

Auto journalists caught off guard in '91

It hasn't been a good year for journalists, what with most of the epoch-making events of the latter part of the 20th century all happening in 1991, and all of them catching the correspondents, newsmen, anchor-people et al. more or less asleep at the switch.

It is one of the hazards of the trade — which mainly relies on thumb-sucking, pontificating and analysis — leaving it unprepared for something like the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Persian Gulf War, or the makings of a trade war with Japan suddenly just happens, and none of the experts, consultants, or unnamed sources ever leaked a word in advance. The result is a mad

scramble in the face of real news. Nowhere is this more apparent than the coverage of some fundamental activities in the auto business, which took some profound turns in 1991, few of which got much notice.

The abrupt downsizing of GM was one of the few exceptions at least on the surface. When GM President Robert Stempel marched into the packed GM press room, no fewer than six reporters already were interviewing each other. Stempel had his say, and then it was back to the consultants, analysts and other reporters, who were anxious to report what Stempel really meant.

What Stempel really meant was it was a whole new ball game. It was



auto talk
Dan McCosh

profound acknowledgment from one of the most thoughtful leaders of American industry that the auto business is "dramatically cutting back on its role as a quasi-public economic institution that cushions the technocrats and middle managers — the people that make up much of middle class America. It was only a few years ago when GM

moved 10,000 new employees into the northern suburbs, setting off a real estate boom that contrasted with the dismal red ink on both coasts. Now they are moving out.

The announcement coincided with the so-called "trade mission" to Japan, in which President Bush and a cadre of executives extend fingers toward the dike, not quite acknowl-

edging the dam has burst.

The point being that 1991 was, in fact, the year of the most profound change in the world industrial scene in this half of the century. The consolidation of Germany, the moves to build a European economic union, the upheaval in Eastern Europe, the growth of industry in India and Pakistan, the shift to Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia of Japanese production capacity, the flight of capital from Hong Kong, the sudden comeback of Mexico, among other happenings, have shaken the basics of the world's economies.

Not so surprisingly, much of this has altered even the face of the landscape of Detroit and its suburbs. The new technical centers built just this

year, with the most dramatic being the huge Chrysler complex in Auburn Hills, ultimately will shape how people live in this urban landscape as profoundly as the shopping center did in the 1950s. The influx of Asian immigrants has only begun.

What is lost is the quiet, dependable career epitomized by plugging away in the bowels of a company like GM or Ford, with a long-term future and a comfortable retirement only the dullest of many possibilities.

The auto business changed in 1991 — profoundly — in a way some esoteric economic historians may recognize in the future. Meanwhile, dealing with the future is a scramble that has only just begun.

datebook

PROFESSIONAL SECRETARIES INT'L.

Wednesday, Jan. 8 — The Tri-county chapter of Professional Secretaries International's 1992 membership meeting will be at the Landmark Company, 500 Kirtz Blvd. in Troy. Also, the chapter will view a video presentation: "Difficult People, How to Deal With Them." Contact 362-4400, ext. 303, for information and reservations.

DISABILITIES ACT

Thursday, Jan. 9 — "Americans with Disabilities Act Workshop 1 — Planning for Compliance" 8:15 a.m. — 12:15 p.m. at the American Society of Employers, 2315 Northwestern Highway, Southfield. Non-member fee: \$125. Information: Pat Murphy, 353-4500.

DIRECT MARKETING

Thursday, Jan. 9 — Direct Mar-

keting Association of Detroit meets at the Sheraton Southfield Hotel in Southfield. Program: "Who's Mailing What." Networking at 11:30 a.m. Lunch and speech at noon. Non-member fee: \$19. Information: 258-8803.

APPRaiser LICENSE

Saturday-Sunday, Jan. 11-12 — "Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice" for appraisal relicensure offered in Troy. Information: 629-5282 Ext. 260. Sponsor: Walsh College.

WRITTEN ENGLISH

Tuesday, Jan. 14 — "Grammar

and Proofreading Skills" 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the American Society of Employers, 2315 Northwestern Highway, Southfield. Non-member fee: \$25. Information: Pat Murphy, 353-4500.

INVESTING SEMINAR

Tuesday, Jan. 14 — Free investing

and tax seminar noon to 1 p.m. at Merrill Lynch, 32255 Northwestern Highway, Tolaria Building Suite 260, Farmington Hills. Additional seminars planned for Tuesdays March. Information: Dennis Herula, 1-800-937-0446.

Invention award lauds businesses

Continued from previous page

aided design-access products that are easy to use and will operate effectively on data generated by all major CAD systems.

CAD-Access, XYSYS Inc.'s newest innovation, encourages communication and teamwork among diverse users of data, from the high-powered automobile makers with huge mainframes to the smallest of auto suppliers with a desktop personal computer.

Patrick Kennedy, marketing director for XYSYS, said there has been a need for CAD-Access ever since the automotive companies began pressuring suppliers to take on some of the design aspects of component manufacturing.

All large manufacturers do product design on computer, he said, but parts suppliers — because of an incompatibility of data between major auto computer and smaller auto supplier computer software — have been left out of the loop.

"There's always been a mystique surrounding these big CAD systems," he said. "Smaller desktop computers — those which are likely to be found in an auto supply firm — couldn't work with designs made on

the large mainframes. For the U.S. to compete, it will be important for everyone to be involved in the production process, he said.

"All we have is a mechanism for top-down engineering. The auto companies would design something and say this is it," Kennedy said. "The problem with that is these designers with unimpaired degrees don't have any practical experience. But we have guys in the shops who smell like oil and have metal shavings embedded in their skin that know things from experience that the designers couldn't," Kennedy said.

The way production process has been set up, those people in the shops couldn't communicate their ideas back to the designers. "That's what this does."

With CAD access, the auto supplier can take data from any of the large original equipment manufacturers and work with it on a desk top.

The supply companies have been reluctant to buy large CAD systems because the auto companies are constantly changing their systems and because each auto manufacturer uses a different method, he said.

business people

Douglas Roehm has joined the firm of D.R.M. Staker & Associates Inc. of Rochester as an associate and principal.

Thomas L. Bradburn was honored by the Greater Detroit Chapter of the American Society of Safety Engineers in Southfield by being chosen as the Chapter's Safety Professional of the Year Award winner for the 1991-92 Chapter year.

Thomas Anthony Howard of Rochester Hills has joined the Detroit-based investment securities firm of Honey & Co. as a securities analyst. In his new position, Howard will provide research coverage of many publicly traded companies in the Midwest, supporting the Honey & Co. network of 27 offices in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana.

Donald Schulz of Birmingham was named Playboy's Detroit-based sales director for Michigan and Canada.

Donald Trust of Rochester Hills was honored by United Parcel Service for completing 25 years of service with the company. He was cited for his loyal service contributions to UPS. He began his career as a claims adjuster in 1966.

The Bank of Bloomfield Hills announced that Louis Allen of Bloomfield Hills, former president of Manufacturers National Bank of Detroit and former chairman of United Savings Bank, has joined its team as a private banker. In his new position he will handle the administration and development of private banking relationships.

Debra Rooney, manager of the Floral department at Bordin's Better Homes in the core Hills on becoming a member of AIFD. He was inducted into the floral industry's prestigious American Institute of Floral Designers this summer.

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