

Auto tech students speed through competition

By JAMES BOYLE
STAFF WRITER

Best friends since the third grade, Joseph Bruce and Devon Mammone grew up sharing a fascination with cars that has evolved from a hobby into a solid career path as they both finish up their senior years at Bucks County Technical High School.

"We've always been motorheads," said Bruce, 18. "We love tinkering, taking things apart and putting them back together."

Their years of knowledge and well-oiled teamwork helped the pair score the fastest time in the Pit Stop Challenge at the 28th annual Automotive Dealers Association of Greater Philadelphia Automotive Technology Competition, held Friday at Automotive Training Center in Warminster.

Bruce and Mammone clocked 27 seconds to change the tires of a NASCAR racing car, marking the second year in a row a team from the technical school in Bristol Township won the challenge.

"This one was more about speed and precision than the other stations," said Mammone. "We've known each other for a long time and know how to work together."

The Pit Stop Challenge was a bonus exercise in addition to the 10 challenges presented to the dozen two-person teams from tech schools throughout the greater Philadelphia region. Each team had 20 minutes per challenge to work through a problem, diagnose it and present a solution to the judges.

"A good bit of it is done using computer diagnostics," said Mammone, "but we also see the problems that the computer can't pick up, assess the issue and follow what we've been taught."

A tough written test taken in November pared more than 100 students down to the 24 that competed Friday. Middle Bucks Institute of Technology's Dan Garton recorded the highest grade, 79, on an exam where scores averaged 51.

Organized by the Automotive CARing for Kids Foundation, the physical portion of the competition rolled out challenges on every aspect of automobile technical service, from alignments, tire rotations to electrical tests and full body inspections. Mock job interviews tested their communication skills, which is an



PHOTOS BY ART GENTILE / PHOTOJOURNALIST
Bucks County Technical High School student Joseph Bruce performs a wheel alignment during the annual 2016 Greater Philadelphia Automotive Technology Competition in Warminster on Friday.

important part of working in the industry.

"It's said that the salespeople sell the customer's first car in a dealership, and the service department sells the second and third cars by building good relationships," said Steve Kelly of Kelly Chevrolet in

Phoenixville, chairman of the technology competition committee.

Kelly said the annual skills contest gives students

an important look at the automobile service industry in the real world, and the handful of participants that made it this far in the

competition have shown what it takes to succeed in a solid job market.

"More than 17 million new cars were sold in the United States last year," said Kelly. "They are all expertly made, but we are going to need people to fix them. Filling those positions with the right kind of people is not easy."

More than \$900,000 in scholarships and prizes were handed out at the closing awards ceremony. Sean Hagerty and Michael Steinmetz from Eastern Center for Arts and Technology in Upper Moreland claimed the first-place prizes.

Hagerty is a senior at Upper Dublin High School and Steinmetz is a senior at Hatboro-Horsham High School.

Each received full scholarships to the Automotive Training Center, Lincoln Technical Institute and Universal Technical Institute, as well as a package of goodies provided by the day's sponsors. Hagerty and Steinmetz also move on to compete in the National Automotive Technology Competition in New York in March.



Middle Bucks Institute of Technology students Thomas Sterling and Dan Garton repair an engine during the competition at the Automotive Training Center.



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