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FORMER GOVERNOR RHODES RETURNS TO SCENE OF ONE OF HIS GREATEST TRIUMPHS 20 YEARS LATER

James A. Rhodes, Ohio's only four-term governor, returned Wednesday to Marysville, the scene of one of his greatest triumphs that came in October 1977 when he and officials of Honda of America Manufacturing announced that the company had selected the small, plains-like city west of Columbus to locate a \$25 million motorcycle manufacturing plant that today hosts a nearly \$2 billion motor vehicle production complex.

A robust 88-year old Mr. Rhodes was the honored guest at Honda's celebration of its 20th Anniversary of locating in Marysville where the company now produces not only lines of motorcycles and all terrain vehicles but also two of Honda's most-popular vehicles - the Accord and Civic - at a complex that employs about 6,500 people. Honda also has major facilities in Anna (engines), East Liberty (autos) and Raymond (research and development) bringing the company's total investment in Ohio to \$3.35 billion with total employment of 12,400.

Mr. Rhodes was accompanied by several former aides, including Fred Neuenschwander and James Duerk, both of whom served as development directors in the 16-year Rhodes' era, and Chan Cochran, who served a while as Mr. Rhodes' press secretary. Mr. Rhodes also credited the late House Speaker Vern Riffe, who he called his "best friend," with helping to facilitate Honda's location in Ohio.

With his distinctive white hair, Mr. Rhodes was widely recognized as he toured the auto and motorcycle production facilities in a golf cart. He attributed his lack of mobility to a bum knee gotten by ignoring the advice of wiser heads and continuing to play basketball past the age of 55. The former Republican chief executive stopped repeatedly along the tour route to be greeted and exchange pleasantries with employees and receive their applause. Many captured the moment with still and video cameras as they paused from their labors in a clean, cool, relatively quiet environment.

Midway through the tour, Mr. Rhodes addressed a small audience during a tree-planting ceremony much like the one he participated in 20 years ago outside the main entrance to the motorcycle plant. Four remaining original associates of the company participated in the ceremony, as did four of the company's newer hires. Honda of America President Takeo Fukui stood by quietly at a distance, but later conversed with the governor at a private luncheon. After the luncheon, Mr. Rhodes was presented a letter from Governor George V. Voinovich honoring his service and for helping to bring the Honda development to Ohio. A letter from the governor honoring Honda's 20th Anniversary was presented to Mr. Fukui. Honda officials presented Mr. Rhodes with a collage of photographs and newspaper stories from the 1977 event and a golf shirt with the Honda emblem.

Prior to the luncheon, Mr. Rhodes spoke with three Statehouse reporters who were present for his 1977 announcement. He recalled a warm relationship he shared with company founder Soichiro Honda, who shared Mr. Rhodes' passion for golf. Mr. Rhodes said whenever Mr. Honda came to Ohio, they would team up, knock off a "couple of chumps" on the golf course and then get down to the business at hand. Mr. Rhodes said Mr. Honda was one of the most brilliant individuals he had ever known and said his legacy of innovation lives on at the Marysville complex where a bevy of new production methods have made the company one of the best in the world. "They invented most everything used here" in the production process, Mr. Rhodes remarked.

Mr. Rhodes, whose public appearances are few these days, also discoursed on a number of subjects, including the importance of quality education, particularly vocational education. He spoke of one of his favorite presidents, Franklin Delano Roosevelt who taught Mr. Rhodes a lesson that helped to make him supremely successful in Ohio politics - give the people good jobs. Ironically, Mr. Rhodes spoke of mineworkers union organizer John L. Lewis while in a facility whose workforce began work in 1979 and remains today nonunion. Mr. Rhodes, noting that his father was a coal miner, credited Mr. Lewis with helping to bring free public education to the poor rural areas of the nation which produced, among others, himself. Mr. Rhodes, showing that his political instincts are still sharp, would not be drawn into commenting on the legislature's stalemated work to craft a new school funding system. He did, however, repeat the findings of polls that a sales tax will not pass and suggested that lawmakers double the capacity of vocational education to insure that Ohio has a workforce to meet the needs of employers. "Kids who get out of vocational education walk ten miles to apply here," he declared. His comments are reminiscent of one of Mr. Rhodes's favorite slogans that served him well in four gubernatorial campaigns: "A diploma in one hand and a job in the other."

Mr. Rhodes said he harbored no doubts in 1977 that Honda would become a major economic force in Ohio although the initial investment, in today's dollars, was small. The Marysville site was picked by Mr. Honda during a fly-over in the state plane, Mr. Rhodes recalled. In 1977, the only structure of any significance in the area was the former Ohio Transportation Research Center, now part of Honda. All else was more or less cornfields and woods. A host of state incentives, including highway and other infrastructure improvements and a rail spur, would transform the site into a host for a modern manufacturing facility. The area today is still largely pastoral, a fact one associate attributed to Honda's stabilizing presence. She also pointed out that Honda's presence has helped to preserve the Marysville community in that the children of Honda workers are not forced to leave home to find employment.

Mr. Rhodes also proclaimed his political career at an end. In response to a question about a possible comeback bid, he said he is too old to be elected, suggesting that there is some provision in the Ohio constitution that would bar him from running. Reminded that constitution's age limit applies only to judicial candidates, Mr. Rhodes said simply "I was at the trough longer than anybody." Despite his confinement to a wheelchair, Mr. Rhodes appeared vital, gregarious and informed of the affairs of state and ready to discuss any at length, prompting a former aide to observe "you ask for a grain of sand and he gives you a beach."

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