

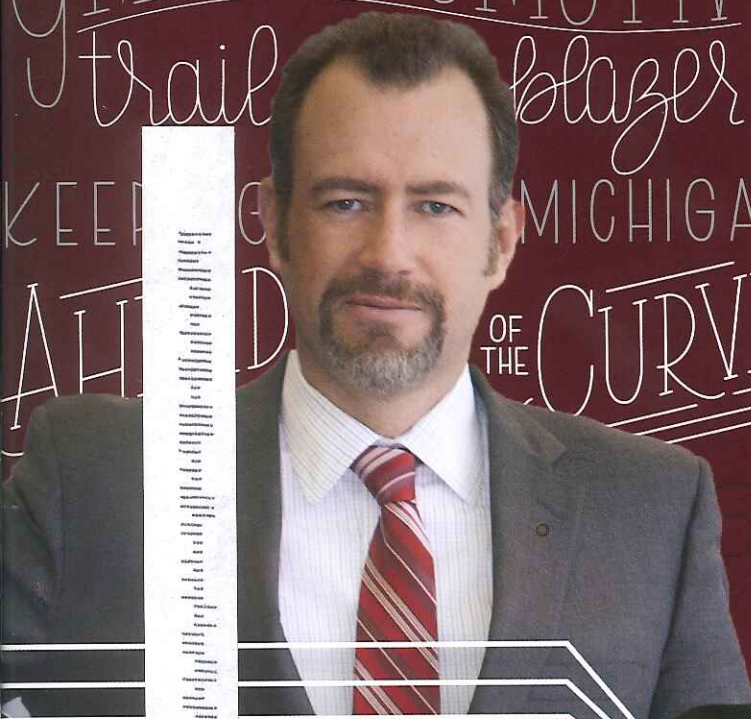
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December 2016 | US \$4.00

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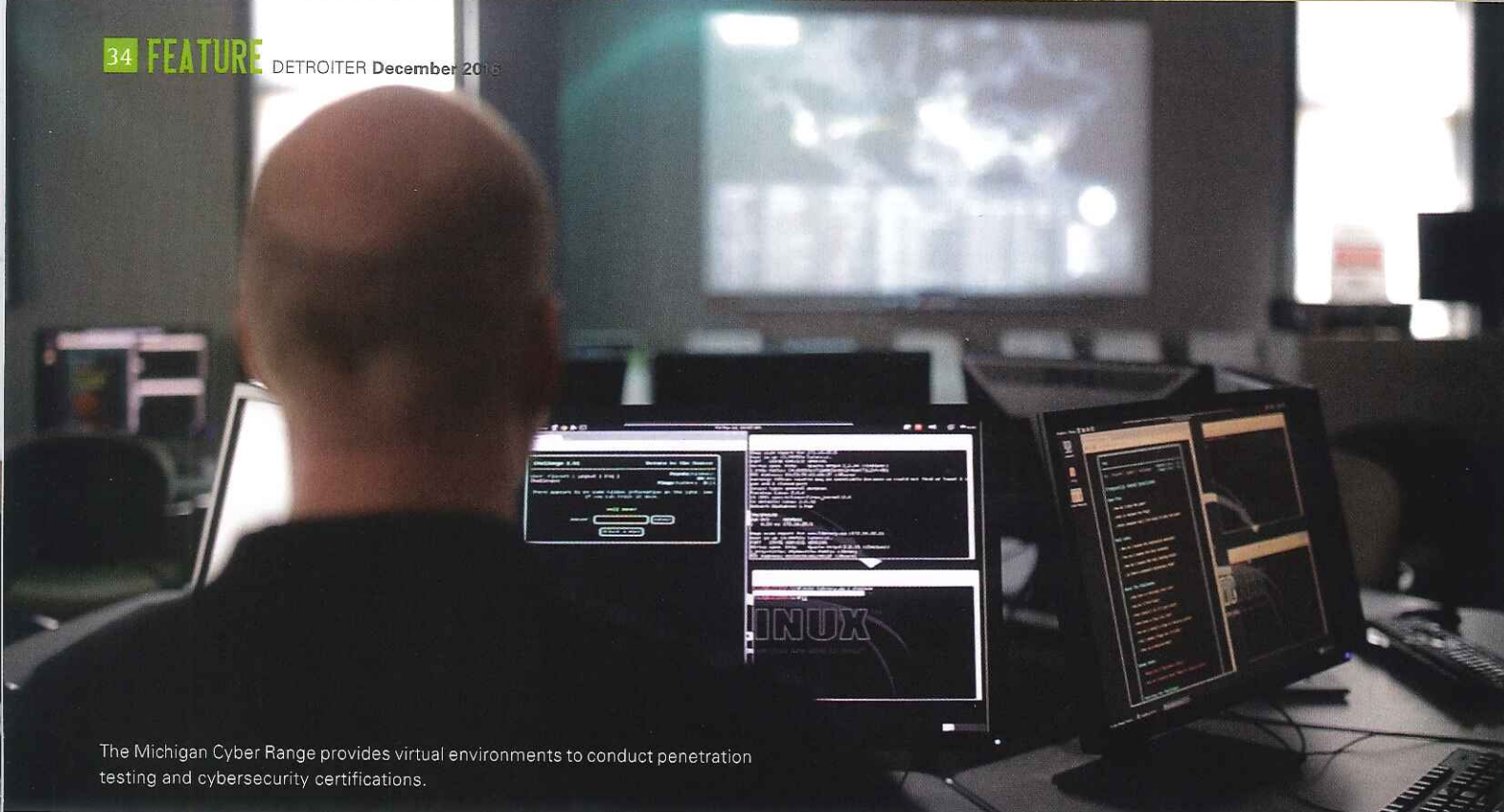
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The Michigan Cyber Range provides virtual environments to conduct penetration testing and cybersecurity certifications.

# CROSS-SECTOR Collaboration

Automotive and IT sectors attract new jobs, opportunities to defense industry By Melissa Anders



▲ Jennifer Tisdale is the cyber mobility program manager for the Michigan Economic Development Corp.'s Defense and Automotive Office.

The defense and automotive sectors are crucial to Michigan's economy, employing hundreds of thousands of Michiganders and bringing in billions of dollars in revenue to the state each year.

As the industries push to develop and adopt next-generation technology, leaders are increasingly recognizing the benefit of cross-sector collaboration. Auto and defense may have different missions and goals, but they often use similar technologies, especially when it comes to connected and autonomous vehicles.

That is why Jennifer Tisdale, cyber mobility program manager for the Michigan Economic Development Corp.'s (MEDC) Defense and Automotive Office, is focused on connecting the automotive, defense and IT sectors in an effort to boost the state's economy.

Tisdale works with the Michigan Defense Center, a platform of the MEDC, to educate companies on opportunities to cross-market their innovations to the automotive and defense sectors. She also promotes assets like the Michigan Cyber Range, which provides

virtual environments to conduct penetration testing and cybersecurity certifications, making it an important talent development and business attraction tool.

"(The Center) is doing a lot for us in terms of private investment," she said, noting that out-of-state companies must either relocate or at least visit Michigan in order to use the unique resource.

Tisdale recently spoke with the *Detroit* to discuss how defense, automotive and IT are together attracting significant investments, high-tech jobs, and solving mobility and connectivity issues.

### What is the goal of the Michigan Defense Center?

The Michigan Defense Center really is to help grow and protect the defense industry in Michigan and to make sure that we have as many Michigan businesses playing in the defense space as possible. It was evident back in '08 and '09 when we saw the downturn of the auto industry that a lot of our companies



could really increase their portfolio and perhaps even save their company by diverting some of their time and resources to the defense sector.

Although we have had a stronghold in the defense industry as a whole for almost 30 years, I think the Michigan Defense Center is an advocate and a cheerleader for these businesses, understanding what their needs are, helping them grow and helping nontraditional defense contractors enter into this space.

**The state's Protect and Grow plan is designed to preserve and grow Michigan's valuable defense assets like TACOM and TARDEC. How are you working through this plan to support the economy?**

The tighter I can knit together TACOM and TARDEC to commercial automotive and academia and talent that is right here in the state, the less likely that they will suffer any cuts, or the less likely that Alabama or another area of the Army can come and take our assets away from us. So, it is to protect what we have, but (also) to grow the opportunity

for where the industry is going in the future. Right now all signs are pointing toward technology, mobility and cybersecurity.

**How are you working to bring together the defense, IT and auto sectors?**

It is understanding what their individual needs are. TARDEC is tremendously thirsty as the Department of Defense (DOD) body here in the state to understand what the commercial industry is doing and what is happening in the university space on the R&D side.

One of the best things I can provide – and it sounds very simple – is to be a good translator. The language that they are speaking in commercial auto is exactly the same, but their vernacular is different. To be able to be the translator between automotive and DOD has really served our program well, so that we can get them to find where they are alike and where they are different and where they can come together. The same is true with academia.

**How can Michigan's defense, IT and auto sectors work together to solve connectivity and mobility issues?**

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) has really done a tremendous amount of work in the past year with creating some of their connected stretches of road. Last June, we did our first platooning exercise down the I-69 corridor in partnership with MDOT, TARDEC, the MEDC, and a lot of our technology companies and universities that are concentrating in robotics. The area that we've been successful in the past few months has been in terms of collaboration and cooperation with MDOT on additional platooning exercises on I-69.

**What is one of the challenges facing the state as it works to expand its defense industry?**

We need to tell a better story for expanding the defense industry. I think that we all know internally – the defense community here – how much activity and how much good work is happening, but we as a state collectively are not shouting that from the hilltops. I think that is part of (Michigan Defense Center Director) Sean Carlson's effort with Protect and Grow is to really be that main champion for the industry. ■ Melissa Anders is a metro Detroit native and freelance writer.

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