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North Montco Partners With Area Companies

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By DAN SOKIL

TOWAMENCIN — If you're looking for an example of partnership between the public and private sector, you'd be hard pressed to find a better one than the Automotive Technology Labs at the North Montco Technical Career Center.



AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY students Melisa Ragoopath, second from left, and Tamara Carter, second from right, are shown with instructor Bob Lacivita at the North Montco Technical Career Center with Grainger Inc. representative Vince Krout, left, and Hunter Industries representative Doug Woolverton, right.

There, the school has arranged with Yardley-based Hunter Engineering Co. to keep the lab stocked with equipment even more up-to-date than most private garages, and Norristown-based W.W. Grainger Inc. to give a little bonus to top students.

"We're now coming up on our 11th year of our relationship with North Montco, and the way it works is that we provide some of our equipment to select locations

like here, and in return they give us access to it for the training of some of our technicians," said Doug Woolverton, Hunter's Northeast Division manager.

Hunter provided the specifications for two vehicle lifts that North Montco purchased itself, but donated over the past decade much of the other equipment in the lab, from brake lathes to a suspension analyzer and the complex computer consoles required to manage and coordinate all of the high-tech equipment.

"It's great, they do a great job of keeping things new and improved. The things we use here are actually newer than what we have at the garage where I work now," said Trevor Chernuka, a North Montco alumni who now helps instruct students.

"I started using this stuff in ninth grade, and some of the kids that age come in now and they don't know the difference between a camshaft and a crankshaft, but being able to come in here and actually take one out and put a new one in really makes a lot of difference," Chernuka said.

Students Melisa Ragoopath and Tamara Carter said they both spend as much time in the lab as they can, learning the ins and outs of vehicle repair by doing it themselves.

"Our class pretty much rebuilt this car. We replaced the old engine, put in a different filter, installed an automatic throttle and redid the brake lines to custom fit them with the new engine," said Ragoopath.

"It's a great class, very hands-on, and nobody even minds that we're girls doing the work. They just give us things to do, and we get them done, just like if we were working in a real garage," Carter said.

And North Montco students who show promising skills in the classroom or in the lab, will get a little boost from Grainger thanks to their \$12,500 in donations over the past two years to the school's Partners in Excellence Student Incentive Program.

"We're a local distributor of facility maintenance equipment, that supplies businesses in this area and throughout the country. In this lab, for example, we might supply the trash cans, tools, lights, signs, safety systems, things like that," said Vince Krout, Grainger branch manager.

"When we heard about the Partners in Excellence program, we thought it would be a great way to reward not just test scores but leadership, teamwork, all of those things that don't really show up on a test but we really feel are necessary in the work force," Krout said.