on the art project.

Meanwhile, Leila Matta, the MBFS manager of Brand Identity, Design and Art Programs pointed out that of late, MBFS has even been taking two dozen or so employees at a time to the DIA for a workday afternoon of outside-the-box thinking and celebration of creativity.

Unknown to most visitors to MBFS, the fourth-floor boardroom at the Farmington Hills office even has two original Andy Warhol paintings on display, on loan from Daimler.

Painted in 1986, just one year prior to the famous artist's death, the typically bright and dramatic Warhol images are actually of a 1925 Mercedes-Benz touring car, all to remind MBFS employees, at least, that the selling and financing of automobiles is still what they all do for a living.

AWS Holds Event at Roush

Roush Industries will host an Open House in the Roush Museum, located at 11789 Market Street in Livonia on Thursday, May 17.

The American Welding Society - Detroit Section (AWS) is holding its May technical meeting that night at Roush, hence the open house.

The private museum houses over 110 vehicles ranging

from vintage classics to various race cars and experimental prototypes.

Roush Vice President Steve Sciatio will discuss how the firm's fabrication services have evolved as the Roush operation has diversified. The evening is titled "Race Cars to Roller Coasters - the Evolution of Welding at Roush." Visit the AWS web site for more.

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SCAN ME



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Former president of Poland Lech Walesa addresses the Chrysler Jefferson North Assembly Plant employees and management. The plant assembles the Jeep Grand Cherokee and the Dodge Durango.

Chrysler Hosts Poland's Lech Walesa

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period increase in shipments and positive pricing.

One analyst, at least, credits Marchionne himself for the leadership that is making Chrysler's ongoing turnaround, following bankruptcy, as dramatic as it is right now.

"At a time when nobody else saw any value in Chrysler whatsoever and many people were saying, 'Just let it go die,'" said John McElroy, auto expert and host of TV's Autoline Detroit program.

"Sergio got the thing, albeit for free, almost as a gift from the U.S. government. But again, nobody else was doing anything with it or riding to the rescue.

"The turnaround he's pulled off is spectacular, absolutely spectacular, beyond anyone's expectations."

Indeed, McElroy further credits Chrysler's engineering and design teams in Auburn Hills for creating some dramatic and well-received products coming out of bankruptcy in 2009, and those products are



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Former Polish President Lech Walesa in the grand lobby of the Chrysler Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit last week.

elevating the company and its image.

The Jeep Grand Cherokee and Dodge Durango were both finalists for the 2011 Truck of the Year at the Detroit auto show that year, and although both vehicles lost out to Ford's redesigned Explorer, still, the Cherokee and Durango have become sales leaders.

Add to that the out-of-nowhere impact of the Chrysler 200 sedan, especially following the "Eminem" Super Bowl TV commercial that ran in 2011, as well as early praise for the 2013 Dodge Dart and, well, you've got

the image of an automaker that is quietly confident and on the move.

Chrysler's turnaround is felt deeply across metro Detroit if only because so many of its assembly plants like the one in Sterling Heights and Jefferson North in Detroit are continuing to thrive across Southeast Michigan.

Speaking of Jefferson North, just last Thursday afternoon, Marchionne and the plant team there hosted a notable visit by former Polish president and Nobel Peace Prize winner Lech Walesa.