



Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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D200 Auto Club revs students' future careers

The cool Wednesday after-school spot for Blue Streaks, Thunder, and Clay Academy students who aren't afraid to get their hands dirty is in the back of Woodstock High School.

The D200 Auto Club, which meets in the school's auto shop, is firing on all cylinders with anywhere from 10 to 20 students tinkering with hot rod engines, checking transmissions, or working on each other's cars. Former auto teacher Brandon Spiller originally started the club, now led by teacher Noah Taylor.

"I've tried to shape the club around the type of experience I would have wanted when I was in high school," Taylor said. "I always wanted the opportunity to work on a classic car or hot rod. When I began teaching at WHS, I saw an opportunity to give my students that experience."

Taylor and his students have been restoring a 1965 Grand Prix. He said the vehicle is a great hands-on visual and instructional aid and also attracts students' interest in joining the club.

"They can see how different automotive systems work, how everything comes together, and how the skills they learn in the classroom apply to an actual vehicle," Taylor said.

WHS senior Eric Hernandez Loaiza has been in Auto Club for four years and describes working on cars as both a "hobby and my life." During club meetings, Hernandez has been working on the same pickup truck.

"I really liked the freedom Mr. Taylor gave me to work on my own cars," Hernandez said. "I brought the truck in at the end of my freshman year and restored it to the point of being safe to drive." Hernandez said he hopes to build engines someday after graduation. "I know I can earn a lot more than as a simple tech."

Some of his Taylor's students have gone on to further their automotive education at McHenry County College or other technical school programs. Several graduates return to visit the club.

"Some students rebuild engines, while others are interested in automotive paint and bodywork, welding, and other skilled trades. "The club allows students to learn the basics, work hands-on with cars and trucks, and discover which areas of the automotive field they enjoy most." Taylor said.

The club's hands-on approach isn't just winning over students; it's also catching the eye of local benefactors.

Last year, Taylor was awarded a \$2,000 Impact Grant from the Woodstock D200 Education Foundation, which helped fund the Grand Prix project.

“The students were able to experience different aspects of hot rodding firsthand. We built an engine, rebuilt the steering and suspension, began upgrading the brakes, and completed many other repairs and modifications. We were also able to incorporate minor welding and fabrication work, allowing many students to try new skills,” Taylor said.

The club also just received \$4,200 from Melissa McMahon of the Woodstock City Council and M3 Events, which were proceeds from the Hot August Night Benefit Car Show where students also volunteered.

The Car Show on the Square provided not only a financial benefit for the club, but also a valuable networking opportunity for our students. Students were able to speak with members of the local automotive community who build, restore, and customize cars.

“These connections can provide students with guidance, mentorship, and even potential career opportunities in the future,” Taylor said.

Avianna Yantis, a Woodstock High freshman, said she couldn't take an auto class this year, but the club offered her a great opportunity. “I really love the club, and I am learning a lot through it and am excited to continue learning,” she said.