

2009 Horace H. Rackham Humanitarian Award Recipient David A. Skiven, PE, FESD



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Retired Executive Director
Worldwide Facilities Group
General Motors Corporation
Co-Director, ESD Institute

DAVID A. SKIVEN, PE, FESD, retired from General Motors after 42 years as Executive Director of the Worldwide Facilities Group in 2008 and immediately began work on a project that seeks to rebuild Michigan's economy, environment, and education: The Engineering Society of Detroit Institute. This year he was honored with induction into the ESD College of Fellows and awarded ESD's highest honor, the Horace H. Rackham Humanitarian Award.

Mr. Skiven is happy to receive both honors, stating the two serve as complements to each other. "The College of Fellows serves as a testament to my contributions within engineering and to the Society, the Rackham serves as a contribution outside day-to-day business," he said.

Mr. Skiven's career is a textbook climb from point A to point B. His engineering history started in 1965 as a student at General Motors Institute (Kettering) in mechanical engineering. His management skills began in 1970, when he joined the U.S. Army Reserve. In 1971 he became a drill sergeant and remained so for five years, meanwhile attending school and completing his MS degree in civil engineering in 1974 and starting at the Fisher Body General Office in 1973, where he worked on utilities and environment-related projects.

In 1981 Mr. Skiven began work at Fisher Body in Trenton, NJ, where he was given the positions of Engineering Manager of Utilities and Environmental Groups and Plant Engineer.

Not long after, Mr. Skiven was hired by a fledgling small-car project

named "Saturn." "I was one of the first 100 employees," Mr. Skiven commented. "We were just starting out, the first ones to walk down the [Spring Hill, Tenn.] site." He led the design team that developed the integrated facility in Spring Hill and was appointed Manager of facilities for the new Saturn Corporation, a position he held for seven years.

In 1992, he was named Director of Plant Environment for General Motors. The position was short lived, quickly outgrowing its own boundaries. In 1993, his tasks were expanded into a larger role, Executive Director of the Worldwide Facilities Group.

The new position made Mr. Skiven GM's newly appointed landlord, making him responsible for facilities management, utilities, capital construction, and environmental segments. The consolidation of these different aspects of facilities management gave General Motors the opportunity to focus on its core automobile business, resulting in significant structural cost savings, improved usage of corporate assets, and development of a talented global organization.

After 15 years, Mr. Skiven decided to retire from General Motors in 2008, but was unable to leave the professional life altogether. He joined forces with Christopher Webb, JD, FESD, and co-founded The Engineering Society of Detroit Institute. Both men volunteered a year of their time for the program.

Mr. Skiven joined the effort because of the Michigan economy. "I was given great opportunities. I just hope we can do something to provide the same opportunities for others," he says. After so many

years at the pinnacle of corporate engineering management, Mr. Skiven has a lot to offer the effort. “I want to use the knowledge and contacts I have gained to address issues within Michigan,” he said.

Mr. Skiven made a promise to his colleagues when he became part of the Institute, a promise that is already showing results. The ESD Institute hosts symposiums attended by Michigan’s leading and most innovative figures from public, government, non-government organization, business, labor, academic, legal, utility, and financial entities. The collaborative effort put forth by these people and spearheaded by Mr. Skiven and Mr. Webb is working to create jobs, economic strength, and innovative legislation to make

Michigan a financial safe-haven for engineers and technical professionals.

The Michigan Green Enterprise Zone Symposium created a proposal that could save Michigan businesses a significant percentage of their operating costs. The Clean Water Symposium, just finished, and the pending Clean Energy and Transportation Symposia promise to provide innovative solutions to Michigan’s most dire needs.

With the potential to help of so many engineers available to him, Mr. Skiven hopes those involved in this effort will “look beyond traditional business opportunities for those that may exist elsewhere, strive to advance your capabilities, and don’t lose the faith.”

He has found those opportunities for himself. Since 2000, he has served as a member of the Board of Infrastructure and the Constructed Environment, a National Committee of the National Academy of Sciences. He also serves as a member of the Board of Directors for BioReaction, Inc., a pollution control technology company, and has been a frequent advisor to a number of federal facilities organizations, including the U.S. Navy and Air Force.

Mr. Skiven served on the ESD Board of Directors from 1998 to 2008 and currently serves as a Trustee on the Rackham Engineering Foundation Board of Trustees. It was there that he found the opportunity for the Institute to take shape: “ESD is a good venue, I know of no other,” he said.



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