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Prime Motor Group and BFIT create a solution to a growing employment shortage

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Fewer young people want to be automotive technicians and as existing workers retire and leave the field, a shortage is developing. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates 46,000 new automotive technicians will be needed nationwide each year within six years.

Prime Motor Group, the second-largest automobile dealership in New England, has joined with Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology (BFIT) on a program to help the company fill its demand for trained and motivated technicians. Prime sells 22 car brands at 39 dealerships in Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.

BFIT is a private, non-profit two-year technical school in Boston with half of its nearly 600 students coming from the neighborhoods of Dorchester, Roxbury and Mattapan. According to Tony Benoit, president of BFIT, more than 94 percent of its graduates are placed in jobs or continue into advanced higher education within six months of graduation, earning an average first-year salary over \$38,000.

While Prime has for years hired BFIT graduates into its automotive service positions, the company and the school developed a formal program to help Prime meet more of its hiring demand. In 2018, they launched the Prime Scholars program, through which 15 students receive a customized education coupled with a pre-graduation job at Prime to provide them with real-life work experience in the automotive industry. BFIT and Prime connect with students coming out of high

school who have an interest in the automotive field, and Prime provides a scholarship to support college attendance along with a part-time job working at one of its dealerships.

While the students are not required to work for Prime after they graduate, that is the company's goal. "We'd like to hire all of them," said Dave Rosenberg, CEO of Prime. "We offer above industry pay and benefits and we have a career path for all of the students."

"This was an easy decision for us," said Rosenberg. "By investing in these students, we're investing back in our future as a business because we're going to need them. I'd rather have the higher quality candidates and support them during their education."

BFIT's automotive curriculum focuses on cutting-edge knowledge of the industry. The Prime Scholars are being trained as line mechanics, and their work at the dealership exposes them to other hands-on aspects of the service industry to give students the foundation they need for a variety of roles. "We customize the students' educational experience to match their work environment," said Benoit. "The job provides practical application of what the students are learning, motivation to learn more, and a paycheck to pay the bills while in school."

Daneidy Pena, from Roxbury, is in the second year of BFIT's automotive program and expects to receive his associate degrees in May. Among the advantages of being a Prime Scholar is the BFIT class schedule, which begins at 8 a.m. and finishes as early in the day as possible so students can get their work experience at a Prime location. At Prime's dealerships, students service cars, assist customers, and work in the parts department.

Pena works at the Prime Collision Center in Roxbury, where he disassembles the damaged sections of cars, preps them and is involved in the body work. Pena said he hopes to have his own business in the automotive industry someday, but loves working at Prime. "The people at Prime care about us both as students and employees," said Pena.

He credits BFIT for preparing him for his automotive career. "The teachers are wonderful," Pena said. "They're willing to help us with anything."

As the Prime Scholar program moves forward, Prime plans to assist more students in broader ways. One of the company's goals is to provide housing near the dealerships where students are employed. Rosenberg said Prime plans to buy multifamily houses and "set up some apartments so the students don't have to pay the majority of their income as rent."

"Dave Rosenberg is progressive in his thinking," said Benoit. "He understands the workforce of the next 50 years is going to be different than the workforce of the last 50 years. Companies that invest now will reap the benefits in the coming decades."

The Prime Scholars Program has become a template for BFIT's business development efforts. The college is currently in negotiation with several employers to create similar programs in other fields. Benoit said that BFIT is working on customized learn-and-earn programs in advanced manufacturing, computer technology, construction management, medical electronics, and opticianry, all fields in which there is high demand for skilled employees.

BFIT is a founding partner in the Lewis Family Foundation's Jobs Action Tank. The initiative supports key community organizations to place 700 young people from Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan into full-time jobs earning at least \$38,000 in annual income.

"Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology advances the community in and around the city of Boston," said Rosenberg. "The college is preparing our future generation of contributing citizens in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts."

Interested in getting involved, or have a successful partnership story to share that focuses on hiring young people from Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan into full-time jobs? Visit the Lewis Family Foundation's job page for more information.

The vision of the Lewis Family Foundation is that young people from Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan live in and reinvest their service, capital, and intellect to ensure that their neighborhoods continue to thrive and are places of opportunity and access.