

98.7% of our students earn a career. On this episode, we'll explore Chattahoochee Tech's automotive program and talk with former students and some of the current instructors. So put on your seatbelts and let's ride.

Well, my name's Brian Prettyman. I'm a new automotive instructor here at Chattahoochee Tech in Marietta. Been in the business of automotive mechanics for about 20 years now. I've worked at some of the biggest fleets in the country, keeping those vehicles rolling and picked up a lot of gasoline, experienced diesel experience, a hybrid experience as well. So looking forward to passing on my knowledge, to our students here.

So Brian, what will the students be learning from this program?

I want people to know that they don't have to have any automotive experience at all to come here. We totally realize that a lot of people don't have a parent or an uncle or grandfather, a grandmother showing them how to change oil anymore. So we start totally from scratch. We have a very patient attitude and we are building a program here. We have a new program coming for electric vehicles. That's going to be very exciting for us. And we start from scratch and I work very slowly and we take our sweet time in the labs. So the number one mistake I see with people is working way too fast. So this is a great environment to learn in because you're not under pressure from the clock and you don't have a customer with a broken down vehicle waiting on their vehicle to be fixed so we can relax, go at our own pace. We have plenty of time to ask questions and really dive into automotive mechanics here.

My name is Sean Davis and I work for Weaver break and. I graduated the automotive program and Chattahoochee Tech in 2016.

My name is Ty Long, so I'm a master technician. You are at the moment. I started off fixing cars back in 2015 at my Uncle Independent shop and I decided to go to school at Yahoo Tech. Went there for two years. Graduated in 2017. After I graduated, I wanted a schedule and have my weekends off. So I decided to go to fleet maintenance and say, I'm going to do a show so we might meet you all. So that's where I work at the moment, Guy. You all got my message, and I've been here since 2017, so about five, six years now. And due that time, I've learned a lot with this. Do a lot do I need to work? But school actually helped me prepare a little better, so without it, I probably a lot worse off at the moment.

Sean, what drove you to go to Chat Tech?

Well, I was currently residing in Kennesaw during the time of my enrollment, and I was looking for a good local automotive program that can really walk me through the steps. I've been working on cars for years and even have a family background and drag racing, but I never really took the step forward to actually go to class and go to school for it. And so I was just talking to people in the area and they mentioned Chattahoochee Tech and its amazing automotive program and just happens to be local. And so I went over there and really, really liked what I saw.

What kind of things did you see that made you say, This is the place for me?

Immediately when I walked to the door, I was greeted by, you know, numerous instructors. And this guy who was actually my teacher at the time, but before she was the dean of the program, she really just sat me down and, you know, asked me what my expectations were and really just gave me the feeling of confidence in the program to where I know that I'm going to learn something here. And it's not just going to

to be another piece of paper that you can hang on the wall. It's going to be skills that you can use in the workplace.

My name is Larry Cordell. I work Chattahoochee Tech as a automotive instructor. I've been there for eight years and I go. I started out as an automotive technician back in 1986. I went to Technical College under GM's Step program, which was a co-op, and I worked in the industry until I started teaching.

Can you tell us your background.

Became an AC master technician? By the time I graduated college, became a Cadillac master technician for three years before moving on to different manufacturers. I'm also a Chrysler master technician. A GM master technician, done everything on the shop floor, sweep floors to make extra money so I could pay bills when I was in college to manage a service department that had over \$2 million budget. If you like puzzles, if you like working with your hands, if you like not being unemployed, anybody who wants mechanical knowledge and it transfers to it's a funny thing about knowing how things work. It's not just cars, machines, other kinds of things you'll pick up the knowledge of as you go through. But to me, it's people like solving problems. I love puzzles. I love doing things that engage my mind. Logical thinking, critical thinking are huge aspects of it because you basically are given a vehicle that a customer is complaining about and you have to take all the information that the customer is giving you and all the information that the vehicle gives you, then come to a conclusion as to what it's going to take to repair the vehicle and bring it back to the condition that it was in when the customer purchased it.

Can you tell us about the set up there at Shattuck?

Well, that's one of the first things that I noticed is that when I walked in the door, there was, I think, seven or ten days onto the left, along with a back room in the back, with a complete with a dino and two alignment racks. And I do believe we had just got on board with the snap on tool program. So they had several roll carts, completely chock full of tools. Basically every tool that you needed to do any job, automotive was there at your fingertips and if you needed a tool, they would get it for you. All you had to do was ask for it.

Tell us why you decided to go to school.

So initially, if you want an associate degree, I guess I just wanted something more than a high school diploma. But I'm not too big going to school and going for my whole bachelor or a degree that I wasn't planning on using. So I was like, Why am I doing this? Might want to get an associate degree in automotive while I'm at it. So that was my big reason. I didn't want a high school diploma as well as some former high schooler, but I didn't want a bachelor in degree and something I would never use. My name is Matthew Frank. I teach automotive technology, Chattahoochee Technical College. I started teaching there in 2015, so it's been about seven years. And before that I worked in the automotive industry since about since around 2008, I've been in the industry. So automotive is a passion of mine. I've always liked cars and that's what I jumped into as a career. So that's kind of how I got involved in the first place. Are programs designed to take any student? It doesn't matter if you've never touched a wrench before, or maybe you do have some experience with cars. We start people from the ground up, so the introductory classes teach. This is what a tool is. This is what this tool does. This is how to use the equipment. And then we take the students through each section of the car. So there's classes and breaks, steering, suspension and performance down the whole list. And by the end of it, you are equipped to pretty much be an entry level technician at

a dealership or independent shop wherever, you know, wherever the student chooses. But that's the goal, is to pass your AC test when you complete our program and start an entry level position.

What makes this program unique?

So I feel like the learning environments unique because we have a whole auto shop at our hands. We've got lifts, we've got cars, we've got tools, we've got equipment. So when you think of like classroom, what cooler of a classroom than being an auto shop.

In this program? How much is lecture and how much is hands on?

That will vary a little bit depending on the particular class. I'm the teacher. All of our classes are considered hybrid classes, which means the homework and all that stuff is done online at home. And then you come in to the school for the lab work. So I always look at it as kind of half and half. If you're on campus at school, we're most likely going to be in the lab, but there is still stuff to do at home to study in one session.

Why did you feel like you needed a formal education?

Well, because you can tell everybody you work on cars and you can walk down the street and talk to the guy, your lap and the guy to your right. And then they're basically going to say the same thing, you know, oh, yeah, I work on cars or Oh, I can change my oil or whatnot. But you know, when you're getting into a professional business environment, you need to have some accreditation. You know, you can't just walk into a shop and start turning wrenches and doing brakes because there's a lot of liability that's involved. And if you don't at least have some sort of accreditation, then they may be hesitant to even hire you, talk to you, or even put a, you know, brakes in your hand because, you know, working on these vehicles is very important. You know, if you decide to overlook one thing or another, either by lack of knowledge, laziness, or because you just don't know how to do something, then it can be catastrophic. And so these shops, they put a lot of, you know, faith in these technicians when they apply and begin to work on people's vehicles.

How much did you know before you went to school?

So before I went to school, I knew I wanted material fundamentals now, but I could do like what most people would consider the so like your basic brakes, alternator, your oil changes and all of the minor stuff jobs that usually take about 2 hours less to complete. I could do all of that once I got to school. That's when I started learning more detail and dairy. And that doesn't sound too fond to all the students that they want to do, too. And so but the dairy stuff that actually save you so much more time in the future because, you know, I'll be guessing you got this fundamental that you can use to apply to diagnostics that will actually help you save a ton of time.

My name is Taylor Smith. I work at Chattahoochee Tech Automotive Department. I've been here for eight years this year. I teach a wide variety of topics breaks electrical introduction to automotive, climate control engine performance. Basically almost anything that the college offers automotive related. I'm involved in one way or the other.

What makes this program unique?

Well, I love the program because we teach all AC areas. AC is automotive service excellence, and that's a test that students or professionals within the industry can take to get certified in different areas. So we have an engine repair class, so our student comes in text engine repair class. The goal is hopefully they'll be prepared, have a good knowledge foundation to be able to take that test and get that certification. It is a third party certification. So it's not something medical school issues specifically, but we teach them to prepare them to take those certification tests and then, like I said, hopefully land a position and be able to excel. The other reason I love this program is because it is geared towards automotive technicians. But one of the things that I love about it is and I tell students they can come in. Yeah, they could go through the program and get a job and turn around for a handful of years, but maybe that's not their thing. Maybe they really like customers, right? Well, if they have a good foundation here, they can transfer what they know as to working with customers that can be a service advisor. Or maybe one day they want to be the shop manager, I think could be a service manager or they could be a shop foreman, which would help other technicians within the shop. Or they could go off and work for Ford Motor Company or Chevrolet Road, GMC as a field service technician. Or it could get into parts, right? So there's a lot of avenues that that students can taper off from the automotive sector. And so that's why I really like this program, is I just tell them, you don't have to be stuck in a box. You sure you can turn a wrench for 50 years if you want to? Right. But if you want to branch off and do other things, just know on how the industry works and having a good foundation of how the car works. You can take that and apply it to different areas and maybe go to a different position later on down the road. So that's why I love out here. We got fantastic instructors. All the instructors are are willing to help and train the students. And another cool thing about this school is we have an auto club and the auto club is set up for anybody. That's Chattahoochee Tech. It does have to be an automotive student or say by anybody within a college that's a student here and join Auto Club. So they work on little projects. We have exos, we have an older Camaro. We have a prelude that they work on. And basically they're fixing up the cars, how they want them to be as a student led art organization. And we as instructors can assist them with the vehicles, but they get to come in and work on a project. So that's pretty cool.

Taylor What exactly is the AC test and why is it so important?

AC certifications are important because it is an industry recognized certification and it is a third party test. AC They write the tests, they put them together, they offer on to automotive professionals to be able to go in and show that they have knowledge, they have a good knowledge foundation right in their first test and guess their aces, then they can take those and when they apply to various dealerships or fleets or wherever they're applying to, that just shows that dealership or that fleet that they've taken that extra time to go and pass these tests. So it is an industry recognized certification and I encourage my stated so you know, it's not mandatory for them to take it here at the school, but I do encourage them, hey, you know, you finish this class, go check out that test, right, and see if you can pass if you need any help, by all means, come ask. I've taken thousands of tests through AC over the years because they do eventually expire. So you need to go back and and recertify from time to time. So but having that and going into the industry, it's just another tool. And you're told, all right. The more you can get, in my opinion, the better rounded you are, the better chance that you'll have them in that position. When I started at Chattahoochee Tech, I was working construction. At the time, I did not have a job in the automotive industry. I just continued on an automotive program and eventually one of the teachers and Georgette taught me everything I know about electrical, asked me if I wanted a job. And so I was basically in. Wow. Starting my automotive career and every single day when I went to automotive class, I would learn something that I wo

uld apply the next day at the shop on the shop floor. Every day was a new experience. And you know where that comes to, you know, tire suspension or even pulling for engines or alignments every single day was something that I learned and something that I can apply right then and there.

What the program teaches you is, like I was saying before, it varies. So like how you invest in tools when you toolbox, you can invest in knowledge and use knowledge as a tool to better perform at your job. And having that knowledge, diagnose something on fixed right the first time is more valuable than knowing how to just take the part off of a proton. So anyone that wants to learn, like the theories and how things work.

Okay, now the important question, how much money can you make after the automotive program?

Yeah, I'd say the sky's the limit depending on what your goals are. If you would like to own your own shop. Income potential is very good, but with that comes a lot of business training that you need and a lot of stress from the customers. But I would say starting out in this market today, you know, I would say possibly starting at around \$15, that's just my guess. But I stress in my classes, how do you negotiate for more money? How do you interview properly? How do you customize your resume so you get more callbacks? I want my students to have their choice of good jobs when they get out of here. I don't want them to feel like they have to take a job because that's the only one they could get. So I would say probably starting in the in the mid-teens and goes way up there, possibly fast in the high thirties or more depending on where you work.

For more information about the automotive program at Chattahoochee Tech, visit Chattahoochee Tech dot edu. Thanks for listening to 98 seven Chat Tech. We're 98.7% of our students earn a career.