

Turn Rochester into hub of alternative fuel technology



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GUEST
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I live and do business in the small town of Honeoye Falls. My place of business is a few hundred yards from the General Motors Corp. Fuel Cell Activities Center, where nearly 300 scientists and technicians are developing fuel cell technology, which could replace gasoline engines.

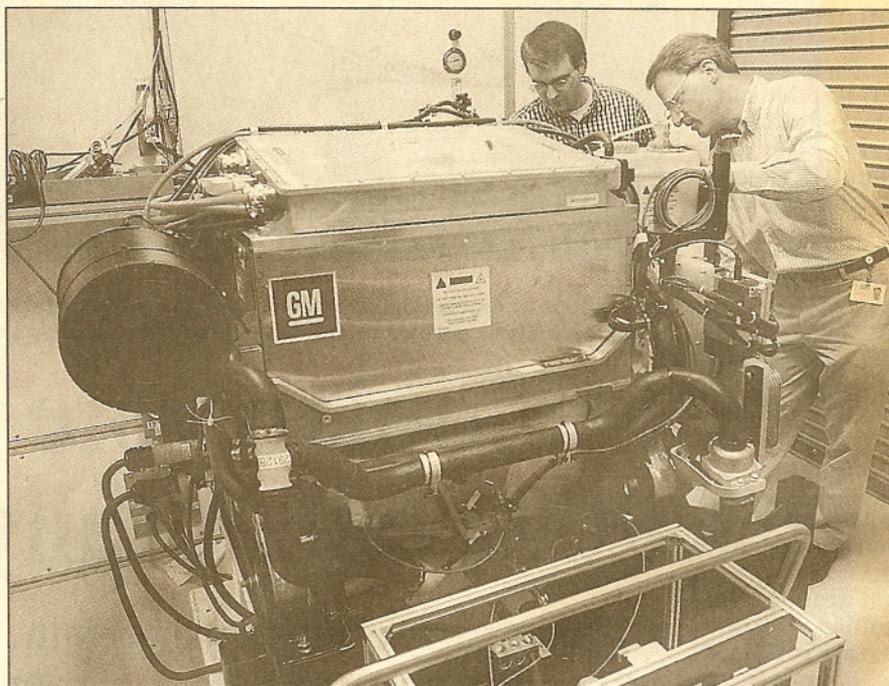
My business is a GM car dealership, and I believe this research facility is one of the best things that ever happened to Honeoye Falls and the Rochester area.

As a Honeoye Falls resident, I see GM's fuel cell research facility as a source of stability. A number of its employees are my neighbors, solid citizens who take pride in the overall well-being of their community. If they go away, we lose human capital of the very best kind: people we know and trust.

As a businessman, I find it wonderful each noontime to see people from the GM plant walking into town to eat lunch and patronize the shops. Many merchants have gone out of their way to welcome them. Indeed, this ripple effect of local spending also extends to the many regional vendors that supply GM with technical services, precision components or research.

As a car dealer, I see this research as the way of the future. In fact, GM engineers occasionally come over to talk with my technicians about engines, and I'm pleased to foster this relationship. Fuel cell engines will gradually make an appearance in the marketplace and will exist side by side with traditional gasoline engines.

In front of our eyes are the small-town values that George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life* was all about: people who believe in themselves working with and leading others toward a common goal with trust and enthusiasm; placing the community good ahead of self-interest; valuing and respecting home-grown abilities.



MAX SCHULTE file photo 2005

Dave Arthur, left, and Gary Stottler help put fuel cell theories to work at the General Motors Corp. Fuel Cell Activities Center in Honeoye Falls.

Many stakeholders want Rochester to be a major hub for fuel cell research and manufacturing. Sen. Hilary Rodham Clinton was here in April to celebrate the world's first fuel-cell-powered truck for the military that rolled out of the GM facility. Both she and Sen. Charles Schumer and Gov. George Pataki have helped secure funding for fuel cell research.

However, especially compared with other parts of the country, Rochester and indeed New York state could do better in terms of federal, state and corporate support and contracts.

Historically, new technology has needed a champion (George Eastman, Joseph C. Wilson and Chester Carlson come to mind) to succeed. In the 21st century, success is based on a champion, on partnership and collaboration.

If we can collaborate to position Rochester as "one-stop shopping" for the science, manufacture and testing of fuel cell technology — similar to our partnership efforts in optics/imaging and biotechnology — we'd be better

situated to attract financial support.

While we need help from our elected officials, we can't look to them for this kind of singular leadership; their portfolios are spread thin over a variety of other concerns. We need a dedicated fuel cell diplomat whose only charge is to bring R&D dollars to this area.

An executive/scientist from the private sector with credentials in research and development, and working only for Rochester's fuel cell stakeholders, would be in the best position to make a difference. This diplomat/lobbyist/marketer would personify our technical capabilities, achievement and commitment to fuel cell's future.

More than appearing on the radar screens of decision-makers in Washington, Albany, Detroit, and elsewhere, Rochester's fuel cell diplomat needs to be on a permanent button on their speed dials. I'm sure we can find the right person here in our hometown. □

Rosati, of Honeoye Falls, owns Molye Chevrolet Buick.