

GATEWAY'S HORIZON

A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE



The Horizon Center for Transportation Technology.

COURTESY OF GATEWAY TECHNICAL COLLEGE

AUTOMOTIVE PROGRAM GRADUATES WILL BE PREPARED FOR THE MOST SOPHISTICATED OPERATIONS, SUCH AS WORKING IN THE LUXURY VEHICLE SERVICE ENVIRONMENT.

By Jayne Herring and Lee Colony

Jayne Herring

is Gateway Technical College's director of marketing. She can be contacted at HerringJ@gtc.edu.

Lee Colony

is communications specialist at Gateway Technical College. He can be contacted at ColonyL@gtc.edu.

The partnership supporting the creation of Gateway Technical College's Horizon Center for Transportation Technology, located in Kenosha, Wisconsin, morphed from one developed under a U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) grant with similar goals. The center, which opened this fall, is a prime example of a sustainable community partnership formed to improve training for key industry groups. The center, home to transportation education programs (two automotive programs and aeronautics-pilot training), uses leading-edge technology to prepare students for careers in automotive technology—specifically the most sophisticated operations such as the luxury vehicle service environment. Students in pilot training receive some of the best training in the Midwest, with the number of multi-engine training hours distinguishing it from comparable programs elsewhere.

Gateway Technical College President Bryan Albrecht (ACTE president-elect), Snap-on Incorporated, the Wisconsin Automobile and Truck Dealers Association (WATDA), and the Kenosha Unified School District have driven the center's development. Each recognized the absolute need for advanced training for technicians—a field greatly affected by the rapid change in automotive computerization and the effects of baby-boom retirements.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics expects employment of automotive service technicians and mechanics to increase 10 percent to 20 percent through 2012, representing an increase of 82,000 to 164,000 new jobs. This, coupled with demand for increasingly higher quality service, will spike the need for industry-certified instructors and instructional programs.

DOL Grant Lays the Foundation

The need for advanced training generated the partnership between Gateway, Snap-on, WATDA, Melior Inc. (which develops and delivers service technician training), the National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF)/ASE, and the National Coalition of Advanced Technology Centers. Horizon Center received a \$900,000 grant from DOL's Employment and Training Administration in October 2004. The grant pays for the Upgrading the Nation's Automotive Program, which aims to increase the number of NATEF/ASE-certified automotive instructors and certified automotive training programs throughout the country.

A major component of the program resulting from the grant uses Web-based training and information to address key automotive workforce issues identified in President Bush's High Growth Job Training Initiative. An overall project Web site, www.upgrade2cert.org, was established as a portal to the online training. From that site, automotive instructors who need to obtain their 20 hours of training to keep their certification can access training online, at no cost, from Melior. Also, high schools, colleges and other automotive training centers can access a free tutorial produced with



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Emily Stover DeRocco, assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, delivers a speech at the ribbon cutting at the Horizon Center for Transportation Technology in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Gateway Technical College President Bryan Albrecht is pictured as well.

grant funding that guides them through the program certification process. Certification is strongly encouraged by the vehicular industry. Original equipment manufacturers will only donate materials to schools having achieved certification.

Further, achieving graduates from certified programs have better job placement and wage earning opportunities. The DOL grant has helped numerous instructors and automotive programs across the country achieve and maintain certification. It was extended from the initial two years into a third ending this year. According to a July 30 report issued by Gateway Technical College to the U.S. Department of Labor:

- 2,330 instructors have been trained through the Web site. The goal was 500 over two years—and 877 were trained in the first year ending December 2005, and 1,740 at the end of two years. (This is according to an evaluation by an independent third party.)
- 8,840 training modules have been completed by instructors as of June 30.

- All 50 states are represented by those who have participated in training.

The portion of the Web site designed to assist automotive training programs achieve certification was introduced within the first year. Emily Stover DeRocco, assistant secretary of DOL's Employment and Training Administration, points out that the Gateway grant became more than just solid training offered to instructors—it opened the door for others to partner with the college in a broader effort.

"Leadership must come from all corners for a region to be successful, and you're fortunate that Gateway Technical College has risen to the occasion," DeRocco said during a Sept. 20 ribbon-cutting ceremony at the center. "Their High Growth grant was a little less than a million dollars, and they could have been satisfied with simply producing the curriculum and training program that had been outlined." But Gateway was able to leverage an additional \$2 million from the private sector to build a state-of-the-art center, DeRocco added. "It is a functioning demonstration of the classroom of tomorrow, where coursework is electronic

and students blend classroom learning and hands-on work.”

Establishing Horizon Center

The idea to establish a regional training center serving the automobile industry had two objectives: position the community for meeting the demands of the increasing career markets in the Milwaukee-Chicago corridor, and honor the history and tradition of the automobile industry in southeastern Wisconsin. The Kenosha and Racine counties continue to have a rich history in manufacturing, and supporting the automotive and transportation industry clusters; so it was a natural progression to support this important labor market.

Community leaders worked for several years to build a framework of support for the concept, and then in 2006 Albrecht presented the center proposal to Jack Michaels, Snap-on’s chairman and chief executive officer, and Ray Pedersen, executive director of the WATDA foundation. With support for the concept, the Horizon leadership team began working to build a foundation of 125 community partners in delivering a dream to build a world-class regional training center supporting the automotive and aviation industries.

“I’ll never forget that first meeting when all the leaders of Snap-on came out to Gateway Technical College to just talk about it,” Pedersen says. “I was present at that meeting and it was clear to me that we were discussing an idea, a dream, that maybe would start to take shape.”

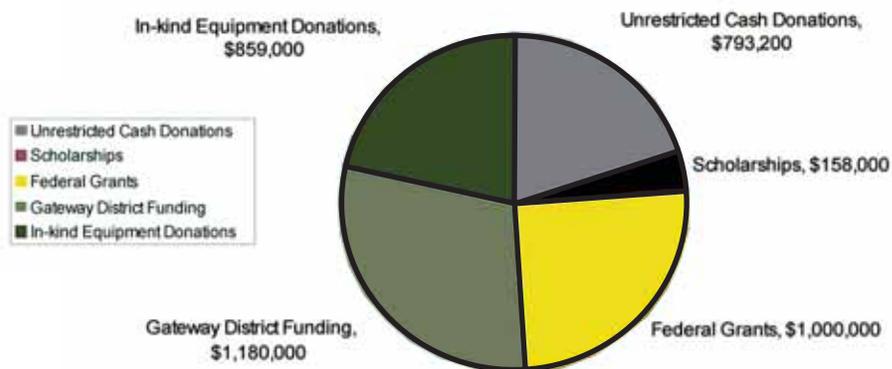
The late father of Andy Palmen, president of the Palmen Automotive Group in Kenosha, Wisconsin, also had a dream like Pedersen of an educational site like Horizon Center. Palmen told Gateway Technical College Board members at the center’s opening that his father would have approved of the center because it looks into the future—something that business and government don’t always do.

“By strategically coming today and thinking of the future, people will be attracted to this industry, and I will be thrilled with that,” he said.



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Gateway Technical College employee Wes Wojciechowski demonstrates the security system for a Snap-on toolbox during an open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Horizon Center for Transportation Technology.



David Lynch, owner of the Lynch Automotive Group in Burlington, Wisconsin, spoke at the center’s opening on how times have changed, and how automotive technicians are perceived today compared to when his late father was in the automotive field.

“My dad was a service manager and was troubled with the perception of the auto technician folks in those days referred to mechanics in unsavory terms,” Lynch said. “I just feel how proud he would have felt today with the recognition and work and the incredible investment that the community is making on behalf of today’s youngsters in the center.”

During the planning, Frederick Brook

house, business development manager for Snap-on Industrial, said the focus of the center would be on a high-quality school meeting the needs of industry. Discussion then included bringing a Snap-on Diagnostics Certification program to the center. To do so, Snap-on teaches Gateway instructors how to prepare students and professionals already in the field for the certification requirements.

“That’s when things got to be really exciting, because that concept was leading the effort to create this center of excellence,” Brookhouse says. “It wasn’t just about the dealers supporting it; it now could be something that Snap-on could lead with.”

Horizon Center's Curriculum

Programming at the center has been developed to create an aligned transportation career path that successfully engages motivated area high school students in their education and a future career. The transportation curriculum seamlessly guides the student through high school and college and into the workforce. Automotive program graduates will be prepared for the most sophisticated operations, such as working in the luxury vehicle service environment. Some of the program enhancements that Horizon Center delivers to automotive students include:

- Operations that simulate a service shop three days a week. Thirteen service bays help students obtain hands-on training with modern tools used in automobile shops today.
- Courses and training are made available throughout the entire year so that students can complete their degree more quickly.
- The most up-to-date diagnostic and training technology used by technicians is made available. Every student has a laptop and uses it throughout every stage of their training. DiGiAC training modules located in two classrooms help instructors to transition what is learned in books and lectures into a more realistic setting. Students are also trained on a Modis, a Snap-on diagnostics analyzer.
- Functionally comparable training such as that of the recognized national automotive education leaders, at one-tenth the cost and at a local location.
- Classes scheduled year-round from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. offer greater opportunity to meet students' schedules. The program can be individually structured for accelerated full-time, conventional full-time, or part-time.
- Students will be assigned use of a master workstation containing the latest in Snap-on technology.

- Advanced engineering provided by Snap-on engineering experts will be integrated into the curriculum.

"It is very unusual for auto technicians to be walking around with laptops," says Dennis Sherwood, Gateway's dean of campus affairs and transportation division. "Dealers say this is what we need to be doing. Technicians need to be computer-savvy."

Albrecht says the center represents the future of education and training.

"The laptop paperless curriculum design allows students and instructors to access content at a much greater depth," says Albrecht. "Students now have the tools to service vehicles and perform computer diagnostics."

Partnerships Key to Horizon's Success

Partnerships with Snap-on and other industry groups and leaders propel the center from a regular training center to one of excellence.

"There are more than 125 partners in the project and the number grows every day," says Albrecht. "Our community sees value in the facility and, most importantly, in the services provided to Horizon students."

The benefits of the partnership with Snap-on could be viewed as two-fold. Firstly, there is the donated capital such as machines, money, expertise and intellectual capital gained by joining with an industry leader. Secondly, Snap-on trains Gateway instructors so that they can teach students how to use the company's tools at a very high standard.

Pedersen says that Snap-on's involvement is "the lynchpin for regional cooperation." He added, "The reason I say that is because programs like this have been done on both coasts, but nobody has really done it in the Midwest."



Gateway Technical College uses state-of-the-art technology to educate students to become workers in today's complex automotive technician industry.

Tom Jahnke, product development manager for Snap-on Diagnostics, says instructors need to be all-around experts in the technology to be able to properly teach it to students.

"The successful instructors are those who embrace the technology," he says. "They realize that a vehicle has a lot of high-end technology on it. Diagnosing drivability problems is different than just replacing struts or a brake job. They need to understand the technology and the use of the technology in the vehicle." Jahnke says the Horizon model can be taken to other schools and applied not only to the traditional student, but professionals already in the field.

"Up to now, it has been thought that the tools a technicians needs is a ratchet, a wrench and a screwdriver," Jahnke says. "Now, in addition to those tools, they also need to include diagnostics equipment. It takes more than a ratchet to fix a car." ■