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The Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — The head of General Motors' operations in China, India and Southeast Asia has decided to retire.

Kevin Wale, 57, who has led the Asian operations since 2005, will step down Oct. 31, the company said in a statement Wednesday.

He'll be replaced by Bob Socia, 58, who is now head of global purchasing for GM. Socia will start work in China on Oct. 1, the statement said.

Wale began his career with GM in Australia in 1975, spending time in Asia and Europe before becoming managing director of the China Group in 2005.

Spokeswoman Lori Arpin said Wale has spent seven years building GM's Asian operations, often working day and night to keep up with the company's growth. "He's ready to go. He's ready to have his life back," she said, adding that Wale plans to retire in his native Australia.

Under Wale's leadership, GM became a leader throughout Asia. During his years in China, GM's annual sales grew from 560,000 vehicles in 2005 to 2.5 million in 2011, the company said.

Socia has worked with GM in every region around the world. He also has been with the company since 1975.

Tim Lee, head of GM's International Operations, said in the statement that Socia's vast knowledge of GM's business around the world makes him a perfect fit to take over the Asian operations.

GM has faced several executive departures recently. The heads of marketing and European operations both were ousted earlier this year, and several lower-level executives also have been forced out or decided to leave.

But the company said Wale decided to retire on his own after almost 40 years with GM.

General Motors Co. shares rose 25 cents to \$23.22 in morning trading Wednesday.

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