



Auto students at NNCC (in blue) with (from top left to bottom right): Alex Street, WNC Auto Program Lead, Jeff Hawkins, Campagni Auto Group Service Manager, Cliff Sorensen, Campagni Auto Group Director, William Quenga, NDOC Deputy Director of Silver State Industries, Nethanjah Breitenbach, NNCC Warden, Dana Whaley, Campagni Auto Group former General Manager, Harold Wickham, NDOC Deputy Director of Programs, and WNC President Dr. Kyle Dalpe.

WNC PARTNERSHIP LEADS TO NEW AUTO PROGRAM FOR INCARCERATED STUDENTS

On Monday, Aug. 28, 2023, the first group of students incarcerated at Northern Nevada Correctional Center (NNCC) stepped into the NNCC auto bay for their first day of Auto 101, Introduction to General Mechanics offered by Western Nevada College (WNC). It has taken four years and the sustained effort and partnership of Campagni Auto Group, Nevada Department of Corrections (NDOC), and WNC to reach this point.

Campagni Auto Group approached NDOC in 2019 to express its interest in creating opportunities for formerly incarcerated people with Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certifications to apply for positions with the dealership. As with many industries across the region and the country, retiring staff and staffing shortages, in general, have presented challenges for the automotive industry.

Dana Whaley, Carson City Toyota's former general manager, and others at the Campagni Auto Group in Carson City, recognized that there is a pool of talent that, if trained while incarcerated, could return to the community ready to help to rebuild the workforce at their dealership and others around the state.

"Western Nevada College is honored to collaborate with forward-thinking partners like Campagni Auto Group to develop innovative solutions that bridge the employment gap," said WNC President, Dr. Kyle Dalpe, "Our joint efforts are not just about education; they're about transformation and opportunity, giving incarcerated students the skills they need to succeed and contribute to our community."

WNC joined the endeavor to provide the educational pathway. Meanwhile, NDOC secured a grant for \$85,000 and purchased up-to-date equipment for the auto bay. Then, in mid-March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought everything to a standstill. A little over two years later, in April 2022, after NNCC was able to return to somewhat normal operations, the equipment was installed and planning was rebooted.

"We are anxiously awaiting the chance to interview the first set of graduates who will have earned multiple Automotive Service Excellence certifications and a Certificate of Achievement from WNC before they walk out the door," Whaley said. "We're proud to have been at the forefront of this endeavor."

Alex Street, WNC's Auto Mechanics program lead and instructor for the Auto 101 course at NNCC, enjoys working with these students.

"They are hard-working and job-focused," Street said. "They are ready and willing to fill a workforce need."

The students are already working on meeting their general education requirements for the Certificate of Achievement by taking the "Strategies for Academic Success" course this semester. They will also complete six credits in English/Communications and three credits of Mathematics. By the end of summer 2024, the first cohort of students should have completed the courses that will prepare them for ASEs in Steering and Suspension, Brakes and Engine Performance.

"Providing those who are incarcerated with access to education and training is incredibly important to the students on so many levels," said Deb Conrad, program director for WNC's Higher Education in Prison Program. "All who have participated in bringing this to fruition understand not only the benefit to the students, but to our communities and the state as well."

To learn more about the program, contact Deb Conrad at 775-445-3302 or email deb.conrad@wnc.edu.