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Mich. Firms end 2015 on mixed note

Stock results an even split of ups, downs in flat year for market

BY BRIAN J. O'CONNOR

If the 2015 goal for any publicly traded Michigan company was to beat the market, well, that was fairly easy.

By the close of the trading year Thursday, the S&P 500 index had slid by 0.7 percent, making for a pretty woeful benchmark. A total of 26 of Michigan's publicly traded companies bested that dismal S&P result, ranging from a 0.4 percent loss by Wixom drug manufacturer Rockwell Medical Inc. to a colossal 56.9 percent improvement by Southfield auto financing company Credit Acceptance Corp....

...The year was mixed for Detroit's Big Three auto companies. Shares of Fiat Chrysler gained nearly 22 percent over last year's closing price, while General Motors Co. was down close to 2 percent and the price of Ford shares dropped nearly 9 percent. ...

..."Fiat has the benefit of Chrysler selling a lot of trucks, like the others, but Europe also is on the mend," said David Kudla, CEO and chief investment strategist of Mainstay Capital Management in Grand Blanc. "Investors are investing on future expectations, and a lot of people believe that this is the typical auto cycle. When they look ahead, many people think that we're at the peak of the cycle."

Beyond Michigan, the stock market spent most of the year like a dog chasing its tail — lots of excitement and activity, but in the end, it got nowhere. In addition to the S&P 500, which measures the broader stock market, the Dow Jones Index lost 2.2 percent on its more established, blue-chip companies. The tech-heavy Nasdaq index gained 5.7 percent, thanks to some big wins in technology sectors.

The year started with fears of economic slowdowns in Europe and China and weak consumer spending after another frigid winter. Investors indulged in what would become a yearlong fixation: worrying that the Federal Reserve would or wouldn't raise interest rates by too little or too much, too fast or too soon. ...

...Markets spent the rest of the year fretting about weak corporate earnings, the completely expected and predictable quarter-point rate hike from the Fed in December, and the continued weak recovery from the great recession that continues to keep wages and salaries flat and a large chunk of the workforce out of a job.

For the new year ahead, advisers see a continued bull market with the same kind of volatility witnessed in the past 12 months.

"Equities will be very volatile but we can have an OK year," said Kudla of Mainstay Capital. "This year was a wild ride to nowhere. We look at 2016 to be similar. Now is the time to hold your own, be very careful about risk and get what you can." ...