

Marysville auto tech class run by IMPACT60 shows people they are 'worth saving'

MARYSVILLE — Trevor Stout stepped on the pedal of the tire-changing machine, and as he guided the arm that peeled the rubber away from the rim, sweat dripped down his face and pooled behind his safety glasses.

“I don’t know why I have so much anxiety about this,” he told the other students gathered around him and watching.

Someone replied: “Because that tire can blow off. That’s some scary stuff right there.”

Instructor Alvin Meek laughed. “You’ve got this,” he told Stout.

But that moment a couple of weeks ago wasn’t just about a tire. For Stout, who has more than a year of sobriety in his addiction recovery journey, it was just another step down the path of proving to himself that he can accomplish what he puts his mind to.

He is one of 11 people in the current Technician Advancement Program (TAP), a free 10-week class hosted at Marysville’s Early College High School by IMPACT60, a local nonprofit organization.

This is the third such class that the organization has hosted in Union County in the past year, along with one in Fairfield County, for a total of 33 participants in all.

Although anyone can participate, many have suffered some sort of trauma and are referred by high school principals, counselors, courts or addiction-recovery services because the referrers think the class will be a way for them to learn new skills and find success.

Stout is a part of Union County’s drug court, whose coordinator told him about the class where participants learn basic skills such as vehicle inspections, oil changes and tire rotation that could land them jobs as entry-level auto maintenance techs.

At 27, he is among the oldest in this current cohort. He attended an information session in July, looked around the fully equipped automotive lab at the high school where they would be meeting for a few hours two nights a week, and wondered if he belonged.

“Most everyone else was these young kids, straight out of high school. I’m this almost 30-something dude, covered in tattoos. I thought ‘What am I doing here?’ said Stout, who has a 4-year-old son, lives in Marysville and works for a local pizza shop.

“But these teachers have pulled me beyond that and they focus on me. They go out of their way to make me feel like I should be there.”

Central Ohio businessman Bruce Daniels had a philanthropic vision for the program

Local philanthropist and businessman Bruce Daniels, who owns several central Ohio auto dealerships and a Marysville restaurant, started IMPACT60 more than a decade ago.

Operating within a budget of about \$500,000, the organization this year alone has provided grant assistance totaling about \$350,000. Its primary focuses include food insecurity, homelessness, affordable housing, health and addiction-recovery issues and workforce development.

Lavona See is the community education and relations coordinator for Daniels' Performance Columbus auto dealership group and is vice president of IMPACT60. She said these classes look like workforce development — and they are — but they are also so much more.

Students can get help with their own vehicles in the class, and IMPACT60 helps them meet other emergent personal needs as they come up, whether it's finding them immediate employment, clothes for interviews, gas money or housing help.

Some of the students get hired into a paid apprenticeship at Daniels' Marysville Honda dealership even before the class is over.

"This is about a second chance for people who often don't get a second chance," See said. The program is "designed to help give an opportunity to someone seeking to find their 'what's next.'"

GED classes in Plain City led teenager to program for a fresh start

While Stout is among the oldest in the class, Brayden Leonard is among the youngest.

The 17-year-old from Hilliard heard about the opportunity from his GED instructor at Tolles Career & Technical Center in Plain City. Leonard had a rough few years separated from his mom, who is a graduate of Franklin County's CATCH Court, a specialty-docket court for victims of human trafficking.

Traditional school, he discovered through his journey, just wasn't his thing. But working on cars? Now that's something he already did and was interested in.

Leonard was eager to learn additional skills that hopefully will help him get a job, and at every session this summer he has jumped head-first into whatever task was assigned. What he didn't expect was that this class — which will wrap up at the end of September — would also prove to him that there are caring and good people in the world.

"I am surprised by how generous they are," he said of those who run the class.

The van he drives belongs to his mom — they were reunified a couple of years ago and she now works for CATCH Court — and a tire kept leaking air. They looked at it in class, and it needed to be replaced. See got him a new tire.

Working in the school shop with access to all of its equipment has been great, Leonard said. He is about to schedule his GED test, hopes to work for Daniels' motorsports operation and dreams of opening his own repair shop one day.

The encouragement and kindness he has received has boosted his confidence and lifted him up in countless ways, said his mom, Amber Pascol.

Stout feels the same way.

"These people are teaching us about so much more than cars. They are showing me that I am still worth this opportunity," he said. "That's a hard thing for me to accept at almost 30 years old with all the heart hurt that I have done. But they make me feel I'm worth saving."