

WANADA APPRENTICE TRAINING UPDATE

WANADA Tech Training Program Kicks Off 5th Year
Mature, Flexible & Highly Successful Program to All Dealerships



WANADA Chairman Dennis Rippeon addresses dealers at the 5th year kickoff meeting of the WANADA Apprentice Training program.

“I want to make sure everybody understands just how important this program is to dealers, and how it will allow us to fill the critical needs we have,” WANADA Chairman Dennis Rippeon told dealers and service managers who attended the 5th annual kickoff meeting of the WANADA Apprentice Training Program at Kenwood Country Club last week.

Rippeon, of Ourisman Automotive, spelled it out in terms every dealer could understand: “The biggest problem we have today is stealing skilled technicians from each other,” he said. “Who’s going to pay the guy the highest dollar amount to do the work that needs to be done *today*. We all go through this. You lose a \$26 an hour tech to someone who pays \$28.50, and then you have to pay a guy \$29 to replace the \$26 tech that somebody just stole from you.

“The point is there is a need in our community for mechanical technicians, and we’re not going to draw them from other places in the country like we used to,” he added. Growth in the auto industry nationally and more sophisticated repairs that require more skilled

technicians, mean that Washington area dealers can no longer recruit technicians from Pennsylvania or other states, “Because Pennsylvania has the same needs as we have now, and they are paying their technicians more to keep them in their home state,” said Rippeon. “So we have to train and grow our own line technicians, and that’s what this program allows us to do.”

Open to All Dealerships

Previously available only to Ford products dealerships, the WANADA Apprentice Training Program was opened last year to dealerships of all brands seeking skilled auto technician trainees. Under the sponsorship of Ford Motor Company, the program has been operating at two area schools, Montgomery College in Rockville and Marshall Academy in Falls Church, and a third facility in Northern Virginia is under consideration.

“Ford has been real supportive of our program,” said Dick Snyder of Jerry’s Lincoln-Mercury/Jeep, who spearheaded the effort to establish an apprenticeship program several years ago and was instrumental in gaining Ford’s sponsorship. He pointed out that the WANADA program is one of only three remaining outside auto tech training programs sponsored by Ford, which once had a dozen such programs. “And this is the only one run by a dealer association,” he added. Ford is coming to Marshall Academy in June to film a video that will be used in a national promotion of technician training.

Snyder noted, too, that nearly 100 students have completed or are currently in the program and are working as line technicians in dealerships throughout the area. Based on this success, Ford gave its blessing to opening up the program to offer a “generic” version of this apprentice training to dealerships of all brands.

Nuts & Bolts

Bill Belew, who together with Archie Avedisian, and Wil Desjardins, make up WANADA’s “auto tech”
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team,” explained that, “In the first year we essentially teach a generic program that includes brakes, steering and suspension, heating and air conditioning and some electronics. During that time, the students are also encouraged to take the ASE tests, so that apprentices completing their apprenticeship training will be certified in some or all of the eight ASE areas.”

Belew emphasized, however, that non-Ford dealers can enroll students and be benefited by the generic program and, in many instances, their franchisor’s training. “We have extensive computer labs at both locations and students will be given time to work on the specific brands tests that they are taking,” he said. “All major manufacturers now have Web-based training, and we have taken that concept and carried it forward so we can train or help train your tech wherever he is.”

John Lawrence, an instructor at Marshall Academy, added that, “We are very flexible in our training for all brands. “We will get your techs trained in your areas.”

The goal of the program is to offer MLR (maintenance and light repair) training as well as ASE Technician Certification training so that, at the end of the first two semesters, “students can do warranty work and earn money for the dealership,” said Belew.

“Although it may take a couple of years to get an ASE certified tech, or even one trained in your own factory discipline, our apprentices can become productive almost from the first day on the job with a good mentor,” Belew pointed out. “We find that a student that is put with a master tech who will really teach him is going to be a lot better than a technician who simply uses the student to run parts or whatever.” And it’s not time wasted for the mentor technician, “because a tech who uses an apprentice wisely is going to be a lot more productive than he would be working by himself,” Belew added.

Good Cop, Bad Cop

Regardless of what brand they represent, all apprentice trainees receive the same careful recruitment, screening and follow-up by WANADA’s tech team. Belew calls it a “good cop, bad cop approach... I am obviously the good cop,” he added with a chuckle.

With extensive experience working in fixed operations at area dealerships, Belew is the shop expert. The plain-talking Archie Avedisian, who headed up Boys and Girls Clubs programs around the country for many years, is WANADA’s specialist in recruiting, screening and keeping the kids on the straight and narrow. And then there is the real cop, Wil Desjardins, a former Montgomery County police officer, who does fol-



WANADA tech team and educators are, from left: Tom Mann of WANADA, Steve Boden of Montgomery County Schools, John Lawrence of Marshall Academy, Bill Belew, Wil Desjardins, and Archie Avedisian.

low-up visits with every student to discuss their productivity and how they are doing in class.

“The reason we have been successful is we have done a good job of screening,” said Avedisian, who noted that the program has a retention rate of approximately 75% – very high for programs of this type. “I have a large file of deadbeats we have not put into the program,” he added.

“What I look for when I interview somebody is whether they are interested in going to work and showing up on time,” said Avedisian. “I look at their personality and how they will get along with the people they work with and customers – somebody who will be productive in your organization.”

“These qualities are as or more important than technical knowledge,” Avedisian continued. “We have had some students who were crack techs in school, but when we put them to work they flunked out because they don’t have the right attitude or don’t go to work on time.

After the interview process, WANADA checks the applicant’s driving record, which, unfortunately, has doomed several otherwise qualified applicants with bad driving records. Only then is the applicant sent to the dealership for an interview with the service manager, who makes the final decision on whether or not to accept the individual.

Once hired, the WANADA team closely monitors the progress of the training and is available at any point to take care of any problems that may arise. “We don’t tolerate deadbeats,” said Avedisian, who is known for calling students at home and talking to their parents. “We stay on top of problems, and sit down every six months with the service director and trainee to go over pluses and minuses and issue a report card on the student.”

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WANADA also receives school attendance records and, as Avedisian points out, "If they don't go to school they don't get paid and they risk getting booted from the program."

Long-Standing Tech Training Partnerships

Apprenticeship applicants are primarily recruited from the pre-apprenticeship high school programs that WANADA has supported around the Beltway since the 1970s, many of which are now certified by NATEF and AYES. Through long-standing partnerships with programs like Automotive Career Technologies (ACT) Foundation in Montgomery County and the Foundation for Applied Technical Education (FATE) in Fairfax, WANADA is able to find top students with the right attitude and aptitude.

And it works both ways. ACT Director Steve Boden told dealers that, "It really helps having the business community at your side when it comes to school districts looking at the importance of career education programs, and it adds a lot of credibility for us when there is a transition for our students to move on to post-secondary opportunities."

Montgomery County now operates auto technician programs in four high schools, and has seen enrollment surge from about 100 students five years ago to more than 500 currently, according to Boden. Both ACT and FATE also operate licensed used car operations that teach students additional skills that can be applied in dealerships.

In addition to students recruited through WANADA's public school partnerships, about 20 percent of WANADA's apprentice trainees were already employed at dealerships and referred to the program by dealers. "In fact, we strongly encourage dealers to sign up employees that are good workers and have the potential to become technicians," said Avedisian.

Reaching Out

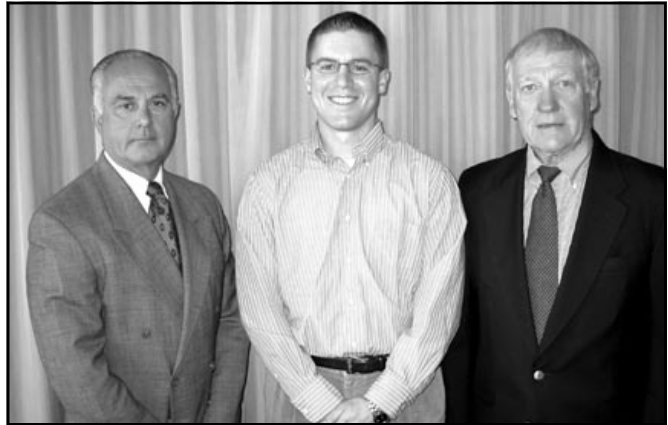
Another important source of new trainees are armed forces veterans. As we recently reported, the Veterans Administration has endorsed the WANADA Technician Training Program as an approved training site under the Department of Veterans Affairs "On-The-Job Training and Apprenticeship Training" program.

WANADA already has veteran apprentices (See "A Soldier's Story," this page) and is seeking more because, as Avedisian explains, "These individuals have the qualities that I was talking about – training, discipline, motivation and the right attitude."

Avedisian also announced that the Rotary

Club District 7620, which includes all clubs in Metropolitan Washington and in Maryland up to Baltimore and Baltimore County, has endorsed the WANADA Apprentice Training Program as a major project this coming year. Avedisian, a Rotarian himself, will be the district chairman for the project and will soon be announcing which Rotary clubs will be supporting the project.

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From left, WANADA Chairman Dennis Rippeon, apprentice Shawn Stanley, and Dick Snyder of Jerry's Lincoln-Mercury-Jeep

A Soldier's Story

As we reported in the April 5, 2005 WANADA Bulletin, the WANADA Apprentice Training Program has recruited its first two Armed Forces veterans. Shawn Stanley, a former Marine who served in Kuwait and who is now an apprentice at Ourisman's Rockmont Chevrolet, was an impressive speaker at the kickoff meeting.

A trumpet player in the Marine Bugle Corps, Stanley said he realized that a music career wasn't realistic. "It's an inverse situation to auto technicians – a big supply and little demand for musicians," he said. He looked into technical schools, but being recently married with "adult responsibilities," he didn't feel he could afford the difference between what the VA would cover and what he would have to pay. Then he heard about WANADA's apprenticeship program.

"It sounded great," said Stanley. "I would get to go to school and not pay tuition, and I would still be able to work and cover my adult responsibilities. So here I am. It has worked out really well. I've learned a lot and already knocked out one ASE test. And I am blessed to be with a great mentor who has really taught me a lot. I'm going to take advantage of that and try to learn everything I can."

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WANADA has also prepared ads for area employment guides in an effort to find more qualified individuals in the community, particularly unemployed people and immigrants with experience or an interest in becoming auto technicians.



WANADA's Guarantee

WANADA is urging dealers to sign up now for students who will be placed in their dealerships in June "so they can get two or three months experience before school starts in the fall, which also gives dealerships the chance to get a handle on them and see if they are keepers," said Belew.

Belew also stressed that sponsoring an apprentice is a "failsafe guarantee." "If a student doesn't work out, you get another free. That's WANADA's pledge."

Ourisman Automotive was among the first dealer organizations to sponsor WANADA apprentices, and currently employs several. Speaking from experience, Rippeon stressed that, "The benefit that dealers can receive from this program is not only financial, but it allows us a lot less aggravation in life."

Rippeon said it could help solve the problem of "having cars backed out of your service entrance and having customers scream at 5 o'clock that they couldn't get their cars fixed because we don't have enough techs to do the repairs on them. This program is going to help us move down that road to get the trained personnel we need and help staff our dealerships at levels that are going to be beneficial to all of us." For more information on the WANADA Technician Training Program, or to sign up to sponsor a student, contact Archie Avedisian or Bill Belew at WANADA, (202) 237-7200.

LAST CHANCE TO SIGN UP!

2005 WANADA Open, Monday, May 9
Sportscaster Tim Brant to Emcee Banquet

It's true, we're going to have a big crowd for this year's WANADA Open, Monday, May 9, at the spectacular Lansdowne Resort. All the more reason not to miss:

- ABC sportscaster Tim Brant who will emcee the banquet.
- Popular comic hypnotist Flip Orley who will provide dinner entertainment.
- A golf tournament on championship courses.
- A fun evening of fabulous prizes and giveaways!

So don't let it slide another minute. Sign up today for this great opportunity to get some fresh air, socialize with friends and colleagues, and just have a flat out good time!

A WANADA Open information and registration form is enclosed with this WANADA Bulletin. For more information, call Barbara Martin at (202) 237-7200.



Tim Brant

Staying Ahead...

If two men agree on everything, you may be sure that one of them is doing the thinking.

—Lyndon B. Johnson

Enclosure

WANADA Open information sheet & registration form