

'Tech Crawl' Lets Suppliers Report on New Contracts, Industry Outlooks

By Ken Brown

Sometime back in the early 2000s, the Bloomfield Hills-based AutoCom Associates public relations firm came up with the idea of devoting a full day to introducing a selection of its client companies, along with their latest news, to members of the automotive media.

"Tech Crawl," as the program came to be called, developed into an annual fixture on the local industry news calendar, and "Tech Crawl 2012" recently marked the event's 10th anniversary.

Typically, the focused companies are vital participants in the auto industry supply chain. Some, but not all, are at Tier I level, and some are less well-known or less "glamorous" than others. All of the companies, however, have impressive news to share and, as AutoCom President Larry Weis likes to point out, virtually all of them display a great deal of innovation.

And there is innovation also in the structure of the day's schedule. As the "Crawl" term suggests, one of the program's key objectives is to "get well away from the office," while still working through a full-day agenda.

Typically, the group assembles early morning at a comfortable location for breakfast and opening discussions, then continues moving from one interesting venue to another between sets of presentations throughout the day before finishing with early evening refreshments at the original starting point.

AutoCom tries to vary the itinerary theme from year to year, and past one-day programs have included visits to each of the featured suppliers' technical centers with travel by limousine; breakfast at a country club, followed by an opportunity to play nine holes of golf, presentations throughout the rest of the business day, and an evening boat trip; visits to "Green Energy" sites in the Detroit area; and a visit with representatives of Gibbs Technologies (developers and manufacturers of High Speed Amphibians), including demonstration rides on Pine Lake, followed by other presentations at Pine Lake Country Club.

A number of the veterans among the traveling media claim that the constant movement and introductions to new environments during the day tend to keep them much more stimulated than they could ever expect to be during the course of, for example, a 10-hour session in a single conference room.

It is clear also that the "Tech Crawl" one-day event series has earned enormous respect for AutoCom Associates from the opinion leaders in the Marketing/Communications industry. The Crawl has received several MarCom

Gold and Platinum Awards over the years from the Association of Marketing and Communications Professionals (AMCP).

Tech Crawl 2012 opened and closed at the Detroit Athletic Club. Other venues visited were the Renaissance Center, the Detroit Wayne County Port Authority, and the National Automotive History Collection (NAHC) at the Detroit Public Library. Travel was by the Detroit People Mover.

Following are summaries of the news presented during the course of the day:

- KEMET Corp., a leading manufacturer of capacitors for the auto industry, explained steps taken during the past year to secure and stabilize its supply of tantalum, the element used in its capacitors, through a strategy of vertical integration.
- FORTECH Products, Inc., a

major provider of corrosion-resistant coatings, metal-forming lubricants, and contract packaging services for the auto industry, announced it is expanding its production, laboratory and office facilities in Michigan to meet rapidly growing customer demand for its products and services.

- GKN Driveline, the UK-based supplier with a technical center in Auburn Hills, said its recently-completed \$440 million acquisition of Getrag's all-wheel-drive (AWD) business unit positions it as the only driveline supplier capable of providing complete driveline systems to its customers.
- Saphran Solutions, Inc., a Michigan-based developer of business management software systems for major automotive suppliers and companies in a variety of other fields, announced that it has posted double-digit annual

growth rates for the past two years and is on pace to more than double its sales revenue in 2012.

- BEHR America and KENWORTH Truck Company displayed Kenworth's newest Class 8 heavy-duty truck, giving the T680 its first showing in the Detroit area and claiming it to be the "Most Aerodynamic Truck Ever."
- HELLA, the German global supplier of automotive lighting and electronic systems, discussed new trends in LED lighting techniques for both interior and exterior vehicle lighting applications.

- Detroit Public Library staff confirmed that a vast collection of documents recording the U.S. auto industry's role in World War II is now accessible to historians, researchers and journalists for "in-house" reference and consultation, along with the rest of the National Automotive History

Collection (NAHC), at the Library's Skillman Branch in downtown Detroit.

- Ford Piquette Avenue Plant representatives announced that the century-old factory and office where Henry Ford created his historic Model T car is now welcoming visitors with extended opening hours.
- Alcantara S.p.A., the Italian supplier of premium interior materials for many of the world's most luxurious car lines, said it will be a sponsor of a social media-based student design competition developed by General Motors and Car Design News (CDN).

- Elektrobit (EB) Corporation described its new EB GUIDE 5.3 software that was released a few weeks ago at the Telematics Detroit conference in Novi and is designed to help automakers develop user interfaces.

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Survey Addresses The Autonomous

The Michigan Dept. of Transportation (MDOT) is conducting an online survey in collaboration with the Center for Auto Research (CAR) in Ann Arbor.

Survey responses from the autonomous vehicle industry will help MDOT and CAR determine what's needed for a successful testing environment in southeast Michigan.

While automobile, robotics and technology manufacturers will participate, interested parties can view the survey online.

Autonomous vehicles have the ability to communicate with other vehicles and the surrounding environment to safely navigate to their destination. This technology holds the potential of drastically reducing traffic crashes by taking the human elements out of many situations.