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Photographs courtesy Fox Valley Technical Center

Mike Farrell, diesel technology instructor, Fox Valley Technical College guides students from Little Chute School District into the Center's Mobile Transportation Lab.

Heading Your Way

New Mobile Transportation Lab at Fox Valley Tech Is Bringing Awareness About Great Careers to Anywhere There's an Audience

By Christopher Jossart

Grease. Dirt. Dark garages. Lower pay. The concoction of these ingredients has ostensibly created perceptions about transportation careers that have been challenging to overcome. Granted, in years past, working under the hood and driving trucks had their obvious perceptual place in the ranks of not-so-clean jobs.

Not anymore.

Transportation careers are riding a wave of momentum today thanks to a greater emphasis on their relevancy in filling the skills gap, and yes of course, due to changing perceptions — albeit something that won't completely happen overnight. The skills gap is the result of a shortage

of talent mostly in advanced manufacturing; hence, impacting the transportation industry as well.

If manufacturers are hiring more than in recent years because there's evidence of a skills shortage, it's a sign that goods are



A demonstration on diagnostics on a Cummins ISL engine is part of Fox Valley Technical College's mobile exhibit.

heading out the door. If goods are exiting for the market, then the transportation industry is delivering them.

One of the factors driving change in a long history of perceptual nuisances about technicians and drivers is technology. Auto, diesel, and collision technicians now have digital innovations at their fingertips to optimize maintenance and engine configurations, and many truck drivers today are at the wheel with GPS technology to increase delivery efficiency and enhance safety.

Training institutions around the country face this same challenge in changing perception. Magnifying the challenge is the demand for skilled professionals. Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) in Appleton, Wisconsin, has decided to take

its 'show on the road' in an effort to raise awareness about the many rewards that career in transportation can bring.

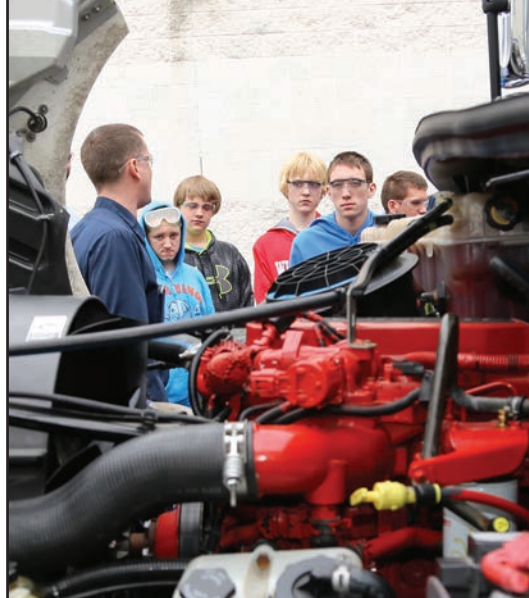
Sell on Wheels

Telling transportation as a viable career option to Millennials and even career-changers at FVTC extends into parking lots and high school tech education department garages. What sounds a bit archaic in terms of a marketing tactic is actually turning some heads. A new Mobile Transportation Lab has set sail on the roads in northeast Wisconsin to deliver hands-on exposure to help related industries in need of skill.

This is no run-of-the-mill lab. The truck is a 2011 Freightliner M2 that was left for dead as scrap. FVTC works closely with many industry partners to ensure its training technology is up-to-date and relevant for students. In fact, those partners served as advocates to help propel the passage of a public referendum in 2012 for FVTC.

A facility development initiative was the backbone of the referendum, and it included expansion of the college's J. J. Keller Transportation Center, the Midwest's largest training facility of its kind. Successfully meeting industry demands by way of public support epitomizes how this college gets things done. No wonder a lab was built on wheels to get people excited about the field of engines and carrying goods.

The converted truck was involved in a rollover accident last year and considered totaled. FVTC's Diesel department purchased parts from the salvaged vehicle and decided to rebuild it. Faculty members and students simply couldn't leave the vehicle as is — they jumped at the chance to unleash a story behind that truck; it was a key piece of equipment with an important message to sell. The damaged truck was donated by Thomas Hribar Truck & Equipment Co., and then a metamorphosis began.



A Truckload of Collaboration

FVTC's Collision Repair students have refurbished many vehicles over the years for families and charities. This project presented a unique challenge: What was it going to be used for? Just as unique as the challenge is as equally an exceptional facility to work on it in. The J. J. Keller Transportation Center houses training for truck drivers, auto and diesel techs, as well as collision repair—all under one roof.

Based on the facility's integrative offerings and shared technologies, the answer to the question of usage was simple. Why not rebuild the truck and turn it into something that could benefit all of these career areas? Hence, the faculty and students from all programs within the Center contributed toward the development a Mobile Transportation Lab.

"From an initial assessment, the truck needed a new cab and frame realignment for sure," noted FVTC Auto Collision Instructor Jerry Goodson. "While our students worked on those tasks and more, other departments were coming up with ways to get involved as well." Goodson said that the Automotive and Diesel departments added some applications and finishing touches.

Since the Lab was completed in February, FVTC Diesel Technology Instructor Mike Farrell regularly takes it to area middle

schools and high schools to display technologies and discuss career pathways with student and teachers. "It's cool to see young learners climb up in the truck with a look of 'what's in there,'" says Farrell. "Once inside, they find hands-on activities that relate to what professionals do all the time in industry."

For nearby students at Little Chute High School, the learning modules inside the Mobile Transportation Lab absorbed their attention quickly.

"What made the learning experience noteworthy is that the students could understand several key concepts essential to these trades in such a simplistic manner," says Jeff Greuel, technical education instructor at the high school. "The modules basically mirror the technology used in the trades; the whole visit by Fox Valley Tech was well worth our time."

In all, 64 students from grades 8-12 participated in the Little Chute School District presentation of the Lab. "One freshman was so into the event that he stayed behind the rest of his class to get more information from the Fox Valley Tech instructor," added Greuel.

Those learning modules, which are interchangeable at any time to include any or all technologies, include:

- A shift simulator — a truck driving tool used to teach students shifting techniques.
- diesel engine — a learning prop that guides students through diesel engine theory and operation. The engine can run to highlight how the components work.
- Truck components—like failed pistons, train engine functionality, gears, brake components, and more — all designed to pique the interest of students about the intricacies of today's trucks.
- Diagnostic tooling displays — such as a laptop that can connect to a vehicle datalink to display engine parameters, ABS troubleshooting, Freightliner multiplexing, and more.

For now, these are the primary features of the FVTC Mobile Transportation Lab in its inaugural year of hitting the road to recruit the next generation of technicians and drivers.

On the Road Again

The FVTC Mobile Transportation Lab's first spring has been a busy one, and its engine won't stay cool too long. Bookings



FVTC Diesel Technology Instructor Lance Larsen shows high school technical education instructors how software is used to perform diagnostics on heavy-duty trucks.

at area schools, community events and at college functions remain in the works through summer for now — all in an effort to get the word out about a fast-changing, in-demand industry.

That's not all with respect to how this unit is hitting the road — the Lab is backed by pertinent data that complements the allure of this new vehicle: success. While young learners are putting their hands and minds to work on the modules, FVTC instructors are touting:

- 100% job placement for FVTC grads of its Diesel Technician programs;
- 100% job placement for FVTC grads of its Vehicle Refinishing & Repair Technology program;
- 92% job placement for FVTC grads of its Automotive Technology programs; and
- 90% job placement for FVTC grads of its Truck Driving program.

(Source: FVTC's annual Graduate Employment Research Report, 2015. Job placement data based on six months after graduation)



A favorite part of touring the Mobile Transportation Lab is taking a turn in the driver's seat. "Once inside, they find hands-on activities that relate to what professionals do all the time in industry," says diesel technology instructor Mike Farrell.

For now, members of FVTC's Transportation department are delighted to be 'heading your way' because they know the more that people see and do, the more quality of life there will be throughout the region and beyond.

"The beauty of this project is that it was a nominal investment due to putting

the talents of our students to work on its creation," concludes Farrell. "Industry partners donated a bunch of resources as well, and in return, we want to give back by providing them with a skilled workforce."

Learn more about Fox Valley Technical Center online at <http://www.fvtc.edu/transportation>.



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