

There's no shortage of jobs for FTCC's repair and refinishing technology grads

By Steve DeVane Staff writer Jun 28, 2015 (1)



Students in a new program at Fayetteville Technical Community College are getting job offers even though they're only halfway through school.

The collision repair and refinishing technology program is training students for an industry where jobs are expected to be abundant. One company has said they could hire the school's first 20,000 graduates, while another said it would take the first 10,000, said FTCC President Larry Keen, who told county commissioners about the program at a meeting this month.

Students learn how to make cosmetic repairs on plastics, composites, steel and aluminum and receive training on multiple welding techniques, according to the FTCC website. They are taught refinishing procedures and work with aluminum specialists.

Keen said professionalism is a major part of the program. The students use computer tablets with software being used in the industry now, he said.

Program Director Paul Gage wouldn't say which companies made the statements about hiring, but he said the school has enough commitments from companies all over the country to provide jobs for the program's graduates for the next 10 years and beyond.

"Companies have discussed hiring large numbers of graduates even to the point of hiring entire graduating classes as teams," he said.

Some of the jobs will be local, but others will be in other parts of the state and country.

"Some of our graduates will need to be willing to relocate to take advantage of those opportunities, and every opportunity hinges on successful completion of the program," Gage said. "If people are willing to commit to the program in its entirety and work hard, we can place them in great jobs."

Some students already are working at internships and apprenticeships.

Reed-Lallier Chevrolet in Fayetteville has three paid apprentices, said Neil Gallagher, the company's fixed operations director. If the students work out, they'll have a full-time job when they graduate, he said.

"We're training them to work here," he said. "We're offering them an opportunity to begin their career here."

The students work side-by-side with body technicians at Reed-Lallier, Gallagher said. They get practice on working on cars in addition to what they learn in their classes, he said.

"There's a lot of technology built into vehicles today," he said.

Matthias Rappe, 18, of Fayetteville is one of the apprentices.

"The people down here have built on my confidence that I can do good in this industry," he said. Rappe said he enjoys repairing damaged vehicles.

"I've always had a love for working on cars," he said.

Another apprentice, Matthew Conley, 29, was a mechanic in the Army before he started the program. "I was looking for something in the auto industry, but a different field," he said.

Conley, who is from Vermont but lives in Spring Lake, said the apprenticeship is a great opportunity. "I'm actually working at what I'm going to school for," he said.

Austin Beasley, 20, of Gray's Creek, started working in the auto body industry right out of high school.

"There's not really anything that I don't like about it," he said. "I'm glad I am where I am."

Gage said the collision repair industry is projected to have about 180,000 job openings over the next five years.

"All those companies are looking for people who are well trained," he said.

FTCC is trying to meet that need. In addition to an associate degree in applied sciences, graduates from the two-year program will have earned 12 professional certifications and have options for 15 to 20 career paths, Gage said.

The first graduates will finish in May. The program can admit up to 20 students every eight weeks, Gage said.

The students collaborate on projects.

"As they move through the program, they learn to work as their own body shop," Gage said.

"We put them in the exact same situations they're going to go through working at a body shop."

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