



Progress Through Partnership



by **Brian Cruickshank, AAP**

Under the banner of 'Progress Through Partnership,' Alfred State College's Automotive Trades program held an Automotive and Heavy Duty Industry Open House in September at its Wellsville, NY, campus.

But this was more than just a routine Autumn school open house. It tangibly demonstrated what can happen when a concerned distributor sees potential and value in helping a local educational program, bringing with it the power of the industry's often untapped resources.

The event brought together students, instructors and the industry in a unique two-day event designed to showcase Alfred State College's educational programs to the industry and expose its students to manufacturers and suppliers through panel discussions and a small booth show.

Multi-national WD and local store owner Uni-SelectUSA/MAWDI was one of the chief organizers of the event. For Uni-SelectUSA/MAWDI and its local division, Fred Roberts Auto Parts, partnering with educational programs such as Alfred State College pays future dividends for all parties involved.

"Alfred State College is developing the future of the industry," said Fred Roberts Auto Parts Area Manager Al Moshier, who helped spearhead the partnership with Alfred State College, and the subsequent open house event. "Quality education and training equal quality customers and quality employees. The partnership of Alfred State College and Uni-SelectUSA/MAWDI is one of the many keys to our future success."

It's no wonder Uni-SelectUSA/ MAWDI chose to partner with Alfred State. For more than 30 years, Alfred State has provided the kinds of hand-on, technologically sound educational programs the industry needs. Alfred's expanding automotive trades department offers associate degree programs in automotive service, heavy equipment, truck and diesel and auto-body repair. Each of these programs is ASE Master Certified by NATEF. It also offers an associate's degree in motorsports technology at its main campus in Alfred, NY.



Student Mark Knox, left, discusses classes with Alfred State instructor Mike Ronan.

Alfred's graduates, which come from as far away as New England and Michigan, are recruited by automotive businesses from across the country. Indeed, Alfred's success in training its students ultimately becomes the automotive industry's success.

At the event, Uni-SelectUSA/ MAWDI executive vice president Jim Buzzard shared his passion for supporting industry education through partnerships such as this. He said that the many challenges the industry faces can be solved through education.

"This industry offers tremendous opportunities for young people," said Buzzard. "But at the same time, we know we have challenges. Perhaps the greatest single challenge we face is finding the young people, the next leaders of our industry. Where are they going to come from? Where are we going to find the technicians of the future? Beyond that, we need parts people, managers and leaders of the future. We have to be proactive - and this is where it starts."

A PARTNERSHIP STRENGTHENS

The relationship between MAWDI and Alfred State College began first as a business relationship - the automotive program was buying automotive parts and products from the local Fred Roberts Auto Parts Store.

Eventually, the program decided it wanted to have a parts store right on the school's property. That's when Fred Roberts Auto Parts stepped up and installed a working parts store at the school. Ever since then, Uni-SelectUSA/MAWDI has deepened its relationship with the school as it saw the benefits a strong educational foundation can make for the entire industry.

"Our industry is looking for good quality mechanics, parts specialists and employees," said Mosher. "We knew we had to do something. Our own company was spending a lot of money on training. What would be a better way than to partner with a school? The youth of our business is right here and we need to support them."

For Alfred State, its connection to Uni-SelectUSA/MAWDI brings its own brand of benefits.

"They've brought partnerships with industry," said Skip Merrick, chairman of Alfred's Automotive Trades Department. "Manufacturers have stepped forward and provided training aids to my faculty, as well as scholarships to the students."

For manufacturers, there are benefits of strong vo-tech programs such as Alfred State College. That's why so many manufacturers took part in the Open House.

"The students here, as well as at other colleges, are really the future of Tenneco Automotive," said Patricia Feck, area sales manager for Tenneco Automotive. "These students are going to move on to own their own businesses and they're going to be making choices about what parts to install on the vehicles."

PARTNERING ACROSS THE INDUSTRY

Certainly, there are other vo-tech schools in other areas of the country that would love to partner with the industry. However, too many distributors or manufacturers view a potential partnership as an expense. To those companies, Mosher offers some advice: "I think it's going to be a cost savings in the long run. The industry is spending millions of dollars on training and education. This is a golden opportunity for our industry to embrace education, and for education to embrace us. If we work hard and help to develop and grow these programs, we can take the industry to the next level."

Moving forward and with the assistance of Uni-SelectUSA/ MAWDI and its suppliers, Alfred State College is currently developing an auto parts management program, as well as a four-year bachelor's degree program that combines a two-year automotive mechanics or parts curriculum with a two-year business program.



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