Ford's Mulally Praises Louisville As 'Center Of Excellence'

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Ford Motor Co. CEO Alan Mulally previewed his company's next Kentucky-made vehicle Tuesday night, saying the new version of the Escape small SUV that will roll off the assembly line at a retooled
Louisville manufacturing plant will be transformational.

Mulally also praised the automaker's partnership with Louisville, calling the city where Ford has twomanufacturing plants a "center of excellence."

The executive credited with steering Ford back to profitability spoke to more than 1,500 people at the annual dinner of Greater Louisville Inc., the metro chamber of commerce.

Mulally said Ford plans to make millions of the new Escapes at five locations around the world — including the Louisville Assembly Plant, which is shut down for a $600 million renovation. The automaker has said it intends to hire 1,800 more employees at the Louisville plant to help build the new Ford Escape.

"The next version of this is going to change the world," Mulally said.

Ford will make 10 variations off the same platform, he said. Most parts will be the same, he said, but the vehicles will be "customized to each country's taste."

And then in a bow to a future hometown of the Escape, Mulally said, "And right here is the center of excellence in Louisville, Kentucky."

Ford's other Louisville plant, the Kentucky Truck Plant, produces F-series Super Duty pickups as well as the Expedition and Lincoln Navigator sport utility vehicles.

Mulally referred to the F-series lineup as "the No. 1 selling vehicle in the world for 34 years, and you make it right here."

In his own remarks, Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer praised the public-private partnership that has allowed Ford to thrive in Louisville.

"Our city and state are investing in Ford, and in turn Ford is investing in our city and our state and most importantly in our people," the mayor said.

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