

New Tech Program Fills GM Dealers' Needs

by Jim Stickford

To keep the technician education pipeline filled, GM is teaming up with Universal Technical Institute (UTI) for a 12-week elective training program for UTI students.

The program will first be available at UTI's Avondale, Ariz., campus.

UTI provides post-secondary education for students seeking careers as professional automotive, diesel, collision repair, motorcycle and marine technicians.

Todd Dawn, GM's program manager for Technical Education, said, "Right now, there are about 30,000 technicians employed by GM dealers.

"Every year, about 2,000 people leave the field for whatever reason — retirement, death, going to another position within their dealership."

Dawn said students in GM's Automotive Service Educational Program (GM ASEP) attend one of 57 affiliated community colleges across the country and spend two years getting an associate's degree while learning the ropes of what goes on in a GM dealership's repair shop.

Graduates of GM ASEP have been taught specifically how to work on GM vehicles, Dawn said. About 500 students graduate from the program every year. So, GM is still down about 1,500 technicians every year.

Mike Durkin, director of Dealer Service and Warranty, said GM also has a program called EYES, which matches wheeled-vehicle-experienced military veterans to openings where they live.

GM is continuing to look for ways to keep the technician pipeline filled, Durkin said. Part of the problem is a change in the public's attitude.

In the old days, high schools' auto shop class was seen as a way to give those who didn't plan on going to college the skills they needed to have a good job. But over time, parents and teachers have taken the attitude that a four-year college is the way to go.

As a result, fewer students are signing up for auto technician classes and high schools are no longer funding such programs

the way they did in previous decades.

"We aren't seeing kids who can go out and fix the lawnmower when it doesn't work," Dawn said. "Today's youth are into iPads and computers and video games. They don't think of cars as high-tech."

Dawn said today's vehicles are very high-tech and it's a challenge to convey that fact to parents and today's youth.

So, working with UTI as part of a larger goal of filling up the technician pipeline makes sense, Dawn said.

The organization has 10 campuses across the country. He said their 51-week intensive training program is good.

The only problem is that graduates are taught how to work on "generic" cars, and not specifically GM products. By adding a special 12-week program just for GM cars, the pool of GM-trained technicians increases.

"The availability of qualified, trained automotive technicians is and will continue to be a critical area of importance for GM," Durkin said.

"When looking at UTI's industry-leading curriculum, facilities and student and employer support services, we knew we had a solid partner to build something great with, supporting a growing need for technicians at our dealerships across the country."

The curriculum for the GM

elective program will be developed in partnership between UTI, GM and Raytheon Professional Services (RPS), GM's training partner for the past 15 years, and a global leader and provider of innovative training solutions.

RPS has partnered with UTI in developing a new blended learning curriculum for UTI automotive and diesel technology programs, Dawn said.

"There is no doubt that this GM elective will be a rigorous program that includes some of the latest technology in web-based learning, and it will prepare students for the way GM technicians perform in the dealership," said Russ O'Brien, executive director of North America Operations at RPS.

"We have worked extensively with GM to develop curriculum for their technicians, and we understand the high caliber of training GM demands."

Graduates of the GM elective will receive GM credentials that would otherwise take years to earn in the field. The students will be even better prepared right out of school, ready to work on a variety of Chevrolet, Buick, GMC, Cadillac and other GM products.

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