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Oshawa GM plant closure to impact local charities

By Aaron Streck Videographer Global News

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The shutdown of the GM Plant in Oshawa is having many ripple effects.

Charities in the area have relied on GM and its employees' support for decades and when GM closes up shop at the end of next year, it's going to leave a massive financial hole for local charities.

"General Motors has been the gold standard for many, many years," said Robert Howard with United Way Durham Region.

Howard knows all too well the need. He's been with United Way Durham Region for the past 20 years and his agency has been helping more than two dozen local charitable agencies keep up with demands for help.

But with General Motors closing its Oshawa-based plant at the end of next year, he's worried how long he'll be able to keep up that support.

"It's not just the 2,500 people immediately affected with General Motors, it's possibly 25,000, 30,000 people who will feel that impact and from our standpoint as the United Way, it's certainly going to have an impact on our charitable contributions and how we're able to support our agencies and programs," said Howard.

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United Way Durham Region generates more than \$3 million a year in donations.

They've had to restructure before; a decade ago, GM employees and corporate donations accounted for nearly 60 per cent of their annual campaign.

Last year, they pumped in about \$600,000, a drop to around 20 per cent.

"There's no question that the impact is going to be intense. Can we make up \$600,000? My hope is that we will be able to do that," said Howard.

The United Way and its agencies aren't the only ones likely to feel the pinch.

The Lakeridge Health Foundation based in Oshawa is also expecting tough times.

"We expect to see a decrease in donations. It's too soon to know how much but these families and

individuals, they're not just donors, they're volunteers, they're event participants and they're event organizers. So Lakeridge Health Foundation and the rest of the charities in the Durham Region, we expect to see an impact and a ripple effect on all fronts," said Daina Porter with Lakeridge Health Foundation.

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Looking around the hospital, it doesn't take much to see the impact General Motors has had on the foundation.

"There's evidence of GM support throughout the hospital, in particular, the cancer centre that is named after R.S. McLaughlin. The plaques throughout the hospital, they're a reminder to the patients just how much support has come from the GM community," said Porter.

With General Motors having been the fabric of Oshawa and Durham Region for more than a century, the closure will be felt for decades to come.

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