

Challenge accepted: Toyota production engineers turn status quo on head

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GEORGETOWN, Ky. (October 30, 2017) – It’s a big task, but Toyota Motor North America has the best and brightest accepting the challenge: innovate and problem solve to create the next generation of manufacturing technology. Today’s newly opened \$80 million, 235,000 square foot state-of-the-art and environmentally-conscious Production Engineering and Manufacturing Center (PEMC) in Georgetown, Kentucky, is the final building constructed under the “One Toyota” project, and is both a statement on Toyota’s commitment to investing in the future of American manufacturing and a home base for a key group of more than 600 Toyota engineers.

“Our production engineers are at the top of their game and help shape the future of Toyota,” said Jim Lentz, chief executive officer of Toyota Motor North America. “They push the limits every day on what’s possible in manufacturing to produce ever-better vehicles. And their hard work and commitment to quality shows in the products we build in our 14 plants across North America.”

A production engineer’s work begins after a vehicle concept is dreamed up, but before the product is manufactured. This key group of engineers finds the best way to make the vehicle, designing processes and layouts that make Toyota plants come to life. Supporting all aspects of production, including stamping, body, paint, plastics, assembly, powertrain, environmental, and safety, they interact with team members in vehicle design and product planning, as well as on the production floor to support everyday operations, model changes, Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA) implementation, new construction and future innovations and technology.

The PEMC in Kentucky has capacity to house 800 team members. In addition to production engineering, supporting teams located at PEMC include indirect purchasing, information systems, strategic business management, human resources and talent development.

Announced three years ago as part of the “One Toyota” initiative to create more unified operations in North America – which also included the new North American headquarters for Toyota in Plano, Texas, and a new research and development facility in Ann Arbor, Mich., – the PEMC includes leading-edge spaces that feature natural lighting, encourage discovery and foster teamwork that will result in increased collaboration and faster decision making.

As the manufacturing nucleus for Toyota’s North American plants, PEMC has a new TILT Lab to focus primarily on problem solving and innovation. With a name inspired by the goal of the space, the TILT Lab provides everything Toyota engineers need to shift conventional thinking on its axis, and take an idea from concept to prototype. Once tested, those advancements may be applied to the company’s plants to improve processes or solve a challenge.

Environmental stewards

Toyota’s commitment to the environment is evident through several sustainability programs across the PEMC and adjoining property. These include solar panels, skylights, a rainwater harvesting system, and a geothermal HVAC system.

“Toyota’s new environmentally-conscious, state-of-the-art PEMC building showcases their continued commitment to the commonwealth. They are a proven leader both in creating and retaining jobs for highly skilled workers,” said Gov. Bevin. “We are grateful to have Toyota in Kentucky and look forward to a bright future together.”

Investing in the future

Investing in future engineers is a top priority for Toyota. In support of this, the automaker announced the following STEM- (science, technology, engineering, and math) related donations:

- A nearly \$400,000 donation to Morehead State University (MSU), in partnership with SOAR STEM (Save Our Appalachian Region), will implement STEM curriculum in 40 elementary schools over two years.
- A \$50,000 donation to the Kentucky Science Center will create “Robotics on the Road to Coding,” a program designed for students across the state in kindergarten through grade 10 to understand coding.
- Toyota is also partnering with the University of Kentucky (UK) to create an undergraduate automotive production engineering certificate. Students will complete TPS – Toyota Production System – training, a two-semester senior design project identifying and solving current manufacturing problems.

“Programs that focus on STEM areas are the basis of a pipeline of qualified workers in manufacturing, especially in production engineering,” said Mike Goss, general manager, Social Innovation, Toyota Motor North America. “Toyota is committed to investing in initiatives that improve the skill levels of the job force, focusing on the next generation, because the success of Toyota, the Commonwealth, and our country depend on them.”

In addition to these initiatives, Toyota announced earlier this year that it is investing \$10 billion in the U.S. over the next five years, adding to the \$23.4 billion the automaker has invested in the past 60 years.