

America Is A Nation On Wheels

Excerpts From The Opening Statements By Larry Hecker At The National Association Of College Automotive Teaching Conference

There are currently more than 200 million vehicles operating in our country. That's an increase of over 30% during the past ten years alone and forecasts call for growth of up to 250 million by the year 2010.

For a person looking for an exciting and rewarding career, the automotive repair industry represents an excellent opportunity. It's a dynamic industry that is constantly changing to meet the needs of a highly technical society. To encourage the rapid advancement of promising employment and to keep employees up-to-date on technical changes, manufacturers and service providers invest a lot of time and money in additional on the job training.

The job of today's service technician is a very demanding one. Today's vehicles are far more complex than they used to be and today's service bays are beginning to look like scientific laboratories with lots of expensive sophisticated diagnostic and repair equipment. The old grease monkey image is a thing of the past. Line technicians must now have an extensive knowledge of mechanical, electronic and computer technology. This knowledge must constantly be updated to keep pace with the rapid change of new automobiles.

Today's shop owner is caught trying to raise the level of training for existing technicians while struggling to locate a new breed of highly trained technicians required for these increasing complex vehicles. Ongoing automotive repair businesses require 35,000 additional technicians each year just to maintain the ratio of technicians to vehicles that exists now and it is extremely important that shop owners, both large and small, recognize the upcoming shortage of skilled, articulate and educated entry level technicians and do something about it now.

An automotive teacher at a Maryland community college said that of more than 300 students in the automotive program, all are spoken for. They are either employed or are in an apprentice program, training program sponsored by a dealer or repair shop. These businesses have invested heavily in these students future and expect them to work full time upon graduation.

Many large dealerships and retail chains employ service specialists who concentrate their skills in a single area like tune-up and diagnosis, electrical systems, front end and steering, automatic transmissions, brake systems and truck repairs. As more motorists expect quality work and to get complete and accurate answers from their service advisors, and technicians, it becomes more important that all automotive repair professionals understand and are trained with excellent communications skills.

Today's technicians need to understand that a background in business, electronics, mathematics and science is important. However, speech and language skills are even more important since much of the automotive repair business entails working with customers.