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**SPE® ANNOUNCES “LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNER” – ROBERT SPEIRS III
PROFESSOR EMERITUS AND FORMER CHAIR OF THE FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY PLASTIC PROGRAM
WILL BE HONORED AT THE SPE AUTOMOTIVE INNOVATION AWARDS GALA NOV. 5, 2025**

TROY, (DETROIT) MICH. – Robert Speirs III, professor emeritus and former chair of the Ferris State University Plastic Program, has been named the 2025 **Lifetime Achievement Award** winner by the Automotive Division of the Society of Plastics Engineers (SPE®). Speir’s academic program leadership, professorship, and personal guidance motivated a multitude of students to pursue successful careers in plastics engineering resulting in growing the industry today and into the future. Many leaders in the automotive plastics industry today were educated, encouraged and mentored by Speirs and are grateful for his inspiration.

Speirs roles at Ferris State University Plastics Program included Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor & Coordinator of Plastics, Rubber & CAD Programs. For almost 40 years, Speirs educated plastics professionals by teaching and mentoring 1500 graduates, inspiring 250 students to obtain Master of Science degrees, motivated 50 to obtain PhDs, led 75 legacy students (sons and daughters of Ferris State University Plastic Program graduates). Most of these graduates established successful careers in automotive industries.

A number of Speirs’ graduates are in key leadership positions in the industry advancing automotive plastics today including:

- Scott Kushion, President – Asahi Kasei Plastics Mexico
- Kevin Chase, CEO at Chase Plastic Services, Inc.
- John Hobson, President, RPM Plastics
- Corey Childs, NA Director of Operations, Dana Incorporated
- Joe Fulsher, Co-Owner WAK Plastics Machinery
- Crystal Searle, Global Resin Commodity Manager, Molex
- Casey Camp, Engineering Group Manager – Exterior Lighting, General Motors Co.
- Lane Lindstrom, Sr. Mfg. Engineer, General Motors Co.
- Tom Miller, Sr. Account Manager, Celanese Engineered Materials
- Dan Fuller, Sr. Applications & Development Engineer, Celanese Engineered Materials, who nominated Speirs for this award
- Tom Van Pernis, Professor at Ferris State University Plastics and Rubber Program

Prior to his tenure at Ferris State University, Speirs worked in the plastics industry as Senior Application Development Engineer at Dow Chemical in Midland, Michigan, Principal Engineer at Baxter Travenol Labs in Round Lake, Illinois and Market Development Engineer at Kay Fries Chemical in Fairlawn, New Jersey.

Speirs formal education includes a Bachelor of Science degree, a Master of Science degree and an ABD (All But Dissertation Doctoral program status) in Plastics Engineering at University of Massachusetts at Lowell. He completed his research at Army Materials & Mechanics Research Center, Watertown, Massachusetts.

“I am so incredibly honored and grateful to be recognized with this Lifetime Achievement Award from the SPE Automotive Div.,” said Speirs. “Thank you SPE, Ferris State University, and especially the students I have had the honor to work with and who have earned their successes due to their individual achievements, perseverance, and dedication,” continued Speirs. “Thank you to my family and friends, whose support over the years, make this award possible as well,” added Speirs.

“Bob’s leadership and mentoring students within the plastics program at Ferris State have made a significant impact on the automotive plastics industry, said Mark Lapain, senior business development manager at Advanced Composites and SPE Lifetime Achievement Award Chair. “There are Ferris State graduates all across the industry in technical, leadership and commercial positions,” continued Lapain. “Bob’s personal success, and by extension, the success of all his former students makes him a really deserving candidate of the Lifetime Achievement Award,” added Lapain.

“For as long as I can remember, Bob has brought his students to the SPE Automotive Innovation Awards Gala to assist with setting up our part displays and more offering them hands on experience and a close-up view of innovation in automotive plastics,” said Jeffrey Helms, global automotive director, Celanese and SPE Automotive Innovation Awards Gala Chair. “This also provided his students with great networking opportunities and our industry with an educated workforce and continued leadership, which we are very grateful for,” added Helms.

First given in 2001, the SPE Automotive *Lifetime Achievement Award* recognizes the technical achievements of individuals whose work in research, design, and/or engineering has led to significant integration of polymeric materials on passenger vehicles.

Past SPE Automotive Lifetime Achievement Award recipients include:

- J.T. Battenberg III, then chairman and chief-executive officer of Delphi Corp. (2001)
- Bernard Robertson, then executive vice-president of DaimlerChrysler (2002)
- Robert Schaad, chairman of Husky Injection Molding Systems, Ltd. (2003)
- Tom Moore, retired vice-president, Liberty and Technical Affairs at DaimlerChrysler (2004)
- Shigeki Suzuki, general manager - Materials Division, Toyota Motor Co.(2005)
- Barbara Sanders, then director-Advanced Development & Engineering Processes, Delphi Corp. (2006)
- Josh Madden, retired executive at General Motors Corp. (GM) & Volkswagen of America (2007)
- Frank Macher, former CEO of Collins & Aikman Corp., Federal Mogul Corp., and ITT Automotive (2008)
- Irv Poston, retired head of the Plastics (Composites) Development-Technical Center, GM (2009)
- Allan Murray, Ph.D., retired technology director at Ford Motor Co. (2010)
- Dave Reed P.E., retired staff engineer, Product Engineering, GM (2011)
- Gary Lowndale, P.E., then chief technology officer, Plasan Carbon Composites (2012)
- Roy Sjöberg, P.E., retired staff engineer - Body, Chevrolet-Pontiac-Canada Div.,GM and retired executive engineer-Viper Project, Chrysler Corp. (2013)
- Dr. Norm Kakarala, retired senior technical fellow, Inteva Products LLC (2014)
- Fredrick Deans, P.E., chief marketing officer, Allied Composite Technologies LLC (2015)
- Dr. Lawrence T. Drzal, university distinguished professor of Chemical Engineering and Director-Composite Materials and Structures Center at Michigan State University College of Engineering (2016)
- Dr. Suresh Shah, retired senior technical fellow at Delphi Corporation, formerly General Motors – ACG (Automotive Components Group) (2017)
- Dr. Rose A. Ryntz, retired vice president, Global Advanced Development and Material Engineering at International Automotive Components Group (IAC). (2018)
- Michael J. Whitens, retired former global director, Ford Motor company Vehicle and Enterprise Sciences at Ford Research and Innovation Center (2019)
- Nippani R. Rao, (1939-2021) president, RAO Associates (2009-2021); technology manager, Asahi Kasei North America (2008-2010); materials engineering supervisor, Chrysler (1986 – 2008) Awarded Posthumously in 2021
- Probir Guha, president and founder, Composites Innovations Inc. (2022)
- Kevin N. Pageau, owner and president of International Marketing Alliance (2023)
- Tom Russell, founder and retired partner at Allied Composites Technologies (2024)

Robert Speirs III will be presented with the SPE Automotive Div. Lifetime Achievement award at the 54th annual SPE Automotive Innovation Awards Gala at Laurel Manor in Livonia, Mich. November 5, 2025. The evening begins with a VIP Cocktail Reception at 4:00 p.m. sponsored by Celanese Corporation. At 4:30 p.m. the main exhibit area opens for general admission, and guests can review this year’s **Automotive Innovation Awards** nominations and enjoy the vehicles on display. Dinner will begin at 6:15 p.m. and the awards program will last from 7:00-9:00 p.m. For those who wish to extend merrymaking and networking activities, the ever-popular *Afterglow* runs from 9:00-11:00 p.m.

SPE's Automotive Innovation Awards Program is the oldest and largest competition of its kind in the world. Dozens of teams made up of OEMs, tier suppliers, and polymer producers submit nominations describing their part, system, or complete vehicle and why it merits the claim as the *Year's Most Innovative Use of Plastics*. This annual event typically draws over 800 OEM engineers, automotive and plastics industry executives, and media. As is customary, funds raised from this event are used to support SPE educational efforts and technical seminars, which help educate and secure the role of plastics in the advancement of the automobile.

The mission of SPE is to promote scientific and engineering knowledge relating to plastics worldwide and to educate industry, academia, and the public about these advances. SPE's Automotive Division is active in educating, promoting, recognizing, and communicating technical accomplishments in all phases of plastics and plastic-based composite developments in the global transportation industry. Topic areas include applications, materials, processing, equipment, tooling, design, and development. For more information about the ***SPE Automotive Innovation Awards Competition and Gala*** see: <https://speautomotive.com/innovation-awards-competition-and-gala/>. For more information on the ***Society of Plastics Engineers*** see: <https://www.4spe.org/>.



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