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Connected Vehicle Research Center Planned on Site of Former Willow Run Powertrain Plant

High-Tech Development Expected to be a Catalyst for the Region

YPSILANTI TOWNSHIP, MI — The former Willow Run Powertrain plant, long a source of economic strength in Southeast Michigan, is the proposed home for a technologically advanced [connected vehicle research](#) center, a project that could become a hub of research and development for the vehicles of tomorrow and a catalyst for jobs in innovative automotive research. The announcement was made today by the [RACER Trust](#), [Devon Industrial Group](#) and Walbridge Development, LLC.

The project will evolve in two simultaneous phases, both led by Detroit companies. Devon Industrial Group, a minority-owned business, will manage the dismantling and removal of the industrial buildings on the property, supervising the activities of [MCM Management](#) of Bloomfield Hills, MI. Walbridge Development, LLC, an affiliate of the [Walbridge Group, Inc.](#), one of America's largest privately held construction companies, would redevelop the property into a shared R&D center and test track for connected vehicles. This facility would jointly serve automakers, suppliers and related technology companies and would be the first of its kind.

RACER has marketed the Willow Run property for sale and redevelopment since taking ownership in 2011. It sought competitive proposals for dismantling and removal of the buildings on the property, as well as alternative redevelopment proposals, in order to maximize the property's substantial redevelopment potential. Devon Industrial Group and Walbridge submitted a joint proposal that included demolition and their vision for redevelopment.

"This is a tremendous opportunity for Ypsilanti Township, the surrounding community and all of Southeast Michigan," Ypsilanti Township Supervisor Brenda Stumbo said. "I believe this will usher in an era of collaboration and cooperation between the public and private sectors. This development will bring high-tech R&D, excellent jobs, a stronger tax base and be a source of great pride for our region."

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Elliott P. Laws, administrative trustee of the RACER Trust, said: “Finding a buyer and new use for Willow Run has been one of RACER’s highest priorities. This project fits perfectly with Southeast Michigan’s long-standing leadership in automotive innovation. I congratulate and thank Devon Industrial Group and Walbridge for their vision and spirit, and for their part in shaping what will be a very dynamic future for this region.”

The contracts will not impede [Yankee Air Museum’s](#) campaign to purchase and separate a portion of the Willow Run Powertrain plant to serve as a permanent home for the museum and its collections.

Dismantling and removal activities are expected to begin this fall and take approximately 12 months to complete. At that point, Walbridge would buy the majority of the 332-acre property and begin redevelopment, subject to a development agreement with Ypsilanti Township. The development agreement would define the scope of the proposed connected vehicle research center and the number of jobs Walbridge would commit to attract as a result.

“Since 1916, Walbridge has played major a role in the history of the auto industry by building some of its most critical manufacturing, assembly and R&D facilities. But more importantly, we want to help build its future. The Willow Run property is ideal for the type of development we envision, one that leverages the region’s assets — both talent and technology,” said John Rakolta III, Business Development Director for Walbridge. “We believe in this project’s success, and we’re committed to helping attract businesses and tenants whose R&D interests align with the goals of our planned facility — to develop and refine vehicle technology that will make our roads safer and keep Michigan at the forefront of automotive innovation.”

Paul Krutko, president and CEO of the economic development organization Ann Arbor SPARK, said: “SPARK’s role as the regional economic development organization is to look for opportunities big and small to build prosperity. We identified automotive technology as a key area of potential and earlier this year drafted a white paper, *Ahead By A Century — A Proposal to Develop A World Class Test Facility for Intelligent Transportation Systems and Autonomous Vehicles in Southeast Michigan*, based on our findings. Working initially with Walbridge, RACER Trust and Ypsilanti Township, and longer term with other private- and public-sector partners, Ann Arbor SPARK is creating this new economic opportunity for the region that has the potential to generate significant investment and jobs.”

“We’re looking forward to the challenge of dismantling and removing such a large building in 12 months, but we share RACER’s and Walbridge’s urgency to get started on redevelopment and job creation, and that begins with our team’s performance,” said David Burnley Sr., CEO of Devon Industrial Group.

In a separate development, RACER is engaged in a land swap with the Wayne County Airport Authority, giving Willow Run Airport control of land it needed to better utilize an existing east-west runway without physically extending the runway. This land swap supports the airport authority’s long-term business development efforts. Full runway utilization had been constrained by the previous property boundary between the airport and RACER’s land.

“This exciting new project and the land swap are both indicative of RACER’s commitment to economic revitalization, not just for Willow Run but for all of Southeast Michigan,” said Tim Keyes, CEO of [VantagePort](#), a regional economic development consortium focused on driving expansion and new investment in and around Detroit Metro and Willow Run Airport. “Our region will reap the benefits of this land swap almost immediately, enabling more efficient movement of people and products through Willow Run.”

RACER previously announced the sale of an adjacent building, the former Willow Run Company Vehicle Operations facility, to International Turbine Industries, a jet engine repair and parts sales business.

About the RACER Trust: The RACER (Revitalizing Auto Communities Environmental Response) Trust was created to clean up and position for redevelopment properties and other facilities owned by the former General Motors Corp. before its 2009 bankruptcy. RACER is one of the largest holders of industrial property in the United States and is the largest environmental response and remediation trust in U.S. history. When the Trust was formed, it owned properties at 89 locations in 14 states, principally in the Midwest and Northeast. The Trust, which is independent, was created by a settlement agreement in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court between the U.S. Government, the 14 states where the former GM properties are located, and the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, which owns land adjoining one of the properties in Upstate New York. For more information, please visit our website: www.racertrust.org.

About Walbridge: Walbridge was founded in 1916 in Detroit and has grown to become one of America’s largest privately owned construction companies. The company has expertise in many market segments, including: airports, automotive, commercial, education, government, healthcare, industrial process, manufacturing, and water/wastewater. Walbridge is an industry pace-setter in the development of new ideas and methods for quality construction, site safety, enhancing sustainability, lowering cost and maximizing long-term project value. For more information, please visit: www.walbridge.com.

About Devon Industrial Group: Devon Industrial Group provides construction management, general contracting, pre-construction, decommissioning and facility management services for clients in the automotive, healthcare, industrial process and education fields. The firm was recognized in 2013 by the Associated General Contractors of Michigan with an Outstanding Safety Performance award earned for a low injury incident rate based on total amount of work hours generated in 2012. For more information, please visit: www.devonindustrial.com

About MCM Management Corp: MCM Management Corp. (MCM) is a vertically integrated industrial services provider that specializes in repurposing America’s largest industrial and manufacturing facilities for redevelopment. MCM has performed more than 100 million square feet of environmental remediation, asbestos abatement, demolition and recycling services since 1993. For more information, please visit: www.mcmmanagement.com

About Ann Arbor SPARK: Ann Arbor SPARK, a non-profit organization, is advancing the region by encouraging and supporting business acceleration, attraction and retention. The organization identifies and meets the needs of business at every stage, from start-ups to large organizations. Ann Arbor SPARK collaborates with business, academic, government, and community investor partners including the University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan

University, Washtenaw Community College, Washtenaw County, Livingston County, Washtenaw County etcs/Michigan Works!, the City of Ann Arbor, Bank of Ann Arbor and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. For more information, please call (734) 761-9317 or visit www.AnnArborUSA.org.