

# BUSINESS

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## SUBURBAN BUSINESS LEADERS

### Advancing technical expertise advances success of business

■ When you land NASA as a customer, it's probably safe to say you've arrived in the high-tech repair business. But it wasn't always so for a company that started in a 200-square-foot facility.

BY MARY RODRIGUE  
STAFF WRITER

Every March 24 Eddie Harmon celebrates an anniversary of sorts.

"It's when I got fired," he says with a laugh. "My employer and I had a parting of ways."

The date is the launch pad that propelled Harmon to bigger and better things.

The president of NC Servo Technology started his own business in 1978 in a 200-square-foot facility in Dearborn. Today his company — a high tech science lab that repairs parts for industry ranging from aerospace to satellite systems to radar — occupies 19,000 square feet in a Westland industrial park.

Despite a soft economy, Harmon has experienced steady growth over the years.

"We've had to diversify," said the soft-spoken Tennessee native. "What was common technology in the 1970s and '80s is being replaced continually. We have to stay abreast of the market now."

On the day NASA scrubbed its most recent space shuttle launch last week, Harmon's firm got a call from NASA for an urgently needed repair job.

"What they sent us was a motor generator assembly," he said. "This field is very rewarding to me."

Harmon, 45, graduated from Casa Technical High School in Detroit where he studied electronics. At

Wayne State University, he earned a bachelor's degree in math and computer science. College was interrupted by a two-year stint in the Army, where Harmon specialized in missile and missile launcher repair and radio repair in Germany.

"I always wanted to have a high-tech science lab," he said. "I enjoy this kind of work."

After a brief affiliation with two partners, Harmon launched his solo career.

"The first year and a half was very hard. I had no customers, no credit, no nothing. There was no rich uncle. It was either sink or swim."

Days were spent calling on customers — virtually any industry that used automated parts. At night, Harmon did the repair work himself.

"I still remember my first customers. They were women purchasing agents who took a chance on me," he said.

He gives them better prices now. "I'm very appreciative."

Business really surged when Harmon moved to the Westland facility in 1982.

NC Servo specializes in same-day service. Upon receiving a defective component, technicians make an evaluation, then notify the customer before any work is done. A large inventory of new and rebuilt parts is stocked for immediate delivery or exchange.

"We've been very fortunate," he said.



ART EMANUELE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

It's a fix: NC Servo president Eddie Harmon (standing) checks the progress of a repair with Nizar Safi, attending to an airplane component.

Today NC Servo has 30 employees — half are technical people. The others, including Harmon's wife, Sheryl, work in administration, sales, and customer support.

Boeing and Lockheed are clients. Even police crime labs have used NC Servo, which also specializes in chemical analysis.

"We do very little manufacturing," he said. "We do manufacture adaptors so customers can update their controls. They may not have the technical expertise to interface the old with the new."

Harmon believes he will outgrow his current building some day.

"Business growth is not really my goal," he said. "I like advancing my technical expertise. Growth will follow. I'm more interested in quality than quantity."

On a recent day, a technician was testing breathing apparatus for firefighters that must conform to new federal health and safety standards. In another section, workers were involved in detective work — trying to trace the problems of malfunctioning components that were offering zip clues to the problems.

"The parts come from all over the world — Germany, Japan, Switzerland, England," he said.

## Firm wins grant to engineer airbag system for passengers

A Farmington Hills engineering firm has been tapped by the National Science Foundation as recipient of a \$50,000 grant to develop new technology for use in passenger airbags.

"We were competing with top scientists from all specialties from across the country. The NSF has the stiffest competition and the least money," said Dave Bauer, chief executive officer of award winning TIP Engineering.

"This is the first ever award to an automotive-related group in Michigan. We fit into President Clinton's new deal — transferring defense technology to the automotive industry."

Bauer and his partner, Ken Barnes, formed TIP Engineering eight years ago. Both come from automotive backgrounds. Bauer spent 19 years with Ford Motor Co. as a design engineer focusing on safety-related areas. Barnes is a 27-year veteran of Chrysler Corp. where he directed the design of the interior panel to include knee bolsters, passenger airbag systems and head impact injury management.

Their proposal for a new design in passenger airbags incorporates a pyrotechnic device used by the defense industry, Bauer says

phase one has shown promising results.

"A major car company has already come forward to use concerning implementation with their '96 models," he said.

If TIP's research on a hidden seam deployment door for the airbag is successful, the NSF is likely to grant an additional \$300,000 for development of a manufacturing process for the product. The grants are made available through the federal Small Business Innovation Research program.

"Because of the high velocity of the door during deployment of the airbag, it in itself can potentially be a safety hazard if it is not designed and protected from tampering to remain attached to the interior panel," Bauer said.

"There is also a hazard if it allows airbag skin and foam fragmentation to project out at the occupant. Or if the deployment door strikes the windshield, it can cause it to break and shatter glass onto the passenger, or strike an out-of-position occupant, such as a child."

Bauer says TIP hopes to design and develop a device and manufacturing process to improve safety, warranty, and appearance at a reduced cost. Passenger airbags

consist mainly of a gas producing inflator and a large cloth pillow that is assembled into a sheet metal housing. The passenger airbag assembly is mounted on the right side of the instrument panel and covered by a deployment door. The deployment door is the focus of TIP's research proposal.

Founded in 1985, TIP specializes in passenger airbag deployment doors, driver airbag steering wheel covers, instrument panel driver and passenger side knee bolsters and the instrument panel itself as they integrate into the federal passive restraint safety law.

TIP's next step is the specific design of the high energy device in an instrument panel and the development of a manufacturing process for installing the device on the back surface of the skin.

The National Highway Safety Administration is discussing the possibility of funding a similar project with TIP for driver-side airbags.

Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards require passive restraints in all passenger cars sold in the U.S. by 1996. The law also requires all light trucks and mini vans to have passive restraints by 1997.

## PR society develops internships

To help bridge the gap between students looking for work experience and businesses looking for cost effective support staff, the Public Relations Society of America — Detroit chapter has developed a student internship network.

More than 40 metro Detroit companies have internships available for students looking for job opportunities in their field this summer and fall 1993. The internships are made available through the chapter's newly created internship committee, which is working to bring students and businesses together.

"This is a brand new program," said Denise Bateman, a PRSA

spokeswoman. "Most of the jobs are public relations but some are radio/television, journalism and advertising."

Hospitals, corporations, non-profit groups, cultural attractions and public relations agencies are among the participating organizations in the network. Information about the various internships, availability, student requirements, day-to-day responsibilities and financial benefits can be obtained by calling Elly Wright at 278-8572.

"Utilizing student talent is a smart strategy for business," said Gabriel Werba, PRSA Detroit chapter president and president of the company that bears his

name. "Students are in need of obtaining hands-on public relations experience and businesses can take advantage of the opportunity to effectively train the workforce of the future. The relationship offered is mutually beneficial."

For more information about PRSA's student internship network, students should talk to their faculty adviser or Wright.

Eight colleges are already involved in the network. They include Central Michigan, Eastern Michigan, Michigan State, Oakland University, University of Detroit-Mercy, University of Michigan, Wayne State and Western Michigan.

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