

DRIVEN *to Succeed*

Bob Lorkowski has restored countless classic cars, while also helping to transform a WITC program

By Deborah Anderson, photos by Rick Vesper

Throughout his life, Bob Lorkowski has had a passion for cars – but the award-winning, world-renowned cars his company produces take a back seat to his dedication to youth, his community, the environment and education.

Lorkowski's business, L'Cars Automotive Specialties, has restored award-winning cars for more than 20 years at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, as well as other competitions around the world.

He and his wife moved from Chicago to northwest Wisconsin in 1978, settling in Bruce, Wis. His original shop, Classic Auto Collision Center, had a unique “hook” to attract customers: after a deer/car accident, he offered one-stop service to his customers – he didn't just fix their car; being a meat cutter, he could also process the venison for an additional \$25.

By the 1980s, Lorkowski was ready to expand into upscale classic car restoration, keeping the collision repair service



separate. He found a building in the small town of Cameron, Wis., secured a loan and remodeled it to restore cars on one side with a showroom on the other.

His customers come from throughout the United States. Some cars delivered as a jumble of parts in boxes. The best craftsman – machinists, mechanics, paint and body technicians, metal fabricators, upholsterers, woodworkers, etc. –

rebuild the cars from the ground up, inside and out.

A majority of the employees at L'Cars are WITC grads. At the Bruce location, all of the employees are graduates of WITC. In fact, Lorkowski is very proud that Shane Trott, who was with him for 12 years, working his way up the ranks to manager, recently bought the business with his wife, Whitney, a WITC graduate in business administration.

“They come from all career fields, they just have to love working on great cars,” Lorkowski says. “It takes thousands of hours, sometimes a year or more before they see the completed unit.”

Giving Back

An important part of L'Cars' mission is “to return part of the profit to the youth programs of the community.”

Lorkowski sponsors school sports teams, and also awards annual scholarships to outstanding area high school students who volunteer their time to environmental and community service projects. He also awards scholarships to those attending a technical college after graduation, as well as a student intending to go into an environmental career.

His dedication to youth has also led him to involvement with the Blue Hills District Boy Scouts of America, Chippewa Valley Council. He has been finance chairman of the district for 16 years. An Eagle Scout himself as a boy, he says the activities and merit badges expose them to a variety of leadership and service experiences, as well as career exploration.

Many WITC students have done short internships at L'Cars. This year, Lorkowski has started a new paid internship program with two students in the WITC auto collision repair and refinish technician and automotive maintenance technician programs. “They work alongside the craftsmen, learning by doing,” Lorkowski says.

There is also a ‘carrot on a stick’ – at the end of the year, if they are top in



Bob Lorkowski's passion for cars has led to numerous awards and world-renowned automobiles. All of that takes a back seat to his dedication to youth and his community.



Bob Lorkowski's L'Cars company has employed many WITC graduates throughout the years. Pictured (from left) are Jesse Weber, Tony Petty, Lorkowski, Blaine Downer and Joshua Saunders.

their class, they will get \$2,500 to put toward their student loans.” They will receive smaller amounts for second through fourth place.

When his good friend and first restoration customer, Dave Manosky, passed away in 2011, Lorkowski joined with Manosky’s family and Dennis Bachman, CEO of Citizens Telephone Co-op in New Auburn, Wis., to raise funds for an endowed WITC scholarship in Manosky’s honor. Since he was president of the Bruce Telephone Company for 36 years, they thought it fitting the annual scholarship go to a telecommunication technologies student.

Lorkowski also gives his time to the Regional Foundation Committee for the WITC-Rice Lake campus and

has served on the Advisory Council for the auto collision repair and refinish technician program since 1985. His valuable input toward the course curriculum is appreciated by instructor Steve Moullette.

“He is an advocate and recruiter, not just for the auto collision program; he promotes the value of an education at WITC,” says Moullette.

Lorkowski considers all of his contributions throughout the years to the development of the next generation, the success of WITC graduates, the environment and the community as investments; for his business and the future. ■

Auto collision repair and refinish technician program

In this program students gain hands-on experience repairing customer vehicles, working with the latest repair and refinishing equipment, learning to interpret information on a damage report, properly removing and replacing hoods, deck lids, and latches, using body fillers and specialty fillers, performing outer panel, quarter panel and roof panel replacements and much more.

For more information about this program, visit witc.edu/programs.