

## Cobo shows off new tech center

Italian firm's addition will create software and design new products.

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WEST BURLINGTON — Cobo International executives were on hand at Thursday's grand opening to welcome dignitaries and customers to the West Burlington plant's new tech center.

The 8,000-square-foot addition creates a new department of mechatronics engineering as well as space for software programming.

Mechatronics is a design process that includes a combination of mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, telecommunications engineering, control engineering and computer engineering. The Italian company will use mechatronics at its U.S. manufacturing facility to create new products, work on products being transferred in and develop software for certain products.

"It was essential that Cobo Group invest in the technological advancement of its U.S. facility in order to sustain the development of the products and services offered here," said Enrico Linetti, who will become the next CEO of the Cobo Group at an undetermined date.

"The West Burlington location must be equipped with all the tools required to customize the controllers, displays and sensors that are being developed locally in order to meet



John Gilman/The Hawk Eye

**Gino Mainardi, COBO International CEO, center, enjoys the open house for the company's new tech center Thursday at 304 Division St. in West Burlington. Pictured from the left are: Enrico Linetti, COBO CEO executive assistant; Roberto Montanari with RE:Lab from Italy; Mainardi; and Marco Ferretti, RE:Lab.**

and exceed the growing expectations of machine manufacturers, systems integrators and distributors of advanced electronic components and solutions," Linetti added.

The West Burlington plant, constructed in 2003, started by making wire harnesses for prod-

ucts made by Case New Holland and General Electric, which was a big reason for Cobo coming to the U.S. On top of making wire harnesses, the facility also is in the process of making steering columns for Caterpillar and the next generation of sensors for farm equipment such as tractors

and planters. Design work in the new tech center will include the steering column, as the play-and-play component comes in about 100 pieces. Cobo's design would save Caterpillar time as all the Peoria, Ill.-based firm would have to do is install the component in the appropriate

piece of equipment.

"I think we would like to use Italian style in design," said Gino Mainardi, the CEO of Cobo Int. Branch. "We have the capability to have a good approach to the U.S. customer. I am happy to

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## Cobo

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grow our plant here in the U.S.,”

Six engineers and software programmers will man the tech center, which was built inside the existing plant and serves as a second floor above the offices. Massimiliano Ruzzi, the plant manager, said two new engineers have been hired for the tech center, and more could be hired in the future.

S G Construction started building the tech center in March and finished it a couple of weeks ahead of the grand opening. Klingner and Associates did the architectural work on the project.

The tech center was not set up for work as one room was set up with displays of the manufacturing plant’s capabilities, and another room had seating for the guests to listen to the morning’s speakers.

Brammo, a manufacturer of electric motorcycles in Talent, Ore., was on hand to display its Impulse motorcycle. Brammo

started using Cobo’s wire harnesses in its motorcycles in the fourth quarter of 2013. Danny Watson, an electrical engineer with Brammo, said the company is manufacturing about 20 motorcycles per week. Depending on how the bike is ridden, the Impulse can go between 50 and 100 miles on a single charge. The maximum speed of the Impulse is 110 mph.

Carlo Linetti, Cobo Group’s marketing vice president, said Brammo is the type of company that Cobo is looking to work with. The non-high-volume vehicle market is part of Cobo’s target audience, such as Case’s backhoe.

Three guidelines that the company follows is internationalization, innovation and quality. Cobo has representation in 65 countries.

Linetti was the first to explore the U.S. market and with a push from U.S. customers eventually led to the opening of the West Burlington facility.

“Cobo International has

grown nationally as a supplier to the agricultural and construction machine markets, just as the Cobo Group has grown in the same capacity world-wide,” Linetti said.

“New developments such as the tech center will help Cobo continue to grow and become a bigger player in the markets that allow devices and machines to interact using android, web and cloud technology,” he added.

Guests were treated to lunch after the speeches and given tours of the 30,000-square-foot manufacturing floor.

Mainardi said the going was tough for Cobo’s West Burlington plant in the early years, but customers like General Electric and Case New Holland helped pull them through. Now the plant is operating two shifts with about 120 employees and creating a wider variety of products.

A year ago, Mainardi had a discussion with Jason Hutcherson, the president of the Greater Burlington Partnership,



John Gattuso/The Hawk Eye

Philip Paul, with Excavating Solutions of Noblesville, Ind., demonstrates how technology makes the perfect dig with a mini-excavator during the COBO International open house in the new tech center Thursday at 304 Division St. in West Burlington. Corporations that use COBO products were demonstrating and displaying their use. Des Moines County Supervisor Bob Beck watches the demonstration.

about the possibility of having a research and development center in the West Burlington plant.

“They wanted to continue their commitment right here. That is how you drive product innovation,” Hutcherson said of the tech center. “We are becoming a high-tech community.”

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