

AUTOMOTIVE EXPANSION COMPLETED

by **Ericka Wellner**

New state-of-the-art facility addresses area job shortages

What began over a year ago as an empty lot bordering the C-Building on the Main Campus has transformed into a stunning 17,000 square-foot expansion complete with a commercial automotive shop.

The \$5 million Automotive Technology expansion, which was completed in July, took two years of vigorous research and planning says Jim Coleman automotive professor at JJC.

“We traveled to dealerships and schools as far away as Wisconsin and took the best ideas from all of these facilities and incorporated them into our design,” says Coleman. “We wanted the shop to have the look and feel of a dealership while maintaining the functionality of a training facility.”

And with the addition of 16 service bays, a large customer service area including a parts department and utility and storage space, the new shop is everything Coleman had envisioned.

But more importantly, for students like Dan Caputo, the expansion grants the opportunity to work with the most up-to-date technology in an environment comparable to the automotive field.

“I can’t wait to work with the new equipment. We’ll be using the same tools as in the field,” says the 19-year-old. “Working with this equipment will make the transition into the auto industry less intimidating. It will feel natural—like the next step.”

New lifts have been installed and alignment equipment updated to meet current industry standards, which is pivotal in an industry evolving from mechanical parts to electronics and computers, says Scott Walsh, owner of Rockdale Automotive.

“The new shop is outfitted with cutting edge tools and equipment,” says Walsh, who is also an Automotive Advisory Board member at JJC. “It is a state-of-the-art facility and is comparable to not just general dealerships, but brand new dealerships.”

Accompanying each service bay is a tool stall complete with toolkit, locker and computer. Having a computer at every service bay allows students instant access to repair and service information and technical support. The computers will also allow the ability to reprogram the vehicle computer.

In the past, students had to leave their workstation and print the necessary information from a localized computer. Sometimes this meant printing up to 20 pages—a laborious task Caputo says he will not miss.

“If we need to look something up, like torque specifications or disassemble procedures, we would have to walk to the only computer and print it out,” Caputo recalls. “But now we will have a computer within arms’ reach.”

The expansion is not only furnished with the most up-to-date equipment and technology, it is double the



size of the original area, allowing students the ability to service approximately 30 cars a day. And unlike the former shop, the new space gives students enough room to see a project from start to finish.

Prior to the addition, students had to share larger projects. For example, one student might start an engine or transmission job, but another would finish it.

“It’ll be nice to have all the new space and the freedom to work without having to maneuver around each other,” Caputo says. “There is a sense of accomplishment when you’ve completed a job from start to finish.”

Having the new space also means that the college will be able to train more technicians to fill critical job shortages within the industry. According to a recent publication of the Federal Occupational Outlook Handbook, 126,000 new automotive technicians will be needed across the country. This represents the biggest

actual increase of all the technical careers listed and does not even include the jobs that will become available because of retirements and promotions. Earnings locally range from \$20,000 to \$85,000 annually.

As the finishing touches were added to the expansion, an 18-by-12-foot American flag was hung in the new automotive shop to symbolize the culmination of hard work and good fortune to years that come, says Coleman.

“We have done something very special that will change the lives of many people for years to come,” he added. “I always tell students there is one simple rule in life and that is to always leave things better than you found them. In this case we certainly have.”

