

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

February 20, 2008

Submitted by and contact:

Daniel Silver, Eastern staff writer

304-434-8000 or 877-982-2322: ext. 248

**EASTERN'S NEW AUTO TECH PROGRAM OFFERS ADVANCED SKILLS**

Although gasoline prices have increased some 75-percent over the last three years, America's love affair with the automobile burns as hotly as ever. The average American household owns 2.8 automobiles, according to a recent survey by Experian Automotive, developers of the National Vehicle Database, and nearly 35-percent of households own three vehicles or more.

"With all those cars and trucks on the road, automotive service technicians and mechanics can expect steady, high-wage work even through bumps and detours in the economy," said Larry Bloom, the Academic Program Director for Industrial Technologies at Eastern WV Community and Technical College. "And that's the official US Department of Labor forecast."

To take advantage of that trend, and to expand Potomac Highlands job opportunities in automotive services, Bloom announced that Eastern will launch a new skill set and degree program in Automotive Technology ready to enroll students for fall semester, 2008.

**Hands-On Learning**

Seventeen letters of support from area industries, auto service businesses and local schools convinced the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education to award Eastern the \$220 thousand Technical Program Development grant that will fund the new program. "These business, industry and educational leaders testified to the growing need in the Potomac Highlands for well-trained employees in this field," Bloom said, "and to the healthy wages these jobs pay."

The labor department's Occupational Outlook Handbook points out that workers who complete a community college training program with hands-on, technical preparation can expect the brightest of job prospects in this field, Bloom noted. "And that's one reason that our new program combines the necessary classroom instruction with intensive hands-on practice in the garage."

The program's technical core subjects will cover engine performance and repair, manual drive trains & axles, automatic transmissions & transaxles, suspension, steering and brakes, electrical/electronic systems, and heating and air conditioning. Hands-on learning will include the use of computerized and electronic diagnostic tools as well as power and hand tools.

**Beginners Welcome**

"The program will provide a broad knowledge and skill base about how vehicles' complex components work and interact," Bloom said, "and learners will acquire and perfect diagnostic, troubleshooting and repair skills." Students who have already studied some automotive technology in high school, and do-it-yourselfers who wish to advance with professional training, "and absolute beginners who don't even know how to use a wrench," will all find classes suited to the level of their knowledge and experience, he emphasized.

Eastern's college classes will not duplicate or replace the auto tech classes currently taught in area high schools and technical centers, but "will build on those programs, and offer still more advanced classes and skills," Bloom noted. "And we plan to offer successful graduates of the secondary school programs advanced placement or college credit where fitting."

Bloom believes that the availability of a college-level auto tech program will also make the county vocational programs even more attractive, as those preliminary learning pathways will now lead to an advanced degree at a local institution.

#### **Professional Credentials**

"We've designed this program to prepare our graduates to qualify for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) national certification," Bloom added, referring to the national professional credential certifying that learners' achievements in the field meet or surpass uniform national standards.

For more information about Eastern's financial aid opportunities, programs of study and learner support services, call toll free: 877-982-2322; or check the College's website: "[www.eastern.wvnet.edu](http://www.eastern.wvnet.edu)".

Serving the residents of Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Mineral, Pendleton and Tucker counties, Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College is a comprehensive and equal opportunity community and technical college bringing the resources and assets of Education That Works to the families, communities and employers of the Potomac Highlands.