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Michelin Okla. facility to end tire production

Tire Business
ARDMORE, Okla.

Citing “evolving market demands” in coming years, Michelin North America Inc. plans to end tire production by year-end 2025 at its Ardmore passenger tire plant and move the plant’s capacity to other Michelin plants in North America.

The decision to close the 53-year-old plant in southern Oklahoma — shared Oct. 26 with employees, customers, community leaders and other public stakeholders — will affect about 1,400 employees. Rubber-mixing operations at the plant are scheduled to continue.

The plant — opened in 1970 by Uniroyal Inc. and acquired by Michelin in 1989 — is one of five factories Michelin operates in the U.S. with passenger tire capacity. The others are in Fort Wayne, Ind.; Greenville and Lexington, S.C.; and Tuscaloosa, Ala. The Fort Wayne and Tuscaloosa plants are union facilities.

The plant’s capacity is listed as 23,000 units a day. Earlier this year Honda North America Inc. honored Michelin North America with a top supplier award for 2022, and in particular cited the contributions of the Ardmore plant.



Despite substantial investments over the past five years to improve technical capabilities and competitiveness at the plant, Michelin said it concluded the Ardmore factory is not equipped to deliver tires at competitive costs that will meet evolving market demands in the coming years.

Continuing to make investments to modernize the Ardmore plant would negatively impact other U.S. sites in the network, Michelin said.

Ardmore is a city of about 24,000 residents; Michelin is the town’s single largest employer.

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Electric opportunity



G S Sareen leads private-brand tire distributor Omni United Pte. Ltd.

Omni United looks to grow in emerging EV tire market

By Don Detore
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SINGAPORE

The enthusiasm in G S Sareen’s voice is, well, electrifying.

His company, private-brand tire distributor Omni United Pte. Ltd., is one of the early value-tier adopters of a segment of the tire industry that comprises just shy of 6% of all personal vehicles on U.S. roads: Electric vehicles (EVs).

Make no mistake, though: Sareen said he not only believes passionately in the EV movement, but he also is deploying myriad resources behind products specific to EVs.

“The market will change, when the 4x4s, the new (all-electric) Rivians, the Ford Lightnings, when they all come out,” Sareen told *Tire Business*, “I mean, listen, this is an irre-

versible trend. I do not think this is going to be turned around.

“It’s a much quieter ride. It’s a much smoother ride. It’s irreversible. I don’t think this is turning back.”

Omni United’s commitment to EVs culminated earlier this year when the Singapore-based firm launched a line of Radar-brand all-season tires designed for EVs.

The Radar EV Collection includes the Radar All Season EV, as well as EV- and hybrid-compatible fitments in the company’s Dimax and RPX lines.

The Radar All Season EV launched in five sizes, covering most of the EV (Tesla) fitments in 18- to 20-inch rim diameters. It comes with a 40,000-mile treadwear warranty.

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HUMANITARIAN OF THE YEAR

Dunlap’s success spreads

Bob Dunlap’s kindness and support in his community earned him the 2023 award



‘His business acumen has made it possible for him to generously support the lives and talents of others by providing education, job training, opportunities. And he has chosen to help generations establish and maintain a wholesome, thriving, caring community.’



Hal Ferrell, mayor of Batesville, Miss.

Education, trees and coffee

By Kathy McCarron
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BATESVILLE, Miss.

Robert H. “Bob” Dunlap, who turns 94 in November, claims the secret to his longevity is drinking six cups of black coffee a day.

He’s quick to share a copy of an article that touts the benefits of coffee.

“I tell people, if you want to stick around long enough for my funeral, you better start drinking coffee,” Dunlap said.

As chairman and CEO of Dunlap & Kyle Co. Inc., he still comes into the office in Batesville every day for several hours.

So when does he plan to retire?

“Never,” he said. “That’s for dead people. I tell them we’re going to do it my way or the highway.”

Dunlap was born in 1929, the same year his father, John “Jack” Dunlap, and his cousin S.H. “Hudson” Kyle created the company. In the early years, the company sold cars and tires and distributed oil.

Bob Dunlap joined the company after serving as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy from 1951-53. He took over the tire side of the business from his father, while his brother took over the car dealership.

Bob Dunlap grew the company into a major regional tire distributor and re-

tailer, and today the company operates 18 wholesale distribution warehouses and about 40 retail stores in four states under the Gateway Tire and Hesselbein Tire banners.

Over the years he has served on numerous dealer councils and was a founding member of TBC Corp., created in 1956 by Cordovan Associates, a tire dealer purchasing group.

“I’ve known a lot of good people in the tire business,” he said, pointing to photos on his office wall of TBC founding members, including Marvin Bruce and Bobby Carroll. “There were some good people involved at that time. And they built a good company.”

He also recalls the iconic tire dealer Les Schwab.

“A lot of people will spend a lot of money on advertising. I spend none. We got a lot of retail stores, I won’t spend any money. You do it with service. We do it with what Schwab taught me,” he said.

He prides himself on being an honest business man, both with his suppliers and his customers.

“I call it keeping it straight. As long as you keep it straight, you got no problems,” Dunlap said.

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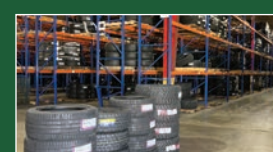


‘Most of his giving is outside the spotlight, so it would be impossible to know the totality of his generosity and the number of people he has supported over his lifetime. It is incalculable.’



Denson Hollis, CEO / senior athletic director for development, Ole Miss Athletics Foundation

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Bob Dunlap aids many educational efforts, 20



Electric

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And to say it's been a success thus far is an understatement, according to Sareen.

"I shouldn't say we've run out of capacity, but we are," he said. "We are shipping pretty much everything we produce. And it's at a price point selling as tier three brand."

In mid 2024, Omni United will launch a full range of EV fitments.

Omni United has taken a novel approach to getting tire dealers familiar with the product.

With EV penetration limited, Omni United has outfitted several Teslas with the Radar EV product and taken them to dealers around the U.S., asking them to compare for themselves the ride that the Radar products provide compared with other, higher-tier products.

"Let them test the product, break it, check it out," Sareen said, noting that the object is to give the dealers a feel for the product without "pushing a product down their throat."

Sareen compares the process to a doctor who prescribes medication for his customers.

"The doctor needs to know the medication works," Sareen said, "because he's the one prescribing the medication."

Sareen doesn't buy the argument that EV customers — stereotypically affluent enough to own or lease an EV — will insist on replacing their original-equipment tires with tier



Radar Tire all-season EV tire.

one brands that typically cost more.

Sareen questions the very definition of "premium." He said he asked a variety of people, from large wholesalers to national retailers to global distributors, how they define the term.

"Everybody's definition of premium is different," Sareen said. "My thinking is by the dictionary definition of premium, which means a product which should have premium attributes. And so it should be attribute-driven. Nothing else."

And the attributes of this tire, he said — backed by data gleaned from independent testing globally — are of premium quality.

Sareen recounted a story about one of his employees at his family's winery in Napa, Calif. The man drove to work one day in his electric Ford F-150 Lightning.

While showing off his new vehicle, Sareen said the man told him the dealer called Lightning "the best vehicle you would have ever driven, except for the tires." The man said the dealer told him the tires would wear out at 15,000 miles.

"So the Ford dealer is telling a consumer that the tires are gonna be crap," Sareen said. "And obviously, they were from a major OEM fitment."

Sareen said he told his employee that what he was told wasn't necessarily true. "But that's the experience," Sareen said.

Omni United is working on its new Radar 2.0 range, being tested extensively in Europe. The new line, Omni United said, will fit with its premium accessibility brand promise.

The range will feature more than 125 sizes, including products in the all-weather, winter, highway terrain,

high-performance and ultra-high-performance segments. Plans are to launch this line in phases, first in Europe in 2024, then in the U.S. in late 2024.

The tires are being designed with in-house capabilities combined with work by GFG Style, founded in 2015 by father-and-son duo Giorgetto and Fabrizio Giugiaro. The pair has created more than 300 standard production automobile models and more than 200 research prototypes for several OE manufacturers.

The Radar 2.0 all-weather, winter and highway terrain lines will be produced in Thailand.

It is not surprising Omni United is pursuing an EV winter product: In July 2022, it hired former Nokian Tyres P.L.C. executive Olli Seppälä as its global head of research and development. Seppälä spent nearly 20 years with Nokian, serving as head of the Finnish tire maker's global R&D department.

Nokian lays claim to being the first tire company in the world to produce a winter tire.

"It's a beautiful range with newer patterns," Sareen said. "It's a really, really good-looking winter tire and in Europe, winter tires are what makes or breaks a brand."

Omni United sources its tires from up to 16 tire plants around the world. It is a model that Sareen said works.

"We have the flexibility of doing a customized product for the market without disturbing (one plant),"

he said. "I might as well pass that (savings) off to the consumer or to the market."

Sareen said his strategy is to approach manufacturers with underutilized capacities.

"That's all I want to do," he said. "I'm not taking away anything from anybody. If you have 100,000 units of capacity free, I will give you business for 100,000 units."

In the meantime, he said, Omni United will look to add two more warehouses in the U.S., one in the Northeast and another in the Southeast, to complement its current warehouse in Dallas.

Sareen is confident that Omni United will continue to grow its market share in the U.S. The importer currently sells around 3 million tires in the U.S., 1.8 million of which are light-truck offerings.

Among other priorities are:

- Expanding its Radar Renegade-X line with extreme/mud terrain products, designed by GFG Style;

- Expanding its Radar Renegade AT Pro line; and

- Revamping its Patriot line of light truck tires with rugged terrain, all-terrain and mud-terrain products.

"I'm confident next year we'll see some very solid numbers," he said. "The wholesalers and retailers have really started seeing value in the product, and their customers are coming back asking for it. Something good is happening."

Dunlap

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

His son Joe, who serves as CFO in charge of the retail stores, recalled how his father told him: "Don't you ever sell something to somebody that they really didn't need because that's stealing. We're not in the business of stealing. So we try to help people. You have to make a profit, because you have to pay your people, and your expenses. But you want to be honest with everything you do."

"I think honesty is another legacy that he has left. Honest dealing in business," the younger Dunlap said.

Bob Dunlap attributes his business honesty and work ethic to being raised in the Presbyterian church and in Boy Scouts.

Dunlap said he is proud of being an Eagle Scout, the highest rank in Boy Scouts.

His family upbringing and his background also instilled the need to be generous with his wealth.

Consequently, Dunlap has been named the *Tire Business* Tire Dealer Humanitarian this year due to his benevolence to his community, including supporting education and conservation.

He said he thinks his reputation in his community as a humanitarian has boosted the reputation of the dealership.

"It's not why I did it. But I think we have an obligation. Part of the scout oath that I took, and I always took that seriously, part of the oath is to help other people at all times," Dunlap said.

Education

Dunlap is known in Batesville, and around Mississippi, for his support of education, most notably his penchant for covering the college



Bob Dunlap in his office at Dunlap & Kyle in Batesville, Miss.

tuition of students in need, both privately and through scholarships.

But no one seems to know how many students he has helped over the years. Not even Dunlap.

His only requirement is that the students study hard, get good grades and show him their report cards.

"I have not had one person fail me. ... Some come back to see me," he said.

"I haven't had one fail me yet, or I'd give them hell."

Not all the people he has supported through college come back to work for him. But he has hired some and he has taken a chance on offering jobs to former prison inmates. Many of his employees end up working for him for decades.

"I am a good judge of character. I have a lot of talents, and one of them is judging people. There's no substitute for good people," Dunlap said.

"The more effort you put in (employees') well-being and taking care of them and giving them the

opportunity, the better people you're going to have at the company."

Legacy

If Dunlap ever retires, he'll leave a legacy of his knowledge of tires and his commitment to the business, according to his son Joe.

"But probably more than anything, I think most people would say, is his desire to help those who were with him. I think that is probably the best one," Joe Dunlap said.

"I think his legacy is helping so many people. People at the Northwest Junior college that get to go to college because of his money and he sends money to Mississippi State (University) and Ole Miss. Helping young people. What can be better than that?"

His generosity benefits the company, he added.

"It generates a lot of good will in the community. This company is well-respected," Joe Dunlap said.

"I think he is leaving a big legacy of generosity, especially to the community around here," Dennis King, president of Dunlap & Kyle, said. "He's done so much for Batesville. He was instrumental in helping us get the north exit (off the main highway) up there which really helped the town out, and gives us two accesses off (Route) 55."

King also noted Dunlap has impacted the company with his penchant for generosity.

"He's instilled that in our hearts, too. He plans on living forever. He keeps drinking black coffee every day," King said.

"He can't seem to quit giving," noted Batesville Mayor Hal Ferrell. "He's so benevolent to give to everybody."

"He comes in every day to make a difference, to try to do something good — and drink coffee."

Jarman

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

commercial dealer network, at Bridgestone Americas Tire Operations (BATO), is next in line.

The tire industry, like every business, is facing challenges with labor and workforce development, Jarman said.

The upcoming generation of workers have grown up with technology, he said.

"The perception is from a lot of people that the tire industry is low tech. And that's maybe a fair assessment in a lot of cases, but it's exciting some of the technology ... being developed. The tire industry is not exempt from technological advances."

TIA recently launched a NEX-GEN Advisory Council with a mission to "attract, celebrate, develop, and engage emerging and industry professionals," the association said.

The council — which currently has seven members and plans to add more — had its first meeting Aug. 9 where it discussed goals and action items. Among those: a need to attract, develop, and retain younger workers in the industry and boost awareness of opportunities and mentorships; explore emerging trends and stay at the forefront of technology; and do a better job telling "our" story about careers, opportunities and upward mobility opportunities in the tire industry, TIA said.

With 30 years in the industry, Jarman is "not quite a dinosaur," but might not have the same perspective as someone in their 20s, he said.

"I think that's important, as this evolves, to know and understand

the mindset of workers today," Jarman said.

"A lot of people, I think, when they talk about millennials and the workplace, it's almost like they're saying a four-letter word. But the fact of the matter is that we've got a lot of passionate and dedicated employees in the millennial group.

"It's dangerous to write off an entire generation, but the worker of today is looking for something different than 25 or 30 years ago."

TIA also is focused on passing federal Right-to-Repair (R2R)

legislation, fighting against the vehicle makers and importers that are trying to keep the repair business inside their own house and limit consumer choice, Jarman said.

"That's a threat, longer-term, on being able to perform work on cars," he said.

TIA is among a number of industry associations lobbying for passage of the REPAIR (Right to Equitable and Professional Auto Industry Repair) Act (H.R. 906).

It's also looking at laws on the state and local level. One of the benefits of an association like TIA, outside of training, is its vast membership of more than 12,000 individuals, Jarman said.

When a state or local legislature is considering a law that could unfairly burden the tire industry or repair shops, TIA can rally constituents in that area to reach out and try to educate lawmakers, he said.

Passing R2R legislation in Maine or Maryland doesn't help shops in Nevada or California, for example, "but it can create a ripple effect," leading to nationwide change, Jarman said.



(PHILANTHROPY)

Industry shows up for Breast Cancer awareness



The Uniroyal Giant Tire in Allen Park, Mich., glowed pink, teal and green for Metastatic Breast Cancer Awareness Day.

Uniroyal tire glows pink for awareness

ALLEN PARK, Mich.

The iconic Uniroyal Giant Tire sitting along I-94 near Allen Park was lit pink during October to spread awareness on breast cancer and metastatic breast cancer.

The tire — an 80-foot-tall 12-ton landmark near the Uniroyal sales office in Allen Park — glowed green and pink on Oct. 13, Metastatic Breast Cancer Awareness Day.

Uniroyal, part of Michelin North America Inc., also is donating \$1,000 to METAvivor Research & Support, an organization that helps people with Stage IV metastatic breast cancer, which is a type of cancer that has spread to other parts of the body and is not curable.

"For several years, Uniroyal has spotlighted Metastatic Breast Cancer Awareness by lighting the Uniroyal Giant Tire in pink, green and teal," Uniroyal brand director Michelle Grim said.

"The Giant Tire is a landmark in the Detroit area and represents the brand's long heritage. We want part of that heritage to highlight and promote metastatic breast cancer research."

Snap-on releases pink tools for 'Socket to Breast Cancer' program

KENOSHA, Wis.

Snap-on Tools recognized Breast Cancer Awareness month in October with its "Socket to Breast Cancer" pink tool sets.

Franchisees offered pink products they purchased in support of The Pink Fund and The Kelly Shires Foundations, two organizations that offer financial assistance to breast cancer patients and their families to cover non-medical expenses, such as auto repairs and utility bills, during treatment.

Over the nine years of Snap-on's "Socket to Breast Cancer" program, the company has donated more than \$1 million to these organizations.

This year's pink products included:

- The Snap-on ASA204BPM four-piece mini acetate handle pick set and ASAL204BPM four-piece acetate handle long pick set. Made from a proprietary alloy steel, the mini and long pick sets have a contour thumb stop in pink.

- Snap-on PL600ES1RKP six-piece essential pliers/cutters set. The combination pliers feature a new Talon Grip that offer 57%

increased pulling power. The VectorEdge diagonal cutters have induction-hardened blades to make repeated cuts at all locations along the blade. The handles of both sets are cushioned pink and designed to reduce fatigue.

- Snap-on SDDX70APP seven-piece combination screwdriver set 3 and SDDX70A-PW seven-piece combination screwdriver set. The set is made from a proprietary alloy steel, and the screwdrivers have contour thumb stops for better control in both white and pink.

- Snap-on SGDX60204CPM 10-piece Instinct soft handle screwdriver/pick set. The alloy steel blade is topped with a pink, soft grip handle and tip identifier to add comfort and control while making the right tool easy to spot, while the tri-lobe design creates needed turning power and prevents the tool from rolling on flat surfaces.

- Snap-on SPBS704AP four-piece striking prybar set. The pink-handle prybars come in 8-, 12-, 18- and 24-inch lengths with precision-ground blade edges that are angled to



Snap-on THNFD72P 1/4-inch drive 72-tooth hard grip swivel head ratchet in pink.

create maximum leverage while lifting and pulling.

- Snap-on PL347ACFP three-piece Talon Grip slip joint pliers set.

- Snap-on FHD80MPP 3/8-inch Drive Dual 80 Technology multi-position ratchet and THD72MPP 1/4-inch Drive Dual 80 Technology multi-position ratchet. The pink-handled ratchets function as offset fixed-head, conventional straight, and as a 360-degree speeder ratchets.

- Snap-on FHCNFD72P 3/8-inch drive 72-tooth hard grip swivel head ratchet, THNFD72P 1/4-inch drive 72-tooth hard grip swivel head ratchet, and FHNFD100P 3/8-inch drive 100-tooth hard grip swivel head ratchet. The swivel head, pink-handled ratchets offer a variety of ratcheting positions and feature 72 teeth to reduce swing arc and shorter movement between tooth engagement.

Omni's Radar Tires aids research foundation for 13th year



DALLAS

Private-brand tire distributor Omni United Pte. Ltd. is continuing its support for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation (BCRF), via the distributor's Radar Tire brand.

This marks the 13th straight year that Omni United has supported the BCRF and its mission to advance research to prevent and cure breast cancer, "leaving a tangible impact on countless lives."

The announcement came at the start of Breast Cancer Awareness

Month, held every October.

Since 2011, Omni United has worked to raise awareness for breast cancer and bring the BCRF's mission to the tire industry. This year, Radar Tires is donating a minimum of \$50,000, which will fund at least 1,000 hours of research.

Omni United said that Radar Tires has focused much of 2023 on research and development, new product development and product testing, eliciting "an overwhelming positive response from customers around the world."

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RNR Tire Express honors breast cancer survivors

TAMPA, Fla.

RNR Tire Express and its franchisees around the country participated during October in RNR's 8th annual Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign by donating a portion of tire sales generated during the month to foundations advancing the cause of breast-cancer research and the search for a cure.

Also, family and friends of breast cancer survivors nominated deserving individuals for a chance to win a "Think Pink" package, which included \$1,000 cash, a set of new tires and a VIP spa day package, courtesy of RNR Tire Express.

The campaign is one of the longest-standing giveback initiatives in the brand's 23-year history.

With 191 RNR locations in operation — up 21 locations since this same time last year — the community impact of the campaign is expected to be farther-reaching than ever

before, with more applicants anticipated this year, the franchisor said.

The giveaway spotlights the resilience and fortitude shown by those men and women who have now or in the past struggled with a breast cancer diagnosis, RNR Tire Express said. The campaign affords them and loved ones an opportunity to share their journey toward recovery.

"Creating lasting relationships at the grassroots level has always been at the core of how things are done here at RNR. Our annual Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign being one of the most significant examples," Larry Sutton, founder and CEO of RNR Tire Express, said.

"After all these years hosting the initiative alongside a growing field of franchisees, it's become an incredible contributor to our brand's ability to give back what's now reached over a million dollars to communities nationwide on a yearly basis."