Engineers in Demand Survey: Higher Pay, Signing Bonuses

By Eric Morath
emorath@mbizreview.com

The demand for engineers in southeastern Michigan is pushing more employers to pay higher signing bonuses in the sector, even while hiring in most other fields remains sluggish across the state. This year, 29 percent of the companies surveyed indicated that they paid signing bonuses to engineers, up from 25 percent in 2004, according to the American Society of Employers’ Engineering Survey for Southeast Michigan. The average bonus increased from $3,000 in 2004 to $3,682 in 2005, according to the Southfield-based employer’s organization.

In a state where unemployment rates have hovered around 7 percent—much higher than the 5.1 percent seasonally adjusted national rate in September—paying bonuses may seem counterintuitive, said Kevin Marrs, the society’s director of survey services. “But what I think this shows is southeastern Michigan is still a research and development hub for the automotive industry,” he said. “Organizations still must maintain a competitive position to attract these folks they are looking to attract.”

The survey contacted 142 southeastern Michigan companies. Many are automotive suppliers, Marrs said, and more than half are based in Oakland County.

Bonuses may not have been used across the board but can prove useful when hiring for hard-to-fill positions or in areas where specific talent is needed. Those types of jobs often demand competitive compensation regardless of economic conditions.

In fact, improving conditions nationally are pushing bonuses for local engineers, said Stephen Woodbury, a labor economist and professor at Michigan State University. “The market for engineers is national, and the rest of the country is in a recovery, so the market for engineers is tight,” he said. “Any Michigan employer who wants to hire an engineer has to compete in that tight national market, and that explains the bonuses going to engineers here in Michigan.”

The market for engineers is cyclical and follows economic trends, Woodbury said. So while the state is not recovering as quickly as other areas, there is still a slightly increasing demand for this highly skilled labor. “Even if Michigan is only improving slowly, lots of companies here need to hire new engineers to replace engineers who are getting lured away to other employers or retiring,” he said. “So even if the Michigan employers who are hiring engineers aren’t in a big cyclical upswing yet, they will need to hire new engineers and offer bonuses to do so.”

The economic news is not all positive for engineers. The American Society of Employers survey found that those who remain with their companies are not seeing substantial pay increases. Marrs said engineers are receiving raises in the 2.8–4 percent range—keeping up with, or slightly ahead of, the rate of inflation. Engineers and other workers in southeastern Michigan are experiencing similar year-to-year raises.

The percentage of companies handing out bonuses remains lower than the rate found in the late 1990s, Marrs said. “It’s still below three in 10 companies, and not every classification of engineer is seeing bonuses,” he said. “But for companies who need to capture folks with critical talent, cash is one popular option.”

Reprinted with permission from the October 13-19 issue of Oakland Business Review.

Daylighting Design Wins National Honors

By Karen Sanborn

Other teams may have been bigger, but Bethany Bezak and Jhana Frederiksen, senior civil engineering students, took top honors in the Parsons Brinckerhoff Environmental and Water Resource Student Design Competition for their Clinton River Daylighting Project in Pontiac. Their design exposes a three-block stretch of the Clinton River that had been covered, revitalizing the river and downtown Pontiac. The highlights of their design include a flow-inlet feature, trapezoidal channel, natural pond, an unrestained natural slope, soil-nailed retaining system, and the redesign of two intersections on Woodward Ave.

Bezak and Frederiksen presented their winning project at the World Water and Environmental Resource Congress May 15–19 in Anchorage, Alaska.

By Karen Sanborn

Students in Greg Feierfeil’s corporate entrepreneurship class were educated and entertained by Petite Pig entrepreneur Patty Masri-Fletcher, principal harpist for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Fletcher, wife of mechanical engineering professor Robert Fletcher, shared with students how she started her successful felt harp pick business. It grew from her need for a pick that would save her fingers. Online orders for the four-pack packages pour in from all over the world.

The business name, Petite Pig at petitepig.com, was derived from the pet name she and her brother called one another. She said that selling the picks on the Web was an important factor in the success of her venture.

Masri-Fletcher stressed that it was her hands-on involvement—from researching and registering the business name, to creating the die used to cut the felt, to advertising/promoting the product and fulfilling orders—and her insistence on the highest quality that propelled her to a successful business venture.

Entrepreneurial Chord

By Karen Sanborn

Harpist Strikes...
Campaign Success
Earns Ragan Promotion

By Bruce Annett

University President Charles M. Chambers recently announced that Stephen C. Ragan has been promoted to senior vice president for university advancement. He had been vice president for university advancement since 1999.

"Mr. Ragan's leadership of the Campaign for Lawrence Tech, which at over $40 million is already some 100 percent over its original goal, has allowed us to make significant progress in improving student services and support," Chambers said. "His innovations, which have enhanced government relations and technology partnerships, and built our marketing and alumni and donor relations programs, are making Lawrence Tech a national model of successful philanthropy and stewardship."

Detroit Designs
Southfield

By Joongsub Kim

This semester the junior studio class at the Detroit Studio is working with the city of Southfield on several proposals, including the development of a master plan for the city center. The 15 students are working with Southfield’s planning division and other committees on this project, which is funded by the city.

The class has been divided into four groups, each of which has chosen a theme around which to develop their master plan. Each team is charged with providing detailed urban design proposals that address the strengths and weaknesses of the four key sites in the city center area.

In the final phase of the project, each student will design a landmark building for the intersection of Evergreen and Civic Center Drive. Some of the interesting design ideas that have been proposed include a mixed-use community center, a community technology center, an event center, an entertainment center for college students and young people, and many more.

The goal is for students to learn how the holistic application of urban and architectural design principles can address the problems faced by post-industrial cities such as Southfield.

In December there will be a project reception and exhibition attended by developers, city officials, students, their families, and guests. The project outcomes will be published next spring.

Another Detroit Studio community outreach project involves students in the urban design class, who are working with the city of Southfield to establish design guidelines for the downtown area. In the course of this project, students will have the opportunity to learn why so many small rural towns have declined across the United States and how to improve their situation by focusing on downtown revitalization that maintains the city’s sense of community and cohesiveness.

Three students have been working with city officials and Alan Kiriluk, chairman of KIRCO in Troy and a supporter of the project and the city, to investigate the challenges and opportunities that Lewiston faces. This project is funded by Lewiston’s board of trustees. Results will be published next spring.

Chung Talks Robofest

By Lori Birman

C. J. Chung, professor of math and computer science, was a guest speaker at RoboNexus, the largest robotics event in the Western Hemisphere. The robotics conference and expo, held at the San Jose Convention Center in the heart of California’s Silicon Valley Oct. 6-9, was a mammoth event with more than 10,000 attendees. Google and iRobot and many others sponsored the event.

Chung shared the experience and knowledge he gained by organizing and implementing Robofest in 2000 and each year thereafter. Other guest speakers included Colin Angle, co-founder and CEO of iRobot; Manuela Veloso, professor of computer science at Carnegie Mellon Institute; and Rob Ambrose, director of NASA’s Johnson Space Center. For more details about the speakers and their presentation abstracts, visit www.robonexus.com/speakers.htm.

Several hundred people visited Lawrence Tech’s booth at the expo, where they had the opportunity to watch the Robofest DVD and pick up information. Thirteen individuals from Lawrence Tech’s booth at RoboNexus.
New Sigma Pi Guys

By Jason Green

Fall semester 2005 started out with a bang for Sigma Pi as we welcomed in our largest pledge class to date. There are 16 new members who are very eager to become brothers in Lawrence Tech’s most active Greek organization. The names of the new members are Corey Allision, Roger Blanton, Andrew Bow, Richard Brienik, Bryan Clark, Kyle Cumbow, Michael Dalessandro II, Benjamin Deyarmond, Jason Hefter, Jacob Kurth, Alex Pekalski, Andrew Queenan, Kyle Seigert, Kevin Smutek, Ben Stephens, and Grayson Welch.

This semester we have planned a few philanthropic events, such as participating in the annual Angels’ Night and volunteering at Detroit-area soup kitchens. On Oct. 7 we helped stuff backpacks for Hurricane Katrina victims. On Friday, Nov. 18, we will host our largest party of the year, Purple Passion! Purple Passion will be held at the Elks Lodge on Plymouth Rd. in Livonia.

Harpist Strikes a Chord

(continued from page 1)

quality that made her venture successful.

“I insist on absolute first-rate quality. I check the felt to make sure it is absolutely flawless before any picks are made. I review each package as Rob and I pack them at the kitchen table,” Masri-Fletcher explained. “If any are discolored or blemished, I put them in a seconds basket. I do not sell anything that is second-rate.”

Masri-Fletcher encouraged students to pursue a business venture they feel passionate about. “Follow your heart,” Fletcher emphasized. “Provide the product and service that you would want to receive.”

Formula Leader Wins National Award

Brian Dwornick not only pushed his team to be the best they could be, he helped push (on the right) the car to the starting position.

By Karen Sanborn

Brian Dwornick, BSME’05, has been named this year’s recipient of the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) Rumbough Outstanding Student Leader Award. Dwornick will be presented with the award during the Honors Convocation at the SAE World Congress in Detroit, April 5-7, 2006. As part of the award, he also receives free SAE lifetime adult membership and a monetary stipend. Established by Max E. Rumbough Jr., SAE executive vice president emeritus, this award annually recognizes an outstanding SAE student leader, encouraging continued participation in SAE throughout his or her professional career. The award is based on leadership skills demonstrated during the student’s senior year of undergraduate studies, and the recipient must be employed in a mobility-related industry at the time of selection.

Dwornick was nominated by Badih Jawad, associate professor of mechanical engineering and formula SAE!, team advisor. “As team leader for the 2005 Formula SAE, Brian motivated his team to build a car capable of finishing the endurance event for the first time in eight years,” said Jawad. “Under his keen leadership, the car was completed a full two months before the competition, which is a record among teams for this event.”

Dwornick is currently a project engineer at Roush Industries in Allen Park. He graduated magna cum laude in May 2005. Dwornick was awarded Lawrence Tech’s outstanding SAE student chapter and vice president of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers student chapter during his senior year.

Allardice is Keynote Speaker at Diversity Café

By Cheryl Kern

In early October, the Project One initiative of the Michigan Minority Business Development Council (MMBDC) sponsored a forum to identify ways to increase the success of Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs). MBEs are ethically based businesses that seek to provide products and services to major corporations as part of those corporations’ commitment to supplier diversity.

The MMBDC and Project One match corporate supplier diversity managers with MBEs on a regular basis to identify contract and bidding opportunities and to foster mentoring. As part of the forum, the spexx Project One group sponsored a Diversity Café that focused on identifying the “burning issues” on the minds of both corporate and MBE members. The dynamic and creative format generated more than a hundred ideas and issues of importance to the group. The discussion covered topics from business and politics to the environment, and how these issues impact the success of employees and their companies.

The highlight of the event was a keynote speech presented by Lawrence Tech’s David Allardice, assistant dean of the College of Management. In his presentation titled, “Navigating Your Way through Turbulent Times,” Allardice stressed the importance of education.
Come Experience The Difference!
Great Service & Price And ALWAYS Honest Advice.

STORE HOURS: Mon-Fri: 10am-7pm  Sat: 10am-6pm  Sun: Closed

Sprint

FREE Incoming Plan
- 1000 Anytime Minutes
- Unlimited Nights & Weekends
- Unlimited Nationwide Talk & Text
- Free Nationwide Long Distance

$9.99/mo

*New Contracts Only

Sanyo 6300
- Camera / Phone
- Voice Recognition
- Slide Show Screen Saver

$99.99

PREPAID PHONES for $9.99 minutes included activation extra

Motorola i530
- Camera / Video Phone
- Voice Activated Dialing
- Color Screen

$339.99

ALL PAYMENTS ACCEPTED ALL PREPAID CARDS SOLD HERE

LG vx8100
- Bluetooth
- 1.3 Megapixel Camera
- Video Camera
- Speakerphone

$59.99/mo

Motorola BAZR V3
- Bluetooth
- 2 Megapixel Camera
- Digital Camera
- Speakerphone

$99.99

T-Mobile

Get More Plus Plan
- 1000 Free Night Minutes
- Unlimited Nights & Weekends
- Free Nationwide Long Distance

$59.99/mo

Verizon Wireless

America’s Choice Plan
- 900 Anytime Minutes
- No Roaming
- Unlimited Nights & Weekends
- Unlimited IN Calling
- Unlimited Domestic Long Distance

$59.99/mo

PREPAID PHONES

Sprint

Motorola i530

Motorola BAZR V3

T-Mobile

Verizon Wireless

Boost Mobile

SOLD HERE

dish

SOLD HERE

dish NETWORK
Better TV for all.

FREE DISH up to 4 Rooms
Ask about 25 FREE Movie Channels or over 200 Channels for FREE

ALL PAYMENTS ACCEPTED ALL PREPAID CARDS SOLD HERE

FREE PHONES

SOLD HERE

Refer a Customer & Receive $30 Store Credit!

10% OFF STUDENT DISCOUNT
For Students, Faculty and Family Members. Bring in this coupon and receive an additional 10% off PDA and Blackberry phone prices! While Supplies Last.

*All offers are subject to change without notice. Not all products, prices and promotions available at all locations. Some restrictions may apply. Not responsible for typographical errors. New activation and credit approval required. In-store purchases require free-form of valid identification. Any applicable taxes and transaction fees apply. All current phone promotions and pricing are subject to the following terms: First pricing is offer invalid and care mail-in rebate and fee new activation must be on a rate plan of $19.95 or higher with the additional purchase of an AllStar Wireless accessory. Written Subject to Customer Agreement, Calling Plan & credit approval. $175 cancellation fee, if term is not met. $599 service plan. Coverages & offers not available everywhere. White supplies last. © 2005 Verizon Wireless.