

MIDLAND TOMORROW

The Savant Group: "Midland Is a Hotbed of Technical Expertise"



When Ted Selby founded the first business in The Savant Group (four separate but interconnected enterprises serving the automotive and lubricants industry), there was no logical reason for him to set up shop in Midland, Michigan. "In fact, there was no logical business reason to necessarily be in Michigan at all," Selby said. "Our suppliers and our customers are located all over the country."

So why Midland? "The town itself," Selby answered. "Midland is a hotbed of technical expertise with a ready crop of chemists and engineers. The town is very inviting to technology. That's how Midland was raised and how it's grown." And The Savant Group has grown too. After

forty years, Savant Inc. – together with Tannas Company, The Institute of Materials, and King Refrigeration, the three other companies that make up The Savant Group – holds more than 50 active patents related to lubricant testing and instrumentation. The Selby-Noack Test, their variation on an old oil volatility testing procedure that minimizes health risk, has become the industry standard. And they design and manufacture lubricant testing equipment used to test the entire spectrum of available engine oils, annually publishing results so comprehensive they're referred to as the "Bible" of the lubricant industry. In the past, this type of information was only available to industry insiders; IOM changed the industry by making their data available to any customer looking to compare product quality and performance.

With suppliers and customers around the country, The Savant Group companies could have located anywhere. But Selby set up shop in Midland to take advantage



of a local workforce steeped in chemical process technology, a business infrastructure with access to rich industry experience that mitigates risk for technology company scale-up, and a pro-business municipal environment that reduces barriers to enterprise. And it's paid off: half of Savant's business is out the United States, and more than 90 percent of its revenues come from customers outside the state.

Rebecca Selby Cox, Selby's daughter and Savant Group vice president, believes that business model could attract further chemical industry startups and spinoffs to the area to further cement its status as an industry epicenter. "Midland knows how to support its technical companies. We've never regretted our commitment to the region," she said. "Other companies would be well advised to consider locating or relocating in mid-Michigan."

Selby agrees with her assessment. "It is very common for smaller towns to adopt an attitude of trepidation, rather than welcome, when a chemical industry company comes calling. That's just not the case in Midland," he said. "This area is a diamond on the polishing wheel. It has a fine opportunity to become one of the most dynamic regions in the United States."