Leaders share ways to sustain auto industry



KEN OSBURN / Staff

Dr. Klaus Schariloth, left, the German ambassador to the United States, tours the ICAR campus Tuesday morning with professor Thomas Kurfess.

German ambassador touts future of manufacturing

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The German ambassador to the United States says his country has benefited from defying the conventional wisdom and focusing on manufacturing.

Ambassador Klaus Scharioth, in Greenville for a conference Tuesday, said other countries told Germany 20 years ago that services was the future, not manufacturing.

"We always challenged that, and we tried to keep our manufacturing base," he said.

Today manufacturing accounts for about 25 percent of Germany's economy, and more than 40 percent of its gross domestic product is export-related, the ambassador said.

"We are not only proud of that, but we believe we need to try to protect that" by innovating and investing abroad to gather the best ideas from around the world, Scharioth said.

He spoke at the Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research as part of a conference on sustainable automotive technologies. It began Tuesday and continues today.

The ambassador said Germany lives by exports, and "you can only do that if you have excellent education, if you have excellent science, excellent research and also excellent infrastructure."

He told GreenvilleOnline.com that German companies have created 22,000 jobs in South Carolina in recent years.

"That has to do with the location, but the other reason is

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Josef Kerscher, the president of BMW Manufacturing, addresses the International Conference on Sustainable Automotive Technologies 2011 at Clemson's International Center for Automotive Research.

ICAR

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Clemson University, and I wanted to take a look at this very close cooperation between Clemson University and German businesses, German industry," Scharioth said.

BMW Manufacturing Co. provided $10 million to endow two professorships at ICAR and operates a data and research center on the campus.

During a talk to attendees at lunch, Scharioth advocated free trade and common industrial standards for North America and Europe.

He said financial markets and companies should be regulated to prevent another economic crisis and that Germany is No. 1 in solar power because it requires power companies to buy extra electricity generated by household solar energy systems, making the systems worthwhile for consumers.

ICAR is hosting the conference in conjunction with the University of Applied Sciences in Ingolstadt, Germany, and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology from Australia.

Suzanne Dickerson, ICAR's director of global business development, said the conference drew about 140 attendees, a sellout, with about half from Germany or Australia.

"This is the first time this conference has been done in North America, so we're very excited to bring it to ICAR first," she said.

Dickerson said ICAR hopes to become the Southeast's top venue for auto-industry gatherings.

In September, the research campus is scheduled to host the second annual Transatlantic Summit with its European research institute partner, the Automotive Intelligence Center of Bilboa, Spain.

Next year, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the leading professional society for electrical engineers, plans its first electric vehicle conference at ICAR.