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BMHS STUDENTS GET VALUE HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE WHILE TAKING PART IN STATELINE AREA APPRENTICESHIPS

February 18, 2017 at 10:00 am | By [Hillary Gavan](mailto:hgavan@beloitdailynews.com)



Hillary Gavan/Beloit Daily News Josh Lankford is a express lube technician at Rock County Honda in Janesville. He works at the youth apprenticeship every afternoon and on Saturday.

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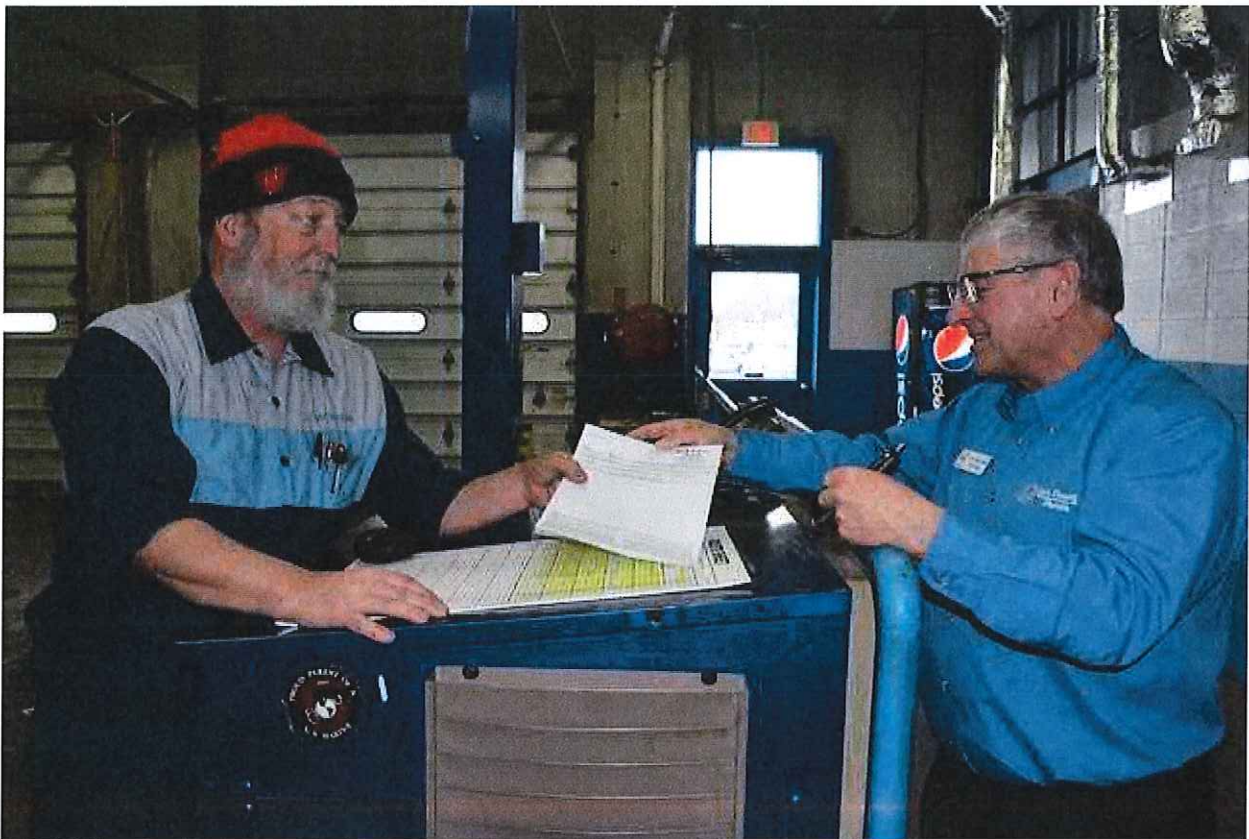


Hillary Gavan/Beloit Daily News Fairbanks Morse Production supervisor Tom Fluehr shows youth apprentice Ben Carlos how to test a crank shaft for operation. Carlos has got exposure to various departments at Fairbanks through his youth apprenticeship.

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Hillary Gavan/Beloit Daily News Rock County Honda Shop Foreman Mark Perkins, Sr., and Service Manager Steve Gonzagowski chat about orders. Those at Rock County Honda are happy to have youth apprentice Josh Lankford.

BELOIT — Beloit Memorial High School Junior Ben Carlos and recent graduate Josh Lankford know what career path they are headed down thanks to youth apprenticeships between area business and the School District of Beloit. After working at Fairbanks Morse Engine, Carlos has decided to become a CNC machinist and Lankford is beginning full-time employment at Rock County Honda in Janesville.

The district's Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming, under the logo of REACH, covers a vast array of career fields such as construction, welding, automotive, computer programming and engineering, hospitality, business, early childhood education and health services. As part of the programming, youth apprenticeships are offered to School District of Beloit students.

Carlos, for example, works mornings at Fairbanks Morse performing light machining and hand operations such as grinding, drilling and lathe work. Lankford, who graduated BMHS on Jan. 20, worked afternoons as an express lube technician and currently has moved to working full-time.

Stephanie Lueder, Fairbanks Morse human resources manager, said having students at youth apprenticeships is not only good for community relations, but can help supply Fairbanks Morse with a pipeline of talented employees as many in the plant are retiring. This year Fairbanks had one student, Carlos, as its first apprentice. In the years to come, those at the company hope to employ at least two youth apprentices a year.

Fairbanks Morse Engine manufactures power systems that are used for power generation, ship propulsion and shipboard power. Because of the sophistication and safety consciousness required of its employees, Fairbanks enlisted the help of an apprentice team to devise a plan on how to train and support apprentices and expose them to all facets of the company. The apprentice team also ensured someone would be paired up with the apprentice at all times, especially in production areas.

Team members consisted of Manufacturing Engineer Mark Neumueller, Union Vice President and Boring Bar Operator Greg Long, Human Resources Generalist Laury Schuler, Union United Steel Workers Local 1533 President and CNC Technician Matt Berg, Large Machinist Gary Breakfield and Nuclear Inspector Bob Parrish.

As part of the Fairbanks apprenticeship, students shadow employees from the start of the process with sales and marketing to the end shipments.

"Ben is going to spend time at every function of the company. Next year, he may come back and will determine what areas he would like to concentrate on," Lueder said.

Production supervisor Tom Fluehr said he's glad Fairbanks started the program.

"We are working with the high school kids at a young age and exposing them to machining, which is an important, highly-skilled trade that needs new recruits from the younger generation," Fluehr said. "We need more programs out there like this. Ben's a good start of how to proceed with it."

Carlos had already made dog tags, metal coasters and components for the Fairbanks retirement clocks at Beloit Memorial High School. During his time at Fairbanks, he went on to learn how to make pistons, camshafts, liners and a range of small engine components.

The Fairbanks team interviewed eight candidates before selecting Carlos. As a youth apprentice, Carlos is considered a part-time employee who is paid and is part of the union. Because safety is one of the company's core values, Lueder said a student with the right attitude is critical.

So far, Fairbanks has found Carlos to be a good match.

"He's flexible. He's very friendly to everyone who has been working with him and he is engaged. He could absolutely get a job here," Lueder said.

Carlos, who coincidentally lives across the street from Fairbanks, said his favorite part of the job is meeting people, learning what they do and how difficult their jobs can be. As he likes to work with his hands and be on the move, it's the perfect apprenticeship for him.

Hoping to become a CNC machinist, Carlos likes operating the machines and knowing parts he worked on are going into ships.

"I like to be up and about and on my feet. I don't like sitting down for long," Carlos said.

Carlos plans to re-apply to Fairbanks next year, and when he graduates he hopes to join the company as an employee.

Lankford was Rock County Honda's first youth apprentice. The high school senior worked as an express lube technician doing oil changes, tire rotations and fluid changes every afternoon. Lankford had taken three automotive classes at BMHS, as well as Honda's 19 online courses.

Rock County Honda Service Manager Steve Gonzagowski said the apprenticeships are a win-win for employers and students. The students get training, job experience and pay while the employer can mold students into the company culture and determine if they would be a good fit for full-time work after graduation. Lankford was planning on working full-time at the dealership until he joins the Marines this spring.

Gonzagowski said he was involved in a similar program at another Honda dealership so he jumped on the chance to get involved with the BMHS program.

"In my position as manager I have to hire people and I have to find good people. This allows us to do training while they are still in high school. It's a win-win. He gets training and job experience and gets paid. We get to take a look at this young man and mold him into our culture," Gonzagowski said.

Having worked in six dealerships, Gonzagowski said it's a common struggle to find good employees. In the old days, employees would compete to obtain them from other dealerships. Over time, however, all dealerships began to struggle with finding workers.

Gonzagowski's goal is to get one youth apprenticeship each year to keep up with the dealership's employment needs.

The experience with Lankford has been a good one.

"He's very punctual, learns fast and is very methodical. He does everything the same every time. He gets along very well with fellow employees. He's just a great guy," Gonzagowski said.

Lankford said it's easy to get along with his co-workers at the dealership.

"I've learned the correct way of doing oil change, tire rotations and checking tires and how to check a car over," he said.