

Ohio Auto Panel Includes McTevia

By DON SHILLING

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YOUNGSTOWN — Like going to the dentist, a locally produced television show on the Delphi bankruptcy is a bit painful to watch, but it's good for you.

At least that's the hope of the Regional Chamber and area media companies.

They organized what they believe is the first simulcast to be aired on all three local television stations. Anchors and reporters interviewed three experts from Michigan on the Delphi Corp. bankruptcy.

"Delphi: Past, Present & Future" will air from 7 to 8 p.m. Thursday. The show was taped Thursday at the studios of WYTV.

Delphi has 5,100 hourly and salaried workers in the Mahoning Valley.

Area residents will benefit from the show by learning more about the problems of the auto industry as a whole, said Reid Dulberger, chamber executive vice president.

Just taking the step of bringing together the crews of all three stations should capture the attention of local residents, he said.

Viewers will hear that the experts don't expect the Delphi bankruptcy to be resolved without some pain.

Jobs will be lost. Wages will be cut, and communities will be hurt, said James McTevia, a former bankruptcy court trustee and consultant for troubled auto suppliers.

Workers for suppliers such as Delphi will learn that they don't need two snowmobiles and five or six televisions, he said.

"It's a matter of learning to live with less and being happy with that," he said.

Changes expected

Younger residents in areas such as the Mahoning Valley must prepare for another way of making a living. People who have jobs with suppliers now may have to retrain themselves, he said.

Such changes are nothing new in the history of this country, he said. Centuries ago, animal trappers saw no end to that industry either, he said.

Not that the auto supply industry will disappear, the experts said. The industry will survive, but it will be smaller, said Neil De Koker, president of the Original Equipment Suppliers Association.

Since September 2004, 18 percent of the jobs — about 200,000 — in the auto supply industry already are gone, he said. The reduction of jobs will continue, but ones that are left will be owned by large investment companies and will have the resources to compete, he said.

The experts said the restructuring is necessary for the domestic companies to compete in a global market, but the impacts on individuals will be great, said Tom Walsh, a business columnist with the Detroit Free Press.

He mentioned one Delphi worker he spoke with who retired at 57 and has a heart condition. He's hoping his medical insurance will continue for eight more years until he's covered by Medicare.

Here's a concern

One interesting question is whether the Delphi unions will stand up to protect such workers, Walsh said.

The two other experts said they think Delphi and union leaders will reach a new labor agreement on lower wages and benefits so that a judge will not be asked to void union contracts. Walsh said that any deal must be approved by union members.

"We don't know if the union leaders can control the anger of the rank-and-file," he said.

He pointed out that the United Auto Workers received only 61 percent approval for minor health care concessions to help General Motors Corp. Delphi's concessions will be much more severe, he said.

He said, however, that he thinks Delphi will continue to increase its wage offer for production workers. The offer has gone from \$10 an hour to \$12.50, and Walsh thinks the two sides will agree to about \$15.

Despite all the uncertainty, two things are for sure, McTevia said.

The Big Three automakers and their suppliers will no longer be a giant driving force that they have been for the economy of the Midwest, but innovators will find other ways to add value to the economy and workers will find other ways to support their families.

"When a door closes, another door opens; believe me," he said.