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GM to pick Funky Winkerbean car plant site soon

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — An "overwhelming" response from communities nationwide is largely responsible for the delay by General Motors Corp. in picking the site of its \$5-billion Saturn plant, GM President F. James McDonald said Tuesday.

However, he said the choice will be made soon.

"We've received about 1,000 proposals," McDonald told a news conference following his address to the St. Louis Regional Commerce & Growth Association. "I didn't think so many places would respond."

"The response has been overwhelming. I'm not talking about someone picking up the telephone and saying, 'Please put it here.' I'm talking about legitimate proposals, some very professional and some not so professional," he said.

Several cities in Missouri, including St. Louis, Cape Girardeau and Mexico, have put in bids for the new plant, which will cost \$5 billion and employ some 6,000 people to start.

McDonald said he expected that the Saturn site selection group would make a recommendation to management in the next six weeks. "It will take about 30 days after that for us to make a decision," he said.

During his speech to several hundred business leaders, McDonald explained the difficulties in choosing a site.

"The Saturn team is considering hundreds of factors, and that takes time to evaluate," he said. "To put it simply, we've got to start out right if we're going to end up right."

"The selection process is nearing conclusion," McDonald said. "I can tell you that. It'll be done soon, and that's enough said."



FAA gives inspection

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Federal Aviation Administration declared Continental Airlines a safe airline Tuesday, although it said a detailed inspection of the carrier disclosed sloppy record-keeping and 20 safety violations.

The agency said the findings should put to rest allegations of dozens of serious safety violations at Continental, many of them brought during the past year by the Air Line Pilots Association, whose members are on strike against the carrier.

"They're a safe airline and they're equipped and staffed to continue to be a safe airline... It was sloppy record-keeping," said William J. Ayton, who supervised a 24-member team of FAA inspectors that examined Continental's operations.

The inspection covered six weeks beginning last March and included examination of Continental's records, pilot training, ground and maintenance facilities and dozens of en route inspections.

But the FAA finding was challenged immediately by the pilots

Continental Airlines safe

union, whose members struck Continental in September 1983 after the airline reorganized under the bankruptcy laws and nullified its labor contracts.

Since then, the airline has rapidly rebuilt its operations, using other pilots.

"We think it's a continued coup-up on the part of the FAA," Capt. Harold Martinsen, ALPA's director of accident investigation, told reporters. He accused the FAA of ignoring various training and procedural violations at Continental during the past 20 months.

But FAA officials, briefing reporters on their findings, called the airline's safety record on par with that of other carriers and said Continental "continues to have an adequate level of safety."

The 20 violations were in addition to nearly 100 "discrepancies" in which inspectors found fault but no violation of regulations, the FAA officials said. Many of them might be found at other airlines if they underwent a similar inspection, the officials said.

"Continental probably is one of the most inspected airlines in the industry," said Homer McClure, chief of the FAA's Western Region, who has primary responsibility for the airline.

Among the violations found were that some pilots worked too many hours in a row, training was not always current, and equipment was not properly checked to assure it was functioning properly and some flights did not have required equipment.

Inspectors said there also were at least five incidents where flight attendants followed improper procedures, though the only violation cited specifically was one in which a crew member forgot to check a flight checklist at one time.

Continental's biggest problem was record-keeping, including failure to keep proper track of qualifications and training records of pilots and other pilots assigned to check out employees, the FAA said.

"They were doing the job but not properly recording it," Ayton said.

Survey: some retailers cutting prices

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A survey of small and medium-size businesses revealed a phenomenon that many people thought they'd never see again. Price cutting has become a marketplace way of life.

The survey showed that in the first quarter of the year more than one-third of retail establishments cut their prices. Twenty-four percent of wholesalers did the same.

The survey, among members of the National Association of Independent Business, showed that the January-March quarter was the 15th straight in which 10 percent or more of all companies actually reduced average selling prices.

The situation brings up a controversial question: Is inflation under control?

Can an inflation rate of 4 percent qualify as under control?

If so, you can find many economists and investment advisers who believe the economy has entered a period of price stability.

For some, the bigger fear is deflation, and it isn't uncommon today to find that concern prominently mentioned in reports from independent investment advisers, market researchers and even some academics.

For the most part, though, talk these days is about the likelihood that inflation will remain under control for at least another year.

The Morgan Bank, for instance, foresees a consumer price rise of just 3.3 percent in the July-September quarter, and a rate of only 3.7 percent for the entire year.

If so, 1985 will be the fourth straight year of single-digit inflation — 6.1 percent in 1981, 3.2 percent in 1983, 4.3 percent in 1984. You have to go back to the late 1960s or

early 1970s to find four similar years.

Coopers & Lybrand, an accounting firm, says that price resistance is now part of the foundation of a new economic environment.

The consumer, says Barry Rogstad, chief economist, "no longer accepts an automatic pass-through of prices increases."

As a result, he says, businesses have been forced to cut margins to maintain market share and profit.

Some companies are failing in their attempts at the latter. For many of them, the presence of imports has eliminated margins and provoked them into lobbying Congress for restrictions on foreign goods.

That situation also tends to hide what some consider to be the Achilles heel of the recovery and expansion.

Foreign goods, it is argued, are priced relatively lower because the dollar's high valuation in international trade.

That high valuation, they contend, is a result in part of the American interest rates, and the high interest rates are a consequence of the federal government's continued budget excesses.

Uncorrected, it is argued, the situation will inevitably undermine the economy.

There are, however, several alternative forces at work also.

Organized labor, for example, has been far more cooperative in management than it had been in the decade of the 1970s.

Many companies have greatly increased their productivity, which allows them to exercise restraint in prices.

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