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■ GM INVESTMENTS: Companies, United Way cheered by turnaround

GM's good fortune has wide embrace

DON FRASER
Standard Staff

General Motors' fortunes have forged an indelible bond with Tora Inc.

Since 1996, Tora has been hired to do warehousing, packaging and inspections for GM's engine plant in St. Catharines.

Work for the auto giant has ballooned over the years from around half to 90% of Tora's business.

News that GM is pouring in almost \$500 million of investment into its local operations has Tora plant general manager Scott DeMont smiling.

GM's financial troubles hurt Tora a year ago and brought employment numbers down to 40 at the St. Catharines firm.

"Now, we're back up to over 100 again," DeMont said. "It's good news for us and I know we'll have a chance to bid on a lot of work. This is going to be so good for the economy, St. Catharines, Canadian Auto Workers members here and I think it means good secure jobs for the next 15 years."

On Tuesday, GM formally

announced a \$245-million investment in its transmission line at its Glendale Ave. power-train facility.

It comes on the heels of an April announcement that \$235 million will be poured into the plant for the production of a new V8 engine. The work will secure 800 jobs in a plant that currently employs about 1,450.

Mike Whatling, general manager of Niagara Precision Ltd. in St. Catharines, is cheered by GM's resurgence.

"It's good for manufacturing in general," the former head of the Niagara Industrial Association said. "And it's good news all around."

Niagara Precision has just started doing tooling work for GM and has been getting more business as weeks go by.

"We hadn't been doing much in the last decade due to their downsizing," Whatling said.

And while the combined impact for local manufacturers remains to be seen, "we're hopeful we'll have an opportunity to help (GM) out and get this line up and running," Whatling said.

GM employs a total of 1,800 at



BOB TYMCZYSZYN Standard Staff

Staff at Tora Inc., a company that does considerable business with General Motors of Canada, are pleased about news the automaker is pouring almost \$500 million of investment into its St. Catharines operations. From left are Ray Long, Bob Ling, Ellen Forbes and Scott DeMont.

its two St. Catharines plants. Its Ontario St. site, with about 250 workers, is set to shut down at the end of the year.

In its heyday in the 1980s, GM employed more than 9,000 work-

ers. The foundry and a plant on Welland Ave. have since closed.

Workers are crucial for the United Way of St. Catharines and District, its executive director said. Frances Hallworth said

GM and its workers now provide more than \$400,000, or 14% of total contributions, to the agency's annual campaign.

"My gosh, the GM news is amazing for us," Hallworth said.

"There is definitely the largest campaign we have. The donors at GM are longtime, loyal and incredibly generous," she said, adding support increased as the company's numbers fell.

News that GM is on a more even keel at Glendale Ave. "brings stability to our own campaign."

Walter Sendzik, general manager of the St. Catharines-Thorold Chamber of Commerce, uses a similar tone in assessing the impact of GM's revival on St. Catharines' economy.

"I think it stabilizes the existing manufacturing infrastructure we have," he said.

Collectively, the economic impact of workers gainfully employed "is also felt by the community every day."

Sendzik added a note of caution. "This doesn't mean we're out of the woods ... when it comes to our economy."

"Yes, this is a stabilizer for an economic sector. But we must keep all cylinders firing as we continue to transition our economy."

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