

Foreign companies are new frontier for young engineers



DAN MCCOSH

Up to now, foreign languages and overseas work-study have been, well, foreign to the education of most engineering types.

It's an intriguing notion, and the logical outcome of one of those trends that have been shaping the suburban landscape for several decades now: the growing number of foreign-owned research firms that have been locating in the Detroit area.

Frankly, I have always thought these were more or less enclaves, where Black Forest elves were working to make new windshield wipers and such.

The reality is that they employ far more U.S. citizens than nonresidents, and my intuition is they have been a significant career opportunity for young engineering graduates for years, particularly since the American auto companies have been cutting back.

Although I don't have the statistics to back this up, I think it is likely that the research labs operated by the likes of Siemens, Nissan, etc. in this area have created far more new jobs in engineering than the Big Three.

I would hesitate to say this is the way of the future, since most of these companies are here because the U.S. marketplace has made them rich.

To think that there will be some kind of foreign legion composed of American engineering school graduates heading offshore to make their fortune denies the reality of foreign "leaves" that up to now has been mainly a one-way street.

The career path in a foreign-owned multinational company is going to be more difficult than a comparable U.S. company.

Still, it's the nature of kids to head out and seek their fortune wherever. Detroit has been attracting people with a technical bent for most of the 20th century, and it's still a Mecca for engineers.

It's a big world out there, and the opportunities are growing. In any case, it may be that today along with a college degree, you need a passport.

Dan McCosh is automotive editor of Popular Science magazine. If you have a comment, question or suggestion concerning Auto Talk, write to Dan McCosh, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, 48150, or you can call him directly by dialing 833-2047, mail box number 1870, on a touch-tone phone.

Dittrich from Next page

In addition to Hal and Harold Dittrich, Hal's cousin Randall Dittrich (Robert Dittrich's son), Karen Dittrich (Hal's wife), Cindy Danton (Karen's sister) and vice president Steve Danton (Cindy's husband) also work in the store.

Hal Dittrich's mother Georgina assists on the sales floor and sons Shawn and Jason work in the store during the summer months.

As part of the family's commitment, each garment sold at Dittrich furs is personally inspected many times, and at least once by a Dittrich.

Hal Dittrich, chief executive officer and president, said the company has changed dramatically even in the last 25 years since he has been actively involved.

Fashion consciousness has changed the fur industry more than any other factor.

When he started at Dittrich Furs, fur fashions were very basic when compared to today's fashions, he said. "Now, just about every major fashion designer, with the exception of two or three, is doing something with fur."

Fashion, not status

"Furs used to be a status symbol, but now they've become more of a fashion statement," Dittrich said.

Furs come in a variety of styles, from casual to dress, colors, both natural and dyed to colors, and in a mix of different furs, he said.

Dittrich has one of the largest collection of furs in the country, 49 percent of which are made by famous designers. Another 10 percent are designed and manufactured in house, the remaining stock are contracted with private firms who manufacture furs for him.

Fur availability and accessibility has also changed the industry.

'I can remember working here as a young man and my grandfather taking me aside on the first day, bringing me to the sales floor, pointing at the door and saying, "You see that door? When someone comes in that door, you treat them like they're coming into your own living room." Everybody who works here is told the same thing.'

Harold G. "Hal" Dittrich
chief executive officer, president
Dittrich Furs

"It's become a much more reasonable commodity."

A fur is still a status symbol, he granted, but many people are surprised at how inexpensive they have become. Today, a fur can be had for as little as \$350.

"When I first started here, a fur would cost \$500; that \$500 back then was a lot more than \$350 today," he said.

"My customer is anyone from the factory worker to the school teacher to the executive of a large company," he said. "People will walk in in work boots and evening dresses."

One thing he would like to change about the industry — and something he strives to do — is remove people's apprehension about buying a fur. "People feel apprehensive about coming in here — they shouldn't."

Some things in the industry have already changed. The clientele, for example, is younger. When he joined the business, the typical buyer was a woman, aged 45 or older. Today, the majority of fur buyers are women, between 35 and 45.

There's still plenty of room for change. "Metropolitan Detroit's fur market has a lot of untapped potential."

Unlike New York or Chicago, a fur is not a common sight in metropolitan Detroit. Far more men purchase furs in this area as a percentage of a furrier's customers.

A third substantial difference is the scope of the fur industry. "Today, it's a worldwide industry."

More than 90 percent of all furs are sold in auctions organized by fur ranchers.

"When I go to these auctions, I have to compete with the Japanese, the Germans — it's not trappers bringing in pelts."

After purchasing the pelts, he has them tanned and dressed by a third party, before designing and manufacturing the furs in house.

The quality of fur has also greatly improved, he said, adding furs from U.S. ranchers are particularly exceptional. U.S. ranchers have combined technology and genealogy resulting in a higher quality pelt.

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SUBURBAN BUSINESS LEADERS

To submit materials to this column, please send a brief biographical summary along with a black-and-white photo. If possible, to: Business Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

The UNISYS board of directors has elected Deborah C. Hopkins vice president and corporate controller. She replaces Bill Rowan, who was recently appointed chief information officer for UNISYS Hopkins, whose most recent position was vice president, corporate business analysis, brought to this position a wide range of experience and successes in the financial arena. Hopkins is the daughter of Gretchen and Frank Hitch of Birmingham.

Stanford Norman and Melinda Murphy of Century 21 Town and Country in Birmingham were recently recognized as being among the top producing sales associates in the Century 21 Metro Brokers Council.

Also recognized for their sales achievements are: Earl Roberts, Barbara Young, Cindy Jacobson and Roseann Nestico of Century 21 Town and Country in Troy; Michael Anasch and Luana Fardell Century 21 Town and Country in Birmingham; Carol French, Pat Smart and Diane Sandler of Century 21 Town and Country in Rochester; Craig Smith of Century 21 Palazzo & Travis in Troy; Roxanne Tarantino of Century 21 Town and Country in Rochester; Mary Messingachlager, Jolie Levine and Mark Warren of Century 21 Today in Farmington.

AIA Michigan, a society of the American Institute of Architects has announced its board of directors for 1993. They are:

■ Steve Vogel, president of Schervish, Meier, P.C. in Detroit, has been named president;

■ Eugene Hopkins, a principal and founding partner of Architects Four Inc. in Ann Arbor, has been named vice president/president designate;

■ Lincoln Poley, of Lincoln Poley Architect in Ann Arbor, has been named secretary;

■ Graham Dickens, an associate of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls Associates Inc. in Detroit has been named treasurer.

In addition, directors for the AIA Michigan's Detroit chapter are: West Bloomfield resident Daniel Redstone of Louis G. Redstone Associates Inc. in Southfield; Benedetto Tiseo of Tiseo & Associates in Farmington Hills; and Birmingham resident Robert Ziegelman of Luckenbach/Ziegelman in Birmingham.

Attorneys Sam G. Morgan, David J. Shea, Carl B. Downing, Kenneth Watkins and Gary E. Abeksa have become associated with Sommers, Schwartz, Silver & Schwartz in Southfield. Morgan practices extensively in the areas of employment and commercial litigation. Shea specializes in personal injury, product liability and mass tort litigation. Downing practices in the area of appellate law. Watkins specializes in personal injury and

medical malpractice. Abeksa specializes in employee rights and employee litigation.

Michelle D. Kujala has been promoted agency vice president at the insurance agency J.J. O'Connell & Associates Inc. in Birmingham. Her new position gives her the responsibility of office manager in administration, personnel, commercial and personal lines insurance.

G. Anthony Jankowski of Farmington Hills has joined the staff of Bloomfield Hills-based First Security Savings Bank as senior loan officer. He is responsible for residential loan origination. Jankowski was previously a loan officer with Source One and a realtor with Thompson-Brown.

Paul Zimmerman of Southfield has been promoted to vice president/creative director of IMP, a wholly-owned subsidiary of D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles/Bloomfield Hills (DMB&B/BH).

In his new position, Zimmerman is responsible for all of IMP's events marketing, heading up creative for the Texas account as well as investigating additional client opportunities.

Source One Mortgage Services Corp. in Farmington Hills has named Mark Janssen as senior vice president of financial operations. He is responsible for the financial operations of the company.

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