

Architect dedicated to the environment

By Jill Blondin
Contributing Writer

FLINT — You may not know the man, but you know his buildings.

The Genesee Area Skills Center in Flint, the Genesee Intermediate School District headquarters in Mundy Township, as well as McFarlen Library, Cook Elementary and Andersen Elementary in Grand Blanc all are works of James E. Tomblinson.

After 50 years in business, Tomblinson retired this year from THA Architects Engineers. He helped found the firm, first called Gibbs & Tomblinson, in 1957.

In its five decades of operation, THA has been involved in more than 10,000 projects for 4,500 clients.

"It's a good firm with a lot of good people," Tomblinson said.

Tomblinson, 80, also worked with renowned architect Ulrich Franzen to design the University of Michigan's UCEN.

Tomblinson — famous for his bow ties — dedicated himself to the environment and energy conservation throughout his career.

In 1980, Tomblinson designed a new high school in Oxford with earth berms that used half the energy of other schools. The design won several awards.



Tomblinson

He was a founding member and the first president of the Flint Environmental Action Team, where he helped to guide policy in community planning, urban architecture and the environment.

"Jim was my mentor and impressed upon me at a very young age what it means to have integrity," said THA President Jeff Bennett.

Tomblinson was inducted in 1980 into the American Institute of Architects' College of Fellows, an honor bestowed on less than 80 Michigan architects.

Tomblinson lives in Grand Blanc with his wife, Betsy.

They have a daughter and two grandchildren.

He said he will remain active in the community and plans to do some architectural consulting work during his retirement.

"He is deeply committed to his community," said Shannon Easter White, THA's director of business development.

THA, located at 817 E. Kearsley Street in Flint, does about \$30 million in construction work a year.

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of its 2008 Tesla Roadsters, a full electric sports car that sells for \$98,000. The company expects to begin deliveries in the first quarter of this year.

Aaron Bragman, an auto industry analyst for the consulting firm Global Insight, said there is definitely a market for

sedan but would also be able to travel 40 to 50 miles on pure electricity. It would sell for \$35,000.

New York-based Visionary Vehicles signed a deal with Ontario-based Electrovaya last week to supply lithium-ion batteries to its cars, and Bricklin said he hopes to announce a U.S. location for manufacturing in the next few months.

He's also lining up dealers who could sell his cars as well as other vehicles

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By using tilting, the team can use a smaller, more efficient engine and get the same performance in a lighter vehicle, Davenport said.

Davenport, who was born in Flint and grew up in Oscoda, said he learned about tilting technology while researching efficient vehicles. He met James online.

The team hasn't decided on a drivetrain, but Davenport said the vehicle's engine likely would use E85 (a blend of ethanol and gasoline) or biofuel.

Tilting Vehicle Australia will compete in the alternative class, which requires seating for two people but has no wheel requirement.

In the alternative class, the vehicle must have a minimum top speed of 80 mph and have a driving range of at least 100 miles.

The team is looking for sponsors to cover the cost of the project, which could run hundreds of thousands of dollars, Davenport said.

The winners will be chosen in 2010, after team vehicles are tested in speed, distance, urban driving and performance through a cross-country race in 2009 and 2010.

You might have heard of other "X PRIZE" competitions developed by the nonprofit X PRIZE Foundation. A \$10-million Ansari X PRIZE went to Mojave Aerospace Ventures in 2004 after it sent the world's first private vehicle to space twice in two weeks.

The Automotive X PRIZE is meant to inspire new superefficient vehicles to help the environment and break the world's dependence on oil.

The X PRIZE has the support of agencies such as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the U.S. Department of Energy, which will help conduct the competition at test vehicles, said Donald Foley, executive director of the Automotive X PRIZE.

"The X PRIZE Foundation is about inspiring new innovations," he said.

The competition will