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BUSINESS online print edition



GM picks Yuma as site of its test track

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The Arizona Republic

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General Motors Corp. will continue to test its vehicles in the Arizona desert, keeping alive a 70-year relationship between the automaker and the state.

General Motors' decision Thursday to relocate its desert automotive proving grounds to Yuma also keeps alive an important source of Arizona jobs and economic stimulation.

The automaker had considered locations in California and Mexico.

The plan for the U.S. Army and General Motors to share the hot-weather vehicle test track at the military's Yuma Proving Grounds was announced Thursday.

It will bring 155 jobs to an area where unemployment hovers around 20 percent.

It also will bring an estimated \$500 million in economic benefits to the Yuma area over the next 10 years, starting with a \$120 million investment by GM to upgrade the existing facility into the country's premier hot-weather automotive test track.

"It creates an incredible opportunity and adds some significant strengths to the regional economy in Yuma," said David Drennon, a spokesman for the Arizona Department of Commerce. The state helped sway the automaker with a \$500,000 grant and loan package.

"This partnership between the local community, GM, the state and the federal government is a prime example of how cooperative efforts work to benefit the economy," Gov. Janet Napolitano said in a statement.

Ed Koerner, the company's vice president of engineering for North America, noted that Arizona has been home to GM's hot-weather vehicle test operations for 70 years and that the company appreciated the support it has received during that time.

General Motors opened its first Arizona automotive testing on five acres in central Phoenix in 1937.

There bystanders watched the first fins emerge on the 1948 Cadillac and other GM automotive advances.

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Encroaching development prompted a move to a 5,000-acre site in southeast Mesa in 1953, just in time to test the first Corvette, which was launched that year.

Every GM car since has been tested on the track.

Encroaching development prompted a decision to move again.

In 2004, GM sold 1,800 acres of the site to billboard magnate Bill Levine for a master-planned community.

High-end home builder DMB Associates, developer of Verrado and DC Ranch, bought the remaining 3,200 acres in 2006 for \$265 million.

GM retained the right to continue to use the track for three years.

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