



GCIA Donates \$2000 to Maxwell High

On Thursday, January 22, several members of the Georgia Collision Industry Association (GCIA) visited Maxwell High School of Technology to present a \$2000 check to Butch Luther, director of the school's automotive collision

Of course, money is always a concern, and many collision repair programs are underfunded, creating a deficit in the skills these students learn and the equipment they're trained to utilize. Batchelor notes, "These cars aren't

anticipate that GCIA's donation will be used to buy spray guns, which cost \$800 each and last four years, and possibly other supplies.

Students are grateful for the association's assistance which will prepare them for their future careers. Senior Joel Leyva notes, "It's only going to help us have better equipment, so we can learn the correct way, but we understand we have to take care of the equipment we do get, so it will last longer."

Maxwell's collision repair program is designed to provide students with a fundamental foundation on which to build. Melaragno stresses, "Getting them on the right track is more important than anything... and getting them on the right industry path, that's the key. [We want to teach] entry-level skills they can actually use when they leave."

Coombs also points out that people's lives can be impacted by the quality of the repair, making it even more imperative to ensure that the upcoming

generation of technicians is trained to repair vehicles safely and properly.

GCIA members point out that these programs also face a second challenge. Many parents have unfavorable misconceptions about the collision repair industry and discourage their children from pursuing such a career. GCIA and Maxwell believe that outreach efforts should include educating parents and students about the excellent career options in the collision repair industry.

The funds for GCIA's donation to Maxwell were raised at the association's annual golf tournament, as well as other events. Batchelor hopes that GCIA will be able to continue supporting Maxwell for many years to come.

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Howard Batchelor, Executive Director of GCIA, hands \$2,000 check to Butch Luther, director of Maxwell High's automotive collision program

program. Howard Batchelor, Executive Director of GCIA, explains "this is the second year in a row we have made this donation to help them purchase tools, equipment and supplies."

Batchelor was accompanied by the association's secretary Gregg Goff and member Bobby Coombs as they showed their support for the next generation of collision repairers. With the average age of technicians estimated to be 48 years old, and continuing to climb, the industry desperately needs more young professionals who are well-trained and prepared to enter an automotive career after graduation.

going to get any easier to repair, so we've got to have qualified people to repair them, in the proper manner. We want to make sure the up-and-coming next repairers have the skills necessary to repair cars that are damaged."

Although the program's instructors recognize the importance of providing students with proper training in accordance with industry standards, the recession has led to a number of budget cuts, reducing collision repair programs in Georgia from 15 to just four or five. With approximately 40 students in their programs, Luther and Maxwell instructor Sam Melaragno

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Jessica Smith

Rising above

Although people are often surprised to learn that Smith is in the CRT program, she has no qualms about it.

"People ask, 'How does that work? You're in a man's industry,'" explained Smith. "You just have to learn to get along with the guys. I tell my instructor, 'Whenever I'm here, I don't want to be set apart from anybody else. When I'm here, I'm part of the guys.'"

At one point a student comes up and teases her about being the best in the class and being interviewed. She chops

back and keeps on moving, excited to explain the different areas in the shop and points out a bumper that she painted, quickly noting that the light scratch on the side was done "after" she painted it.

"I'm very competitive and I want to prove to myself and everyone else I am capable of doing what I want to do what most men can do," said Smith. "They don't believe females can do that as well, but I'm determined to set that record straight—that we can do it, if not as good, better."

A proposition that Smith should have no trouble supporting.

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