

# Giving Back

Honda ProFirst certified shop general manager addresses the technician shortage

**W**hen Billy Vallely, general manager at Master Collision in Rockville Center, N.Y., a Honda ProFirst shop, realized that the collision repair industry was struggling to bring new technicians into the industry, he knew he had to do something.

Vallely, an I-CAR instructor, turned over every rock, explored every avenue, and even attempted to bring in and train “raw staff,” as he puts it. But he quickly realized how difficult it is to bring in staff that could truly sustain the volume and rigors of everyday work in a collision center.

That’s when he spoke to some friends and learned about Thomas A. Edison Career and Technical Education High School.

“They had students that actually had a passion for this industry, and had the right equipment built in the school to properly prepare these students for present-day repairs,” said Vallely. “I was excited because this was the answer to all of my questions.”

## No Experience

The only issue was that these students had little to no experience in a shop. The only experience they did have was from a classroom environment.

“I saw the writing on the wall,” Vallely says. “I knew with the help of others, we could build a bridge to our industry, not only to the shop, but to the insurance companies as well. We could mold new technicians and estimators at an early age, with the right training and the right attitude to thrive, and bring our industry back to a time when we had a pool of vibrant, skilled, motivated technicians ready to make a mark on the industry.”

## On the Board

Vallely now sits on the curriculum advisory board at Thomas A. Edison. After only one year, he has at least four to five shops looking to help get involved and train these students in all aspects of collision repair.

“I feel it’s immensely important – not only to the shops, but to the students – to see the different SOPs and procedures in the shop, to become more versatile and adapt to different situations. Now, these students can train and study simultaneously to properly prepare them for what’s in store in their future.”

## Lack of Parental Support

Vallely, along with the entire industry, faces another obstacle that’s not so easy to fix: a lack of support young people get from their parents when trying to get into the collision repair industry.

“They all believe they want their children to be doctors, lawyers, stockbrokers, etc.,” says Vallely. “They don’t realize how much a young and skilled tech can earn as a skilled



**Billy Vallely, general manager of Master Collision.**

technician. I emphasize and encourage my students to bring their families in, let them speak with me, and gain the support of their families to enter this industry and thrive within it. That to me is key. To build confidence, you need the support of your family first. When they see success, they give their support and display confidence, in turn pushing them to be the best they can be while supporting the student’s true passion.”

## The Real World

When Vallely brings new students in, he makes sure they have a good understanding of the real-world environment they’ll be working in.

“I don’t have them paint a damaged fender, I have



them paint a real-world repair," Valley says. "If a mistake is made, so what? The supervision my technicians give them would guide them through that scenario. Mistakes can be corrected. If they don't work on a real situation, how can they feel the emotion of failure? How do they feel the adrenaline, stress and accomplishment when it's done right, or if they overcome the obstacles to correct those mistakes?"

### Job Placement

Kids in the program get routinely placed in jobs at Master Collision as well. Valley has two to three students work two to three days a week, which allows them to see every aspect of the collision center. First, Valley has them work in their desired line of work, and then watches them progress into estimating, blueprinting, KPI calculation, human resources, welding, etc.

"Being well-rounded makes them more marketable, and they may even find a new passion within the collision center," says Valley.

Thomas A. Edison is starting to implement an I-CAR training program, which will give students an I-CAR designation right out of high school. It's also working on structuring a solid training schedule for the students so they can see different environments and collision centers and receive proper training.

"I see different shop environments, feel the pain of other collision center managers and owners, and really try to see the big picture," Valley says. "Our industry is plagued with a technician drought. It is my steadfast belief that if we don't stay active participants in growing the industry as a whole, we can't survive. We have to stand together, and get over the adversarial relationship we all have. To me, this [program] will never end, it will only grow." ♦