



Engaging industry.



As employees become harder to find, employers that engage college students during the course of their studies — and promote curriculum that will make employees more productive on day one — will have a distinct advantage.

The Minnesota State Centers of Excellence offer a wide variety of meaningful ways to connect with those students and the educators who are preparing them for life and career. Those opportunities include:

- Serving on the leadership council for the center focused on your industry
- Welcoming STEM and Career Camp attendees to your facilities
- Providing input about, and helping develop, curriculum and certifications to better educate future employees
- Offering apprenticeship, internship and work study programs

For more information, call the Minnesota State Centers of Excellence main office (651-201-1672) or visit the website (minnstate.edu/coe).



MINNESOTA STATE

Transportation Center of Excellence

Luther Automotive takes a full throttle approach to workforce development

When the Minnesota State Transportation Center of Excellence was in its formative years, Luther Automotive was quick to see how partnering with Minnesota State could help ensure a highly skilled workforce. Their new Tech Trac scholarship program has taken the benefits of their involvement to a whole new level.

Luther Automotive is the largest family-owned group of automobile dealerships in the Upper Midwest. With over 27 brands, 37 locations in 3 states, 2,500 employees and 14,000 vehicles, Luther customers rely on the professionalism of the more than (???) mechanics and technicians employed at its state-of-the-art service centers.

Eight years ago, Matt Carlson, a service specialist with Luther Automotive, was part of a team that began visiting instructors and deans at every Minnesota State campus that offered an automotive or collision program. Today, Luther has a representative on all of those colleges' Advisory Councils. As a result, they are able to help shape curriculum and provide support for advanced training.

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"We are very interested in making sure automotive programs have the right equipment, the right tooling, the right knowledge, and the right type of vehicles for training our future technicians," said Carlson.

Carlson himself serves on the advisory council for the Minnesota State Transportation Center of Excellence. He has partnered with Executive Director Chris Hadfield and his team on statewide initiatives from the development of a wildly fun Transportation Career Exploration Trailer that travels to high schools and career events around the state—and Nitro-X summer camps designed to excite middle school students about automotive careers.

Innovative Tech Trac scholarship program

Recognizing that auto dealerships had a recruiting disadvantage with trades, such as welding and plumbing, that have traditionally offered paid apprenticeships to students, Carlson came up with an idea for a scholarship program at Luther. He invited Hadfield and his Transportation Center team to help him whiteboard the idea.

The result was a new Tech Trac scholarship program that Luther introduced last November. Sponsorships are open to students who are pursuing careers as Automotive Technicians, Body Technicians, Paint and Refinishing Technicians, Glass Technicians, and Graphics Specialists.

The program offers laddered incentives to qualified students, including: \$2,000-\$4,000 in scholarship support, paid part-time work during school, fast-track transition to full-time employment at a Luther Group Dealership Service Center upon graduation, ongoing mentorship, a \$2,000 tool grant, "stay-on" bonus of \$1,000, and more.

"I thought we'd get maybe 10 applications the first year," said Carlson. "We got 29.

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A partnership that proves the benefit of industry/education collaboration

Jon Friton, an automotive technology instructor at Minnesota State's Ridgewater College and president of the Midwest Teachers of Transportation & Industrial Areas (MTTIA) says Luther's multifaceted approach to supporting automotive educations gives Luther a distinct advantage in recruiting the best and brightest students.

"From summer camps to career events, Luther employees are on the front line engaging with students and providing financial support," says Friton. "They also pay and treat their employees well. They're a known entity to our faculty, students and advisers. It's not surprising that Luther is often the first place they apply for work."