Local students gear up for automotive classes at World of Speed

North Marion High School among many in region to take advantage of opportunity

Ferguson, more and more schools are showing interest in the program.

“It's a good mix of under the hood and class time,” Ferguson said. “We try to connect it to the real world. Yes, there's a textbook, but this is how things work, here's what you can do for a career.”

Students receive both college and high school CTE (career technical education) credits. And with three different courses being offered, that could represent up to 12 college credits.

“If they're not thinking of pursuing that secondary education, they already have the credits so that could motivate them (to pursue an automotive career),” Ferguson said. “You never know where education will take you. Or they could see it as a cool hobby that has value.”

The more young people they can get interested in the automotive industry, the better, Ferguson said.

“For every 10 trained technicians leaving the industry (to retirement), there's one to take their place,” he said. “So there's a great need out there. This is an opportunity that could lead to good-paying jobs. It's more than the local mechanic. It can be that, but there are so many other paths in the industry.”

While the automotive skills are important to learn, having the classes held in the museum has been beneficial to students in other ways. Not only do they receive memberships to the museum, but they also get behind-the-scenes glimpses of exhibits and have met professionals in the field.
“The whole museum is an educational tool,” Ferguson said. “They get to see behind the scenes and talk with industry experts.”

Wilsonville Toyota donated the cars the students work on in the bay, which used to be part of the Dodge dealership that previously occupied the building.

Students also receive free tuition thanks to their schools footing the bill, at least partially.

“The schools cover the instructors, credit hours and transportation, and World of Speed provides the space and tools,” Ferguson said. “It’s been a true partnership.”

North Marion, for example, received a “Take It to the Court” grant from Portland Trail Blazers and Wells Fargo so that about a dozen students could take part in the class. And Principal De Ann Jenness said the school continues to look for grants or ways to incorporate it into the school budget.

“When World of Speed contacted me about this opportunity, I didn’t blink an eye,” she said. “We are missing this opportunity for our students and we have students interested in the field. We are excited to offer this class to our students.”

And it has been making a difference in these students’ lives.

“We have teachers say they never had kids talk about their future plans, and now they are,” Ferguson said. “Some kids underperform but now they see something they want to be part of and that’s now translating in core classes like math.”

These courses with CCC instructors aren’t the only way World of Speed is promoting education. Throughout the year, the nonprofit offers field trips for schools and workshops for the general public, often geared toward women or young people, on topics like how to change the oil in a car.

“Our mission is to educate and to entertain,” Ferguson said.

World of Speed is always in need of tools to support its educational outreach. A list of needed donation items can be found at HYPERLINK "http://www.worldofspeed.org/education" www.worldofspeed.org/education.

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