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SPE® ANNOUNCES "LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNER" – TOM PICKETT, LEAD MATERIALS ENGINEER, GENERAL MOTORS CO. WILL BE HONORED AT THE SPE AUTOMOTIVE INNOVATION AWARDS GALA NOV. 4, 2026

TROY, (DETROIT) MICH. – Tom Pickett, Lead Materials Engineer at General Motors Co., has been named the 2026 **Lifetime Achievement Award** winner by the Automotive Division of the Society of Plastics Engineers (SPE®).

For over forty years at General Motors, Tom has led innovative plastic materials, processing, and design in Exterior, Interior and Powertrain automotive applications. He is responsible for a myriad of novel and groundbreaking plastics automotive applications contributing to the advancement of plastics in the automobile.

Industry innovator Tom Pickett has amassed an impressive portfolio of 11 patents two trade secrets, and four defensive publications, marking significant advancements in polymer materials, design, assembly, and processing.
Pickett's contributions to manufacturing precision and extrusion technology are anchored by a suite of interconnected patents. These include proprietary methods and hardware for advanced manufacturing, such as a specialized method of controlling gloss extrudate, an auxiliary die for gloss control, an extrusion die stabilizer guide, a stabilizer guide for an extrusion die, and an interlocking stabilizer. Together, these processing innovations provide manufacturers with unprecedented control over material flow, surface finish, and structural stability during production.

In the realm of advanced product assembly and component design, Pickett has secured essential patents that streamline how complex parts bond and function. This segment of the portfolio features a system for multi-material part attachment, a high-efficiency adhesive tape released liner, and a method for creating a grained appearance plastic part.
Furthermore, Pickett's design expertise extends into high-performance automotive aerodynamics and exterior trim, captured in patents for a unique two-piece rear spoiler attachment and a low-stress attachment system tailored specifically for plastic decorative applications. A groundbreaking automotive breakthrough is a novel mechanical interlocking mechanism designed to neutralize the Coefficient of Linear Thermal Expansion (CLTE) in elastomeric seals for battery box applications, solving a critical sealing challenge in modern electric vehicles. This comprehensive collection of intellectual property underscores Pickett's role in shaping the future of polymer engineering, offering robust solutions that bridge the gap between complex chemical processing and practical, real-world manufacturing.

Pickett's Automotive Plastics Career Highlights include:

Tom Pickett's career in the automotive plastics industry is a masterclass in pioneering material science, processing innovation, and environmental stewardship. Through decades of breakthrough developments across powertrain, exterior, interior, and chassis systems, his work consistently earned the industry's highest honors and redefined what plastics could achieve in modern vehicles.

Revolutionizing the Powertrain
Pickett established himself as a leader in high-performance materials capable of withstanding the harsh environments of vehicle powertrains. His expertise in elastomers and fluoropolymers led to consecutive victories at the SPE Automotive Innovation Awards. He won the Powertrain Category for developing a novel acrylic elastomer material used in engine cooler

press-in-place seals, followed by a win in the Materials Category for a groundbreaking fluoropolymer material designed for engine seals.

His commitment to forward-thinking chemistry continued with the 2023 Engine Seal development team, where his leadership in creating a high-performance acrylic elastomer earned a spot as an SPE Finalist in the Sustainability Category. Beyond advanced synthetics, Pickett was a pioneer in automotive recycling; he initiated and implemented General Motors' very first use of recycled nylon material for an engine port, proving that sustainable components could thrive under extreme under-hood conditions.

Transforming Exterior Applications and Manufacturing

Pickett's most expansive body of work lies in exterior innovations, where he routinely balanced structural integrity, aesthetics, and manufacturing efficiency. In the realm of aerodynamics and large-scale blow molding, he developed a high-heat, high-impact ABS application for automotive blow-molded spoilers that earned him the prestigious GM Chairman Award. He built on this success by leading the team that formulated an improved ABS material to blow-mold the massive spoilers for the 2015 Cadillac Escalade, GMC Yukon, and Chevrolet Tahoe. In 2014, he championed an industry-first blow-molded air deflector process for the GMC Sierra and Chevrolet Silverado, securing a finalist spot at the SPE Innovation Awards.

His processing expertise extended to sophisticated extrusion and molding techniques. Early in his career, he developed and implemented an extrusion process for high-gloss, molded-in-color metallic PVC body side moldings on the 1988 Chevrolet Corsica, and later invented a novel extrusion rotary wheel molding process for varying-profile body side moldings. He also developed a horizontal injection-molded insert glass process to encapsulate high-gloss, molded-in-color PVC rear quarter windows.

Pickett was a frequent winner at the SPE Automotive Innovation Awards in the Exterior Category. As part of collaborative teams, he helped develop the long glass fiber polypropylene (PP) running boards for the 2007 Chevrolet Trailblazer and GMC Envoy, as well as a one-piece integrated liftgate spoiler for the 2009 Cadillac CTS Wagon—both of which won top SPE honors. His eye for industry firsts led to the creation of a transparent polycarbonate fin spoiler for the 2014 Corvette Stingray Z06 (an SPE Finalist) and the industry's first molded-in-color charge port bezel for the 2013 Chevrolet Volt.

In the truck segment, Pickett solved complex thermal expansion and durability issues. He initiated and implemented a lower cost TPO material replacing higher cost ionomer material on the Chevrolet Silverado Dually end gate and side molding railings. He pushed this technology further by implementing on GM's largest pick-up trucks. He also engineered a soft 50 Shore A hardness, high-flow thermoplastic elastomer (TPE) to serve as a reliable water seal on the 2012 Cadillac ATS rear fixed-handle decklid.

Furthermore, his sustainability efforts excelled on vehicle exteriors when he championed the use of recycled nylon on a structural fascia bracket, capturing the prestigious 2007 SPE Environmental Stewardship Award.

Elevating Interior Comfort, Safety, and Aesthetics

Inside the cabin, Pickett focused on enhancing passenger touchpoints, safety components, and aesthetic longevity. For the 2002 Chevrolet Malibu, he engineered the first all-polyolefin (TPE, PP, GFPP) soft touch pull handle, creating a premium feel from a fully integrated plastic system.

He achieved an industry breakthrough with the 2003 Cadillac XLR instrument and door panels. Here, he championed the first non-painted, slush-molded thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU) with an ultra-low gloss finish (1.0 to 1.5 gloss). More importantly, this specific TPU dramatically expanded the safe airbag deployment temperature range to -40°C through +107°C (shattering the previous industry standard of -20°C to 85°C), substantially increasing passenger safety in extreme climates.

When paint delamination plagued the plastic center consoles of the 2003 Chevrolet Monte Carlo, Pickett stepped in to champion the development of robust soft-touch interior paints. His solution resolved the quality crisis and earned the GM/UAW PMQH Award.

Pickett's crowning interior achievement combined environmental sustainability with critical safety engineering. He initiated and implemented the automotive industry's first use of 100% recycled glass-filled nylon 6/6 in a structural PRDNL shifter housing. Despite the strict mechanical and safety demands placed on a functional shifter module, the component was successfully deployed across the 2005 Saturn ION, VUE, Chevrolet Equinox, and Malibu. This breakthrough swept up the 2005 SPE Automotive Innovation Environmental Category Award and earned Pickett a GM Employee Suggestion Award.

Advancing Chassis Systems

Expanding his footprint to foundational vehicle architecture, Pickett applied his extensive blow-molding expertise to chassis components. He successfully developed a complex, multi-layer blow-molded manufacturing process for plastic fuel tanks, ensuring strict emissions compliance, impact resistance, and structural integrity beneath the vehicle.

Through this diverse and deeply impactful portfolio, Tom Pickett firmly established himself as a visionary engineer whose innovations shaped the modern era of automotive plastics.

Pickett has 40 years of continuous employment with advancing leadership roles in automotive plastics at General Motors Co.

His formal education includes:

- **BA, Bachelor of Arts Chemistry**,1983. College of the Holy Cross
- **MS**, **Master of Science Plastics Engineering**, 1987. University of Massachusetts at Lowell
- **MBA, Master of Business Administration,** 1996. University of Detroit Mercy

Pickett has presented over 60 technical papers/presentations on automotive plastics technology. He co-authored a chapter in a book titled Coatings of Polymers and Plastics. He has won several SPE Service Awards and three UAW/GM Management Awards. His Professional Society Participation includes over 40 years of service to the SPE Automotive Division and SPE Detroit Section serving as Chair and President . He has been a long-standing Board Member serving in several key positions and Chairing and Co-Chairing many conferences, events, and programs. SPE International bestowed Pickett with Honored Service Member status.

“Wow! I am so grateful to be honored with this special SPE Automotive Lifetime Achievement Award especially when selected by my peers in the professional community I cherish. I am especially humbled by this honor among so many talented industry professionals,” said Pickett.

“I have had the pleasure of working with GM’s Tom Pickett for many years,” said Frederick Deans, P.E. owner, Allied Composites Technology, and SPE Lifetime Achievement Award recipient in 2015. “His overall dedication, experience, and contributions not only to GM, but to the industry as well, are remarkable, added Deans who nominated Tom. “It is a great amount of satisfaction that we recognize Tom as our 2026 SPE Lifetime Achievement Award recipient,” continued Deans. “Congratulations Tom!”

“Tom’s dedication to General Motors and SPE is truly outstanding,” said Mark Lapain, senior business development manager at Advanced Composites and SPE Lifetime Achievement Award Chair. “His achievements are prolific, resulting from his combination of plastics expertise and a strong work ethic,” continued Lapain. “Tom has supported SPE in nearly every automotive plastics event, serving in various leadership roles,” added Lapain. “On top of it all, he’s one of the nicest people in the industry.”

“I am fortunate to have had Tom’s leadership support as a Category Captain and more for the SPE Automotive Innovation Awards Gala over the years” said Jeffrey Helms, global automotive director, Celanese, and SPE Automotive Innovation Awards Gala Chair. “It has also been a joy to work with him on other automotive industry events and conferences,” continued Helms. “I am also grateful to have had the pleasure of working with Tom and his expertise on many innovative programs at General Motors,” 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 Lownsdale, 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, professor emeritus & former chair of Ferris State University Plastic Program (2025)

Tom Pickett will be presented with the SPE Automotive Div. Lifetime Achievement award at the 55th annual SPE Automotive Innovation Awards Gala at Laurel Manor in Livonia, Mich. November 4, 2026. 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 Y*ear's Most Innovative Use of Plastics*. This annual event typically draws over 600 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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