

# OLD CARS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Automotive Restoration Technology Curriculum at East Valley Institute of Technology



Sally Downey of EVIT and famed race driver Lyn St James gather with restoration students at EVIT in Mesa during the RPM Foundation's Arizona Regional Summit.

The newly restructured RPM Foundation recently held its Arizona Regional Summit Meeting at the East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT) in Mesa.

The day began with a display of historically significant and performance-oriented classic cars and motorcycles from as early as 1903, before moving inside.

EVIT superintendent **Sally Downey** welcomed attendees from California, Georgia, Kansas, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Texas and Washington, some by phone.

The Institute's beliefs are that every scholar needs a skill, to turn passion into paychecks, while not every student wants or needs to go to college. EVIT serves

5,000 junior and senior high students from ten area schools, in over 40 training areas at its two campuses.

Career technical training has changed a lot over the years. The skills that are required to be successful are rigorous—and the outcome at EVIT is impressive.

Two out of three students of EVIT go on to attend college, with a 96 percent graduation rate. (In a normal high school setting, only one out of every three students attends college.) Downey attributes this success to EVIT students taking their academic courses at their home school, allowing them to come to EVIT for half days to pursue their passion and their dreams.

Everything taught at EVIT represents a real need and a synergy with the community. The community supports EVIT because they seek their trained students, while EVIT tracks the community's needs to tailor their restoration programs.

The guest of honor was RPM Ambassador **Lyn St James** of Phoenix, a veteran professional IndyCar driver with eleven CART and five Indy Racing League starts to her name—one of seven women who have qualified for the Indianapolis 500, and the first woman to win the famed event's Rookie of the Year award. She also





**T**he RPM Foundation provides services, shares resources and gives grants to develop the next generation of automotive Restoration and Preservation craftsmen through formal training and Mentorship—thus “RPM.” The Foundation is the educational arm of America’s Automotive Trust.

Originally the Hagerty Education Program (HEP), a program of LeMay—America’s Car Museum (ACM), in Tacoma, Washington, it was elevated to a distinct charitable, not-for-profit organization and re-branded as the RPM Foundation, to more clearly convey its mission.

The RPM Foundation is a collaborative partner with ACM as a member of America’s Automotive Trust (AAT), which also includes Club Auto, which provides activities and race events, and Concours Club, focused on high-level fundraising. RPM is governed by an independent board of directors with representation on the board of AAT. RPM’s national director also serves as a vice president of AAT.

Together, these organizations work to secure and preserve America’s automotive heritage. The RPM Foundation is dedicated to ensuring that critical collector vehicle preservation and restoration skills are not lost, working closely with educational institutions to advise on curricula and proficiencies needed for success in the field.

RPM facilitates student scholarships, internships and full-time apprenticeships with Master Craftsmen, to ensure students receive the necessary classroom knowledge and hands-on training to enter the profession successfully.

In addition to hands-on training of future craftsmen, the Foundation promotes the importance, and even dignity and prestige, of the skilled trades and the many career opportunities within the industry, developing partnerships throughout the collector hobby and industry, including shows, concours, clubs and businesses.

Established as the Collectors Foundation, then transitioning in 2014 to the Hagerty Education Program at ACM, the RPM Foundation has impacted more than 25,000 people and has awarded over \$2.75 million in funding for student scholarships, internships and apprenticeships, as well in support of educational institutions providing training for full-time careers in the applied arts for restoration and preservation. ■

has two victories at the 24 Hours of Daytona, and a win at the 12 Hours of Sebring. She has competed in endurance racing in Europe, including the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the 24 Hours of Nürburg-ring, where her team placed first and second in class. St James is founder of the Women in the Winner’s Circle Foundation and a motivational speaker.

Driving fast is Lyn’s passion. She started racing at 27 years old, late in life for a racer, but once she slid into her first race-car, she never looked back. She emphasizes that it is important for any young person to find and to live their passion.

Most students find their passion by being exposed to it. Maybe working on an old car with their dad, or seeing a restored show car’s engine, they are exposed to something at some point that sparks an interest in learning more about restoration and preservation of the classics.

Lyn reaffirms the need for access to programs or schools that can apply this passion, teach students the art and science of restoration, and place them on the path to a fulfilling career.

**Randy Bush**, restoration manager at Kip Motor Company in Dallas, shakes off preconceived ideas of auto mechanics in a changing marketplace, identifying automotive restoration as now a legitimate business model in its own right. Bush has been in the restoration industry for 41 years. Like many, he was learning how to take apart his mom’s car while others were playing football. He started working young, learning in small shops and dealerships. He became increasingly aware that people no longer know how to repair parts, rebuild an engine or diagnose a transmission—they just replace them.

The marketplace today surges with many desirable models seen as blue chip investments. In 2015 alone, 35 different auction houses took 29,000 cars over the auction block, at 95 different auctions, for a total of \$1.8 billion in sales. Many are what Bush calls “emotional restorations,” as emerging buyers seek the car from their childhood and restore it to pass on to their children. He says there is never a price tag that can be put on such a car.

In today’s marketplace, for a restoration technician fresh out of college, there are a lot of opportunities and careers. Not only are there shop jobs, but there are opportunities to work in insurance, journalism,

museum curation and much more. The key is having education plus experience in restoration.

RPM Ambassador **Stacy Puckett**, McPherson College alumna and former collections manager at LeMay—America’s Car Museum (ACM) in Tacoma, is parts production coordinator at Classic & Exotic Services, Inc. in Troy, Michigan, a full restoration shop with all aspects performed on site, specializing in Duesenbergs, V16 Cadillacs and other pre-war American luxury marques. The shop averages five restoration projects and ten service projects at any given time. Puckett emphasizes the need for bridging the gap between formal education and a job in a shop.

One of the complaints she hears from shop owners who hire graduates is that on paper a graduate looks great, but their hands-on skills are not as expected, which she thinks is due to a lack of apprenticeships—graduates don’t know about real world shop jobs when leaving college. She points out that years ago, recently educated apprentices worked in shops with mentors, who helped bridge the gap from graduation to a full-time career in the restoration industry.

Puckett recommends that shop owners create a job description for new hires as apprentices, make a list of nonnegotiable skills necessary to begin the job and a list of the skills the shop owner wants the new hire to learn while apprenticing.

The shop owner needs to specify how they will teach these skills—whether paying for classes, or having them work in various areas of the shop.

And the shop owner needs to plan how much time and money they are willing to invest in each employee’s apprenticeship.

Additional speakers included **Garrick Green**, chairman of the Automotive Restoration Technology Department at McPherson College in Kansas; **Lloyd Buck**, associate director of the Industrial Design and Automotive Restoration Program at The Academy of Art University in San Francisco; and former students, shop owners and industry representatives.

All agree there is an important place for restoration curriculum in schools. EVIT is starting an evening class for high school car lovers, as a beginning point to prepare for jobs at local shops. The 14-person Automotive Restoration Advisory Committee is key to making this possible. ■

