Gov Promotes Detroit Workforce Partnership

Jeff Karoub, AP Business Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder on Monday praised a partnership between a Detroit-based social and economic services agency and a manufacturing assembly company, saying it would be a role model for the jobs plan he plans to announce in November.

Snyder spoke at the nonprofit group Focus: HOPE, which has teamed up with Auburn Hills-based Android Industries to assemble parts for the Chevrolet Volt, a rechargeable electric car with a small gas engine.

"The power of partnerships — that's what is truly exciting here," the Republican governor said from a stage set up near workers assembling headliners and front-end suspension models. The equipment will be shipped to a nearby General Motors Co. plant for final assembly.

"It's by marrying those together that we see increased power," Snyder added. "That's what we need to focus on."

Snyder said the din of machines behind him was "a noise we need to hear more often in the state."

About 50 workers, mostly from Detroit, have been hired by Focus: HOPE for manufacturing positions at Android Industries, which leases the employees and manufacturing space at the nonprofit. Company officials said they hope to hire a total of 150 Focus: HOPE employees in Detroit and another Android facility in the neighboring suburb of Warren by early 2013 as demand for the Volt increases and the number of shifts grow.

"This is about a 10 percent footprint of what we're going to be doing (at Focus: HOPE)," Android Chief Executive Gerald Elson said.

Elson said the manufacturing line at Focus: HOPE has been running for a little more than two months, and he described the operation as "flawless." He also said the workers trained by the nonprofit are as good as those Android hires through its normal process.

He said working with Focus: HOPE was "the right thing to do" for the workers, the company, the city and the state.

Snyder said it's an example of the kind of workforce development that's crucial to pulling Michigan out of its economic struggles. He's expected to introduce his jobs development plan next month as one of his "messages" to the state Legislature.

Manufacturing tie-ups aren't new for Focus: HOPE, which was founded in 1968 after

the Detroit riots and worked for years with the Detroit Three automakers and major suppliers. The agency was forced to discontinue those contracts several years ago as the auto industry retrenched in the face of price pressure and tough competition — a precursor to the bankruptcy reorganizations of GM and Chrysler.

Cassandra Davis was among those to benefit early on, coming to Focus: HOPE in 1994 and working her way up through its educational training programs to work as a shipping and receiving data analyst.

The 40-year-old from Detroit said she lost her job in 2005 when Focus: HOPE stopped making auto parts. She moved to Columbus, Ohio, for temporary automotive work, but returned to Michigan last year when she heard about the Focus: Hope-Android partnership.

Davis said Focus: HOPE provided her a "first chance," now her job with the partnership is offering a second.

"It's fabulous I could do it in Detroit," said Davis, one of the first people hired to work on the Android line at Focus: HOPE. "I only left Detroit because I didn't have work."

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