

Marin County High Schools
Automotive Technology Advisory Committee

Minutes of the Meeting

DATE: October 18, 2017
TIME: 6:00 to 8:00 PM
PLACE: Tamalpais High School Auto Shop & Classroom

Mike Grant, Marin County Office of Education (MCOE) Director who manages our Regional Occupational Programs (ROP) welcomed everyone and thanked us all for coming. We went around the room and introduced ourselves

Greg Davison, MCOE School to Career Partnership Liaison, explained his role in setting up internships for students at local businesses. He serves several different schools, working at Tamalpais High School once a week. He hopes to work with local employers to expand offerings for students at local shops.

Judd Blunk, recently retired Region Manager for Porsche of North America, introduced a topic that was to become a central theme of the ensuing discussion: that we need to find ways to encourage young people to enter our automotive industry. He bemoaned the fact that no one had told him when he was in high school what steps to take to pursue a successful career in this industry.

Wendy Stratton, Assistant Principal of Tamalpais High School, welcomed the participants. She made it clear that the high school supports its career technical education pathways programs and wants to see them flourish.

Bonnie Estes, Owner/Manager of Vanguard Automotive Repair, explained that she now employs a (female) high school automotive student from Terra Linda High School, who began working with her through the School to Career Partnership. We need to provide more opportunities for young people to pursue pathways other than college that can lead to a satisfying career making good money in our high tech field.

Steve Hamilton, Service Manager of Audi Marin, described his own experience in and after high school as directionless, reprising the theme that we need to find ways to guide young people into career opportunities in our industry. Dealerships need technicians! And today's experienced techs can make a good living.

Vincent Van Hoven, has worked as a Mercedes Benz technician for upwards of forty years. His son is an automotive student at Terra Linda High School. His company wants to reach out and support our efforts because they see the need to cultivate technicians for the future. His manager wants to participate and has offered to donate a vehicle.

Brian Scott, heavy equipment mechanic at Marin County Garage, recalled that he studied industrial arts in high school. The field has been good to him; he makes good money, has a good retirement plan, enjoys his work and takes pride in what he has accomplished. Young people and their parents aren't aware of the opportunities. When the County Garage had a recent opening, only seven applied. Of these, only three were qualified.

Dave Del Grande, retired Fleet Operations Director at the City and County of San Francisco and long-time automotive teacher at City College of San Francisco and College of Marin, recognized that only a handful of young people really have an interest in our field. But we need to cultivate that interest. We also need to communicate to parents that the motor vehicle service industry is not a dead end job but rather, potentially, a good career.

Dan Silin, automotive instructor at Terra Linda High School and Tamalpais High School (two periods at each school), explained that he just took over the Tam High program this semester, after its highly regarded teacher, Lisa Miller, retired. He is committed to keeping the Tam program (and the Terra Linda one) vibrant and healthy.

Greg Khari, Service Manager at Lexus of Marin, recalled that he got interested in the field through a South Bay high school ROP program. His dealership is also seeking to cultivate young talent and he naturally wants to work with our ROP programs to do so.

Mike emphasized that Career Technical Education (CTE) and internships are priorities for County School Superintendent Mary Jane Burke and the Marin County Office of Education. She understands the importance of these programs and is eager to work with committed professionals like us to promote them.

Greg Davison agreed about parents. We need to help them understand that careers in the trades can be a viable option. He explained how the School to Career Internship program works and handed out some information for prospective employers.

Jesse Madsen, MCOE Project Specialist, works with high schools, community colleges and industry to strengthen “career pathways” so that students see how to connect their education to the goal of satisfying employment. Job shadow days, career fairs, career academies, internships, part time jobs and employment after high school are all parts of the program.

Judd described his experience with Porsche. Desperate for young technicians, they hired graduates of Universal Technical Institute (UTI) from the Midwest to work in their California dealerships. The new employees had no local support system and bailed out after a short time. Since UTI was not the answer, Porsche created its own in-house training program to groom local talent for their dealerships.

Minutes of the last meeting were provided to all participants in three-ring binder Auto Tech Advisory Handbooks. The minutes were approved.

Mike mentioned that a job skills class, now being offered at College of Marin, is part of the summer MCOE School to Career internship program.

Dan reminded everyone that students who do well in our high school auto tech classes earn college credit (and advanced placement in the automotive program) at College of Marin.

Ron Davis, automotive instructor at San Rafael High School, shared in the discussion. He had been working late at NAPA auto parts.

Dave emphasized the importance of the “soft skills” of professionalism, without which a young person cannot succeed in any career. Bonnie seconded this point, describing adolescent behavior as “unfiltered.”

Dave also remarked that young people still get interested in learning automotive technology, as demonstrated by twenty students showing up for his evening engine performance class at College of Marin’s Indian Valley campus on *Friday* nights.

Judd sees a lot of potential in our efforts. We could really do a lot of cool stuff. We could have a *lot* of interns working in our field. The College of Marin automotive facility is underutilized. If someone had come to him when he was in high school and showed him what he had to do, step by step, to follow a career pathway that would allow him to do the kind of work that interests him and get paid \$70 thousand or more to do it, he would have jumped at it. This is the kind of thing we need to do for students to benefit both the students and our industry.

Steve used the term “desperation.” Audi is growing so fast that dealerships are desperate for young technicians. They can’t hire them away from other dealerships since everybody’s wages are now so high. They are booking service appointments three weeks in advance. They now realize they haven’t focused enough on training and mentoring the next generation of technicians. It is critical to their success to bring more qualified technicians into the industry. In addition to Audi’s technician training program, he is now developing his own training and apprenticeship program inside the dealership, with his own classroom, where his most experienced techs will mentor and train the new hires.

Steve also is planning two “job fairs” a year. On a Saturday afternoon, young people are invited to tour the service department, meet the technicians and eat a meal. Perhaps it’s more like the European model where the technical trades are more respected and apprenticeship is taken seriously. If the industry doesn’t take the initiative, the pipeline of new technicians will run dry.

Vincent, Greg, Judd and Steve described manufacturers’ training programs. Most include a couple of years studying half time at the training center and working half time at the dealership. But training is ongoing throughout one’s career. Vincent mentioned that most of his training is now on-line.

Bonnie summarized that we need to show people that they can earn a decent living in this industry and that it presents an opportunity for a satisfying career.

Dan said that he will invite interested students from his high school programs to participate in Steve’s next job fair on Saturday November 11. He also mentioned that, based on the discussion at our previous meeting, he had included a brief pitch about the viability of careers in the trades during his “back-to-school night” presentations to parents.

Mike asked Brian about employment at the County. Brian stated that they bring younger people in at a basic level as veterans retire. The new hires are getting paid while they learn. Opportunities in the public service area are good, with competitive salaries, excellent benefits and secure retirement plans.

Jesse pointed out that there is a kind of disconnect between high school and community college (and the workforce). We have to help students find their way through the steps of the pathway. Perhaps an industry representative could take on an individual student as a “sponsor” to help the student make these transitions.

Judd suggested that we make a comprehensive list of shops that would be willing to take on interns. We need to find the reputable, certified shops that practice professionalism and ethical business practices.

There was some discussion about the liability issues around internships, with Greg K. mentioning that Lexus can only hire people over 18 years of age. Mike and Jesse explained that MCOE provides liability insurance to protect businesses when taking on interns.

Vincent remarked that prospective employees must have a “clean” drivers license.

Mike explained that a strong advisory committee needs a chairperson from industry rather than from education. Bonnie nominated Judd to serve as Chairperson. Dan seconded. Judd was elected Chairperson by acclamation! Dan agreed to serve as Secretary.

Jesse acknowledged that concerns about students' age, safety, liability and insurance act as barriers to internship in the minds of some employers. He encouraged us to be creative in solving these problems. Partnerships between education and industry provide opportunities for students and open up a pipeline of new workers for industry.

Judd asked if students were given aptitude tests or other guidance to direct them into particular areas of employment. Jesse mentioned an on-line exercise called Naviance, explaining that it is used mostly to help with a college rather than a career choice.

Mike explained that, as representative of MCOE, he helps coordinate with College of Marin and mentioned "career academies" as one example of such coordination.

Mike also gave a brief program status update report. Ron's automotive program at San Rafael High School has been cut to a single section. As discussed at our last meeting, the number of automotive classes in the County has been whittled down drastically over the years.

Mike explained that before the recent economic crisis, ROP funding was "categorical," meaning that the State of California guaranteed a certain ROP budget each year. Since then, a local control funding formula has allowed Individual school districts to determine how funds are allocated. So CTE programs must compete with other priorities for their fair share of funding. This does not mean that CTE is being abandoned. Both at the state and local level, there seems to be a growing understanding that four years of college is not the only viable option for young people and that a strengthening commitment to CTE could pay big dividends.

Everyone acknowledged that young people's interest in "working on cars" has also probably declined due to the overwhelming technological complexity of today's vehicles.

As the meeting adjourned, this participant sensed a palpable optimism. We have assembled a group of committed professionals. We have the potential, particularly with our new Chairperson's leadership, to undertake innovative initiatives that could greatly strengthen automotive technology career pathways for young people in our county.

The meeting Agenda was not strictly adhered to and a few agenda items were omitted from the discussion because no one wanted to interrupt the vigorous discussion, which seemed to have taken on a life of its own. Minor agenda item omissions were more than made up for by the enthusiastic participation of our members.

Note: A number of members were unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts but emailed me in advance that they regretted not being able to participate. Hopefully, we'll see them next time. In particular, these members include George Hritz of California Automotive Teachers, Rosie Cadoux of A & A Automotive, John Savelli of Malugani Tires, Marc Woerlein of College of Marin and Rey Meyoral of San Rafael City Schools.

We intend to meet again in the spring.

Minutes submitted by Dan Silin.