

# Budd to open Automation Research Center

The North American auto industry can't rely on high technology alone to become more competitive, a manufacturing expert for one of the world's largest automotive suppliers said.

"It's going to take smart people teamed with smart machines if we are to truly benefit from technology's potential," according to Russell J. Bennington, an executive of The Budd Co. "And you can't have one without the other."

Bennington, research and development manager for Budd's Stamping and Frame Division, announced at a news conference that the division

has established a new Automation Research Center, which he will head, in suburban Sterling Heights.

He also outlined plans for accelerating the retraining of workers.

BENNINGTON said the new Automation Research Center contains 32,000 square feet. It employs an initial cadre of 20 manufacturing process specialists and training personnel.

In addition to the design and evaluation of the latest manufacturing technology, it will be used as a classroom-training laboratory for workers and managers "to help familiar-

ize them with this technology so they can work with it confidently and comfortably."

He said the first groups for training would be brought in in September. They will be representative of all of the division's plants and include union and management personnel.

Bennington also noted that the Stamping and Frame Division last month received a \$1.5 million customized job-training grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to help retain the Philadelphia plant employees in new manufacturing technologies and processes.

A similar commitment is being sought for Detroit-area employees, he said. The company is already in discussion with Michigan state officials.

PRIMARY MISSION of the new center according to Bennington, is to increase the manufacturing quality and cost performance know-how that "is the secret to our continuing success as an automotive supplier."

Stamping and Frame, headquartered in Rochester, is the largest division in the 74-year-old company. The division employs more than

6,000 at its plants in Detroit, Philadelphia and Kitchener, Ontario.

Its products, which include metal stampings, assemblies and frame components, can be found on most cars and trucks manufactured in North America by American Motors, Chrysler, Ford and General Motors.

Budd Co., headquartered in Troy, serves a variety of industries with emphasis on automotive and trucking. With annual sales of more than \$1 billion, Budd is the largest subsidiary of Thyssen AG, Dusseldorf, West Germany, an \$11.3 billion conglomerate.

UNDERSCORING the need for worker training to keep pace with technology, Bennington, who has been working with robotic equipment since 1962, cited the company's experiments with robots 15 years ago.

"That first robot ended up in a plant yard after a few weeks covered with a tarpaulin. We learned from that experience that the full benefits of automation cannot be realized unless the technology is integrated into the manufacturing system and fully understood and accepted by the people who use it," Bennington said.

## Jobless rate below 9 percent

The July unemployment rate of 8.9 percent was the lowest for the month since the pre-recession year 1979 when the rate was 7.2 percent.

Richard Simmons Jr., director of the Michigan Employment Security Commission, credits strong seasonal hiring combined with modest labor force growth for the 0.5 percent drop from the June level of 9.4 percent.

In July, the number of unemployed Michigan workers declined by 21,000 to 385,000.

IN JUNE, the jobless total had been 406,000 or 9.4 percent of the

state's labor force. A year ago, in July 1985, Michigan's jobless rate was 10.5 percent with 449,000 out of work.

Simmons said seasonal employment grew in the state's service, retail trade and construction industries. This growth more than offset scattered model changeover layoffs in the auto industry and seasonal layoffs at schools, colleges and universities.

In addition, Simmons said, there was high employment in state and federally-funded summer youth employment programs.

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