



THOUGHT LEADERS

ENGINE OF CHANGE

Transportation manufacturers gear up as the mobility industry evolves



BOTH PHOTOS: JIM COURTNEY

From left, Randy Myers of Cummins Inc., David Buzo of the Ford Stamping Plant and William Tiger of GM Components Holdings met last week to discuss the future of the industry. Stephen Still, below, an adviser at UB's Institute for Sustainable Transportation and Logistics, joined the conversation.

BY DAN MINER
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Changes big and small are coming to automotive manufacturers in Western New York.

Some of that is driven by headline-grabbing trends such as driverless vehicles and fueling systems that run off electricity.

Some are more subtle, such as new materials and machines that change products and the way they're made.

"Electric cars still have motors and batteries have to be cooled," said William Tiger, plant manag-

er of General Motors Components Holdings factory in Lockport, where about 1,400 people make heating and cooling products for motor vehicles.

Tiger was among a gathering of local executives in automotive manufacturing who came together for a Business First "Thought Leaders" discussion Feb. 8.

He was joined by David Buzo, plant manager of the Ford Motor Co. Stamping Plant in Woodlawn; Randy Myers, director of machining operations and facilities at the Cummins Inc. Jamestown Engine Plant; Daniel Spitzer, a partner at Hodgson Russ



with DAVID BUZO, RANDY MYERS, STEPHEN STILL and WILLIAM TIGER

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“We have to be ready for whatever changes are coming that we don’t know about yet. We’re starting to learn about electric vehicles and what they mean for cooling products.”

WILLIAM TIGER,
plant manager,
GM Components Holdings



“We have to evolve. If we don’t evolve we become extinct.”

DAVID BUZO,
plant manager,
Ford Stamping Plant



“We still have to sell and to make sure our current products are excellent to fund what we do in the future.”

RANDY MYERS,
leader, machining
operations, facilities and
central services,
Cummins Inc.



“Every business model for companies connected to the mobility industry is going to change.”

DANIEL SPITZER,
partner,
Hodgson Russ LLP



“Universities have to deliver highly qualified students who can help you sort out all these challenges from many different angles.”

STEPHEN STILL,
adviser,
Institute for Sustainable
Transportation and Logistics,
School of Engineering and
Applied Science, University
at Buffalo

LLP; and Stephen Still, a business executive who serves as an adviser for the Institute for Sustainable Transportation and Logistics in the University at Buffalo’s School of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

The local Cummins, General Motors and Ford factories are vastly different in function and scope. But they all have been on an upward trajectory in recent years as they’ve won investments from their corporate parents.

► Cummins, for instance, added hundreds of employees last year to the plant in Lakewood as it continues to expand the product portfolio, including recurring revenue items such as treatment for long-haul truck engines.

This year it will release a new version of the X12 engine, which is 600 pounds lighter than anything else in the industry.

Myers said the Cummins parent company is investing about \$500 million in exploring electric vehicles, an initiative that will almost certainly be a part of the Jamestown Engine Plant’s future someday.

In the meantime, the plant is already expanding the portfolio of products, such as a new partnership that will see production of an integrated engine and transmission.

“In the future we’ll be more than a truck manufacturer,” Myers said. “We’ll be a provider of powertrains to many different end users, whether it’s truck companies, bus companies, with a more integrated product that



JIM COURTNEY

Hodgson Russ LLP partner Daniel Spitzer, left, listens as Randy Myers of Cummins Inc. makes a point.

is more connected.”

► The sprawling GM Components factory in Lockport has been on life support several times in recent decades but pulled through in recent years as Tiger and the plant’s United Auto Workers segment forged a partnership that emphasizes transparency and collaboration.

The result has been a growing book of business and a flexible, confident mindset about the future.

Tiger said shifts over the next decade or so will likely be subtle. But local GM executives are watching closely.

“We know that we need to be making something,” he said. “I don’t care if it’s electric motors or cooling products. We have to be the best at what we do so that we’re making something here.”

► Ford’s factory on Route 5 in Woodlawn has also had tenuous moments in recent years as the company closed factories around the world.

But the parent company chose to invest in Western New York, turning it into the most automated stamping factory in the Ford system and pushing employment from about 500 to

► **CLOSER LOOK AT THE THOUGHT LEADERS**

The Thought Leaders is a series of discussions with Western New York business leaders and attorneys at Hodgson Russ LLP.

Throughout the year, leaders in diverse industries meet for a roundtable discussion moderated by Business First journalists. Excerpts from the conversation are published after the roundtable.

The next one will feature decision-makers involved in cyber security and data protection.

Discussions are held in the law firm’s Pearl Street offices in Buffalo.

more than 1,100 now.

Like the General Motors factory in Lockport, changes such as electrification or the integration of driverless software don’t have a direct effect on what’s produced in Woodlawn. Workers there build doors, panels, hoods, fenders and other products and then ship them to Ford assembly plants.

But Buzo said those changes could play a role in the ever-changing design of automobile bodies. That could mean different products and processes for the Ford stamping factory.

In the meantime, technological changes have changed the kinds of materials that Ford uses.

“I think we’re going to see the continued evolution of different materials,” Buzo said.