

7C BUSINESS

Layoffs hit black auto workers hardest

By Chris Nisan
MINNESOTA SPOKESMAN-RECORDER

ST. PAUL, MINN. — "I don't see Ford going under, but they are sure going to be small," said auto worker Azariah of Ford Motor Company's future in the aftermath of the company's recent announcement of massive layoffs and plant closures. Azariah, who goes by the single name, is a 20-year member of the United Auto Workers union at Ford Motor Company's Twin Cities Assembly Plant in St.

Paul. The local facility is under consideration for closure by the auto manufacturing giant, along with a number of other plants across the country. "There is a wide range of opinion among workers," said Azariah, "but the common denominator is that no one wants to see it close."

Ford announced several weeks ago that it would slash up to 30,000 jobs within the next four years and shut down 14 factories. Last

week, the automaker made public the first plant closures that included facilities in St. Louis, Atlanta, and Wixom, Mich. In total, the proposed cuts amount to 25 percent of its North American payroll.

The Twin Cities plant was on the original short list of factories to be closed, but it dodged the bullet in this first round of shut-downs.

Confronted with steadily declining sales and profits, the two other U.S. auto manufac-

turers, General Motors and Daimler-Chrysler, have taken similar actions to confront the profit crunch and intensifying competition.

GM announced several months ago its intent to cut 30,000 jobs in the U.S. and Canada, cuts that amount to 17 percent of its labor force. Last week, Daimler-Chrysler said that it would eliminate 6,000 white-collar jobs, 20 percent of its administrative work

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Doo-wop band wins settlement from Pepsi

By Kim Curtis
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO — A judge has ordered PepsiCo Inc. and its advertising company to pay \$250,000 to the 1950s doo-wop band The Flamingos for using their recording, "I Only Have Eyes For You" in a commercial without permission.

A federal judge in Chicago upheld an arbitrator's decision in favor of the two surviving members of The Flamingos, Terry Johnson and Tommy Hunt, and the estates of the deceased members.

A collective bargaining agreement with the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists requires an advertiser to get permission and pay fees to the music publishers, the record labels and the artists themselves.

"In our case, they didn't even ask," San Francisco entertainment lawyer Steven Ames Brown said Monday.

It's not the first time Pepsi has neglected to pay a recording artist for a song, Brown said. He claims Pepsi has failed to pay black performers for their songs in advertising campaigns featuring supermodel Cindy Crawford.

"Pepsi routinely pays the Caucasian performers who appear on camera, but refuses to pay the African-American singers whose voices are used in the soundtrack unless they sue," Brown said.

A spokesman for Pepsi said the failure to pay The Flamingos directly was an oversight and that Pepsi didn't realize the song was subject to the collective bargaining agreement.

"That's completely inaccurate," said Dave DeCecco of Purchase, New York-based Pepsi. "We have a long history and strong track record of supporting diversity in our advertising."

Pepsi used the band's best known 1959 hit in a television commercial that ran nationwide for about six months in 1997, Brown said.

Brown said he successfully sued Pepsi on behalf of Doris Troy, whose 1963 hit, "Just One Look" was used in another popular Crawford commercial, which also featured two young boys. Troy died in 2003.

Brown sued on behalf of The Flamingos in 2003.

Hunt sang the lead vocal in "I Only Have Eyes For You," which reached No. 11 on Billboard's Top 40 in 1959 and remained on the charts for 11 weeks, according to the suit.



PHOTOWADE NASH

Charlotte attorney James Ferguson (right) takes the baton of ownership of the Historic Excelsior Club from the former owner, N.C. Rep. Pete Cunningham.

Excelsior Club legacy passes to familiar hands

By Victoria Elmore
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The baton of ownership of the Historic Excelsior Club has been officially passed.

The Charlotte club's former owner, N.C. Rep. Pete Cunningham recently sold the Excelsior to his friend of many years, civil rights attorney James Ferguson II. At a ceremony last Friday, Cunningham reflected that the time to sell had arrived.

"I'm 76 years old; I can't take it with me," he said.

The Excelsior is a fixture in Charlotte's social and political circles. As an entertainment venue, the club has been visited by nationally-known performers like James Brown, Nat King Cole and the O'Jays. Today, it's known as a gathering spot for professionals and regular folks alike to unwind and socialize.

"It was a private night club. It

was a social club where you wanted to go, you'd be in awe of being there," said N.C. Sen. Charlie Dannelly, a longtime patron.

The Excelsior is not just a place for dancing and socializing; it's where organizations gather to discuss their plans and ideas. "This is a place where we help people. It's not just a place where people come and hang out," Cunningham said.

Since Jimmie McKee opened the Excelsior in 1944, the club has nurtured black leaders, a commitment that the new owner plans to continue. "I bought it because it is an institution in the community," Ferguson said. "It is progressive place where things have always happened and will continue to happen."

Many people who attended last week's ceremony thanked Ferguson for carrying on such a

legacy.

"I would like to say a big thank you to Ferguson, for one, accepting the baton," Charlotte City Council member Anthony Foxx said. "My dream is that we will have an even bigger institution come through this building. This place means a lot to me. I had my 10th birthday here."

Excelsior General Manager Keshia McGee voiced her appreciation for the club. "People are here for you, whatever capacity you need them," she said. "You know you're safe here. It's unique and the doors are always open."

Ferguson left no doubt he will continue to uphold the club's legacy. "The Excelsior has played a major role in the African American community," he said. "It is the forum for people to network, which is critical for the vision of preservation and progress."

ONSTAR

Updated navigation system unveiled

By Dee-Ann Durbin
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT — Ten years after it first introduced the OnStar safety and navigation system, General Motors Corp. is making a significant upgrade that will allow customers to get real-time directions as they're driving.

GM plans to announce the new option Wednesday at the Chicago Auto Show, the same venue where it introduced OnStar in 1996. Turn-by-Turn Navigation will debut on the Buick Lucerne and the Cadillac DTS in March and will gradually be added to other GM vehicles. GM says it will be available on approximately 1 million cars and trucks by the 2007 model year.

Around 4 million drivers now have OnStar, a service unique to GM. That will increase exponentially in the next few years, since GM plans to make OnStar standard on all vehicles by 2007.

OnStar has always been able to give directions, track a stolen car, unlock a car when the keys are left inside or summon an ambulance after an accident. Gradually, other features have been added, such as the ability to make handsfree calls and send monthly vehicle diagnostic reports.

Right now, OnStar owners can press a button to dial an operator and get audio directions based on their location, which is pinpointed by satellite. The directions are read off immediately. The system lets customers tape the directions and play them back as they drive, but it doesn't keep track of the vehicle's progress as it follows the route.

With the new system, drivers will call an operator and ask for audio directions, which are downloaded by the operator. A computerized voice will come on and talk the driver through each step of the route as they're driving. If the driver leaves the route, the system will alert the driver and recalculate the directions based on the new location.

OnStar President Chet Huber said the new system is easy to use and safer than screen-based navigation because drivers never have to take their eyes off the road. It also will be less expensive than installing a navigation screen, which can cost between \$1,500 and \$3,000, he said. Directions are available in English, Spanish or French.

"It will demystify the user interface with navigation," Huber told The Associated Press in a recent interview. "It will be easy to use. Normal people will be able to get value out of it."

Huber wouldn't give the exact cost of the Turn-by-Turn Navigation option, but

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SOUTH CAROLINA

Group forms to help black-owned businesses



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA — A new group that hopes to become a unified voice for black business leaders has formed.

The African-American Business Roundtable, led by chairman Stephen Benjamin, hopes to improve the economic climate for black South Carolinians. The group will lobby and work for minority-owned businesses.

"This is an effort to buttress and support and compliment all the other efforts that are going on," said Benjamin, a Columbia attorney. "It is not lost on us that if we improve the quality of life for African-Americans, we improve it for the entire state."

There was a need for an organization focused strictly on the state's minority-business climate, said Jonathan Pinson of Greenville, the

roundtable's vice chairman and chairman-elect.

"Our whole goal is to get results. We want to see progress being made in the African-American business sector," said Pinson, head of Pindrum Staffing Services.

Benjamin said the group will first develop a black economic development strategy for the state and will do some lobbying, though it will be limited because its seeking nonprofit status.

"I think it is important that once we have developed our agenda that we go out and promote it actively with our elected leadership," he said.

The roundtable is envisioned as a non-partisan, nonprofit corporation and hopes to one day be viewed with groups like the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, South Carolina

Council on Competitiveness, The Palmetto Institute and Palmetto Business Forum.

The roundtable already has membership overlap with those groups.

Chamber president Hunter Howard said he welcomes the new group. "When we go setting the agenda next year, we will go and talk to them," he said.

The roundtable's goals are consistent with the chamber's in terms of getting business people more engaged in public policy, he said.

Another issue for the roundtable is the small number of black senior business executives in the state. The roundtable wants to help businesses through recruitment, internal retention and mentoring.

And while it wants to be a

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