

Luxemburg-Casco: Partners with NWTC, industry to launch Ahnapee Automotive

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LUXEMBURG, Wis. – The Luxemburg-Casco School District has launched a new educational initiative – the Ahnapee Automotive program, located within the high school – during the first semester of the 2020-21 school year. Students are provided with the opportunity to earn college credits while also receiving credit towards high school graduation through this partnership with Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC).

Through successful completion of NWTC's Automotive Maintenance Technician (AMT) curriculum, students attain a one-year technical diploma. Following graduation from high school, they may choose to ladder into an associate degree in Automotive Technology or a two-year technical diploma as an Automotive Technician.

Twenty students are participating in the initial year of the program, which is a consortium of area schools: 17 from Luxemburg-Casco High School, three from Kewaunee High School. Of the 17 L-C students, eight are seniors and nine are in their junior year. Two female students from Luxemburg-Casco are taking part in the AMT program.

“One of the themes that we have heard loudly and clearly from our community, our business leaders in the transportation industry and from NWTC is that there is a huge need to produce highly trained automotive technicians, and that those technicians can earn lucrative salaries in a very broad market,” says Luxemburg-

Casco District Superintendent Glenn Schlender. “Because of that messaging, we have created the Ahnapee Automotive program.

“The district believes in the importance of providing L-C students with a wide range of educational choices. This program is designed for those students with a mechanical aptitude, who enjoy diagnosing and solving automotive challenges.”

To receive the one-year AMT technical diploma, students must complete 26 credits in courses such as Transportation Service Operations, Auto Service Operations, Brake Systems, Steering & Suspension Systems, Intro to Electrical Systems, Engine Repair, Engine Performance, Advanced Chassis Systems and Transportation Welding.

While some time is spent in the classroom, the majority of each course is conducted in the automotive shop.

NWTC Automotive programs are ASE Certified to NATEF (National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation) Standards for Maintenance and Light Repair. The college’s instructional staff are Master, ASE Certified Technicians.

At NWTC, the program is overseen by Gene Francisco, associate dean of construction and transportation. Brent Westlund, formerly a local automotive technician for 20 years, is the college’s on-site instructor. He is assisted by Rod Mleziva, an aide at the high school.

“Ahnapee Automotive is a great example of what partnerships between business, K-12 institutions and higher education can do. This really is a unique opportunity for students,” says Francisco. “NWTC is proud to be part of this partnership. We look forward to the juniors starting in the program this year walk down the stage at our graduation next year.”

The district’s 23-month referendum projects included significant renovations to Luxemburg-Casco High School. Dedicated on Oct. 29, the expanded and upgraded

Automotive Shop on the northeast corner of the high school building has four fully equipped automotive bays with new lifts; a tire machine and balancer; equipment to perform brake maintenance; a set of tools for each station; and a new automotive lab with exhaust system.

The new program is made possible by meaningful partnerships with the local automotive industry. Area companies who are supporting the automotive curriculum through investment and opportunities for hands-on student work are Dorsch Ford, Broadway Automotive, Gandrud Automotive Group, NAPA/Clover Auto Parts, NAPA/Ball Auto and Truck Parts, Phase III Service Center, Pilsen Auto Service, Auto Aces, New Franken Sales and Service, and McClure's Service.

A total of \$100,000 has been donated to the program to help purchase the needed tools and equipment.

"We couldn't have done this without the help of the many great partners who stepped forward," says Mike Snowberry, the district's director of learning services who is spearheading the program. "One of the things that I tell people is, if you invest in us we're going to invest back in you. One of my passions is that I'm going to try to find you the best people I can in our school system that love turning wrenches. What gets me excited every day is helping students to find their purpose."

Ten L-C students already are receiving on-the-job training through employment at area dealerships through the Ahnapee Regional Youth Apprenticeship program: two at Dorsch Ford, three at Broadway Automotive and five at Gandrud Automotive Group.

L-C students who participate in Ahnapee Automotive, one of roughly 20 such programs in the state, have the opportunity to become certified by the ASE Education Foundation (formerly the National Automotive Technician Education Foundation) for Maintenance and Light Repair Program Standards. Holders of the certification can choose to work immediately in the automotive industry, pursue additional education, or do both.

Automotive Maintenance Technicians diagnose vehicle malfunctions, perform basic appropriate repairs, and recommend/conduct regular vehicle maintenance. Other related careers include Automotive Electronics Specialist, Brake Specialist, Engine Repair Specialist, and Steering, Suspension and Alignment Specialist.

There were 756,600 automotive-technician jobs nationwide in 2019, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The website carcareers.org projects that from 2016-26 the industry will require an average of 75,900 new automotive technicians each year to replace those that retire or leave the profession.

Estimates say that the number of technicians entering the workforce is only half of that number. Those who understand and have training in the latest technology used in automobiles – new steering systems, internal GPS and computerized transmission systems – are in high demand.

A one-year diesel program is being considered in the future, according to Schlender. It likely would be located at the district's former middle-school building in Casco.