

Bob's Auto Café: So Much More than just Auto Repair

BY REID IFORD, TUALATIN LIFE

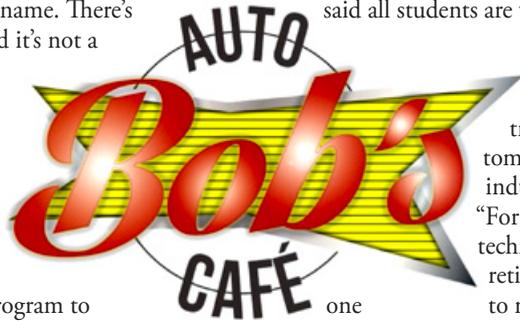
Bob's Auto Café might not be what you would expect from the name. There's no one named Bob, and it's not a café, but it's very much about automobiles. It's a school, but not your typical school. It fills a serious need in the automotive industry for mechanics by offering an intensive training program to people interested in becoming ASE Certified mechanics and entering the field. But there's another unique angle which is rarely found in technical training schools.



Daniel Lacy, Founder and executive director, Bob's Auto Café

We want to train the full employee, not just a partial employee. We want them to respect themselves, their customers, and their employer."

Daniel is a chaplain in professional motorsports, and has drawn heavily upon his industry connections in setting up the school,



which is a public nonprofit, not religious or private. Despite its religious foundation, Daniel said all students are welcome at the school.

"The purpose of our work is to train technicians for tomorrow's automotive industry," Daniel explains. "For every four to seven technicians that die or retire, we only pick up to replace them. We're one looking for someone looking for a career."

Bob's Auto Café just graduated its first coed class of students. Two are already employed in the automotive industry, one is looking for work, and one is hoping to continue with the school, both for additional training and to work with new students.

"In January we are starting paid internships," Daniel says. "We are definitely moving forward. By having the students employed by us while they are trained, we can help sustain them." He explains that people seeking career training often are underemployed or unemployed, so paid internships will make it easier for people who need the training to take advantage of what the school offers.

"We're not a semester-based system like a school district," Daniel explains. "In the four years we spent developing this we discovered we didn't have to be a school, but a shop. The hands-on experience involves working on donated cars, and some service work."

He says getting the school up and running was possible due to significant support from the local automotive industry, and plenty of sweat equity in setting up the shop. They occupy 6,800 square feet in a Tualatin industrial park. This includes an office, two lifts, and ample space to store cars indoors, and of course work on them. They opened with no debt.

They do some maintenance and repair work on cars, but primarily restore donated cars, which they then sell to the public to subsidize overhead. Daniel said donations of good condition use cars are readily accepted.

"We check them mechanically," he explains, "and we check them safety wise. We evaluate if they are worth fixing. Donated cars do three things: they are a tax write-off for the donor, they help us train people, and hopefully they will provide reliable transportation for those who can't afford to pay too much for a car." Besides cars, Daniel said the school readily accepts donations of equipment, tools, and of course money.

One question remains about Bob's Auto Café. Who, exactly, is Bob? Daniel laughs when asked this question.

"Bob is my daughter," he explains. Today she's 21 years old, but she when she was two she called herself 'me... me me me.' So I told her from now on I would call her Bob. She started calling herself Bob, and it stuck."

Those we spoke with in the automotive community familiar with Bob's Auto Café give high praise to Daniel, not only for his innovative concepts, but for the years he dedicated to making the school a reality. But Daniel sees it very differently. He readily acknowledges that only a combined community effort made the school possible.

"People have entrusted me," Daniel says, "and it is humbling. I am a blessed man, not a rich man, and it is all due to Him."

To learn more about Bob's Auto Café, to make donations, or to inquire about educational opportunities, visit their website www.bobsautocafe.com or call 503 885-2233.



The first graduating class of six mechanics from Bob's Auto Café marked the culmination of four years of research, planning and development of the innovative new concept in technical training.



Evan and Bailey working on suspension.



Interns gain hands-on experience restoring donated cars and performing maintenance on customers' vehicles in the large, well-equipped shop.

