

# GM cuts jolt Oakland business

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

News of the drastic cutbacks at the General Motors Corp. has not triggered a sense of economic doom in Oakland County.

But it has renewed the need for caution in the market place — a notion that will carry over into the new year and beyond.

"Our company will not make any

drastic changes," said Bert Ehl, a corporate vice president at Engineering Technology Ltd., a Troy company employing about 500 and providing engineering and design services to the Big Three automakers and first tier suppliers. "At least not right away."

"But we're not likely to make any new financial commitments either," Ehl is typical of the hundreds, no thousands, of people jolted by last

week's announcement that GM will cut 74,000 jobs and close 21 plants by 1993.

GM chairman Robert Stempel said the cutbacks — to be implemented nation wide — are necessary if the corporation is to survive in the competitive worldwide market.

As a businessman — also in a competitive market — Ehl understands the GM moves. "They had to do something. . . their financial situation was rocky. I applaud their decision."

EVEN SO, any GM downsizing will likely affect Oakland County, where at least half the businesses derive 60 to 90 percent of their revenue from auto-related enterprise, according to surveys conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan.

"It can't be good news," said Norris P. Lee, of Birmingham, a retired marketing manager from the Burrough's Corp. (now the UNISYS Corp.)

Even if southeast Michigan is lucky — and loses, hypothetically, 2,000 jobs, "That's 2,000 more people unemployed," said Lee.

Some will find new jobs, he said. And others may be forced to draw on savings and family resources for a year or two until they find new employment. "But some may never find new jobs. And that weakens the entire area."

Ronald K. MacLennan, sales manager for Century 21 Town & Country in Rochester, said it will take time for businesses — starting with real estate — to gauge the impact of GM's announcement.

Housing sales have been "at a plateau," he said, "not particularly good, but not bad either. So it will be

some time before we feel any impact at all."

TONY ROTHSCHILD, executive director of Common Ground, Oakland County's designated 24-hour crisis agency, said it makes take months for people here to start feeling the impact of GM cutbacks.

"But they'll feel it," he said. "Any cutbacks will create higher levels of stress and people will be looking for help."

Common Ground, for example, has experienced a sharp increase in the number of calls related to financial difficulties over the last two years, Rothschild said.

"Some of those calls are related to state cutbacks in general assistance," he said. "But many calls are linked to a generally bad economic climate. The economy's been soft. Any GM cutbacks will aggravate that."

John A. Erich, executive director of Community Services of Oakland County (a United Way agency), said it may take two or three years before the area feels the impact of any GM cutbacks.

The reason, in part, is that displaced GM autoworkers "have a pretty good safety net," he said, referring to jobless benefits available to them that can guarantee 95 percent of their income for up to three years.

"But any jobs we lose will be good ones," he said. "The kind that pay good wages and provide good benefits. . . and we're losing them for good."

"We've been able to bounce back from other downturns, but I'm afraid this one is different. It will affect us in the long run."

# Assisted suicide 'circus' goes on

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

Taking "Dr. Death" before the Oakland Citizens Grand Jury is an abuse of power, says the defense lawyer for physician Jack Kevorkian.

One for which "the souls of Janet Atkins, Marjorie Wantz and Sherry Miller will damn (Prosecutor Richard) Thompson," according to Geoffrey Fieger who insists his client acted out of compassion, not malice.

Fieger, a West Bloomfield resident, minced no words Thursday at a press conference in his Southfield office when he talked about the prosecutor or Kevorkian, the retired Royal Oak physician who attracted international attention with the suicide machine he invented.

Three women — Janet Atkins, 54, of Portland, Or., Marjorie Wantz, 58, of the Benton Harbor area, and Sherry Miller, 43, of Roseville — died after consulting with Kevorkian, and learning about his suicide machine.

None of the three were necessarily terminally ill, Fieger acknowledged. But the quality of their lives deteriorated to the point they did not want to continue living.

"THEY WANTED TO die," he said, and turned to Kevorkian because he had courage enough to buck legal and medical sanctions and help them.

Thus taking Kevorkian's case to the grand jury is a perversion of the system, said Fieger, an act as serious, "Voters (of Oakland County) should kick his butt out of office."

Fieger characterized Thompson as a "first class buffoon . . . and the willing puppet of a perverted fringe group," meaning people who want assisted suicide made illegal in Michigan.

Fieger displayed a poster-sized picture of Thompson, with a red balloon for his nose. This was shortly after accusing the prosecutor of turning the controversial case into a "media circus."

Thompson seemed unaffected when told of Fieger's antics and characterization at a press conference staged two hours after Fieger's.

"I will prosecute this case like any other, despite any inflammatory or slanderous remarks," he said.

"But you guys," he said, pointing to the television cameras, "should be careful about what you show. He does it for you."

Thompson said he is indeed referring the deaths of Wantz and Miller, who died Oct. 23, to the Oakland Citizens Grand Jury, probably for consideration in January.

"I CAN THINK of no fairer process than to leave the decision of whether to charge Mr. Kevorkian up to his fellow citizens," Thompson said.

# Recount finished

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

The victory margin for Oakland's controversial solid waste program in the Nov. 5 election — already considered the closest in county history — was even closer than initially reported, according to a recount completed Friday.

Instead of winning approval by 257 votes, as originally certified by the Oakland County Board of Canvassers, the margin of victory was 188 votes, according to the Elections Division of the Oakland County Clerk's office.

The final certified vote shows the proposal on the waste program passing 70,924 to 70,738.

That tally doesn't overturn the election, said Diane L. Pederson, who spearheaded the recall effort. "But it does show that support was less than reported."

The most-controversial part of the \$500 million solid waste program is the waste-to-energy incinerator proposed in Auburn Hills.

Pederson, a Rochester Hills resident, is president of Help, Oakland Preserve the Environment (HOPE),

and part of the coalition that raised \$4,250 to recount 425 of the county's 557 precincts.

EVEN THOUGH her side lost, Pederson said the effort was worthwhile. "We stood up for what we believe," she said.

Pederson, one of the HOPE members who periodically monitored the recount, said she was amazed at the number of ballot mistakes.

The chairman of the Oakland County Board of Canvassers, however, said the number of ballot errors was within acceptable range.

"We're never happy about mistakes," said Barbara A. Brinker of Novi. "We all want the results of a recount to be the same as the certified figure. But it doesn't work out that way."

There was no specific pattern to the ballot errors, Brinker said. They were spread evenly through the target precincts. "I think it was a matter of people not being used to paper ballots."

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