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## High school mechanics compete for scholarship

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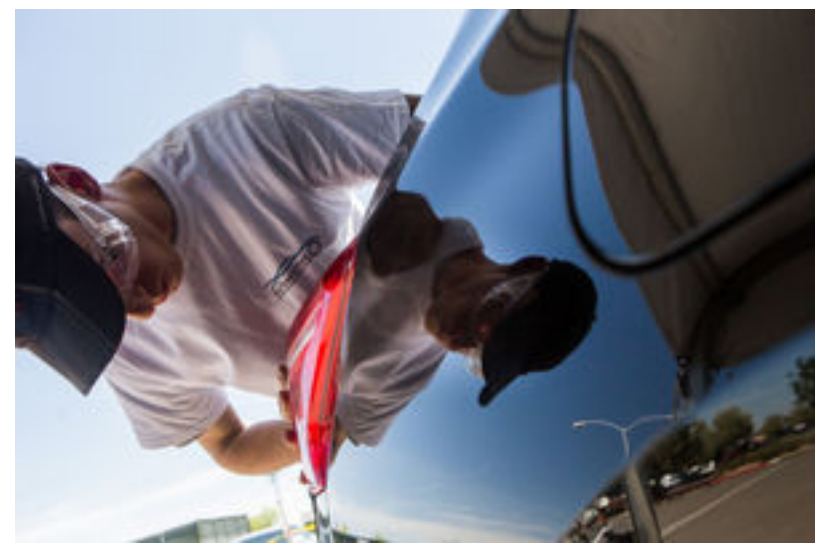
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Posted: Monday, May 2, 2016 4:05 pm | Updated: 10:37 am, Tue May 3, 2016.

Jamie Leland, Tribune



[David Jolkovski/Tribune]

Ten teams of Arizona high school students tried their hand at fixing cars for scholarships in the first ever Arizona High School Automotive Challenge.

Each team consisted of two students who worked to diagnose and repair eight issues on a 2016 Nissan Sentra within an hour and a half. The competition, sponsored by ABC Nissan, was held at Mesa Community College on April 22.

### AZ State Auto Technician Competition

East Valley Institute of Technology seniors Sean Christensen and Nate Kulpa compete in the AZ State Auto Technician Competition at Mesa Community College on Friday, April 22, 2016.

Maricopa Community Colleges with automotive programs, including Mesa, Glendale and GateWay, created the Arizona High School Automotive Challenge when Ford/AAA Auto Skills announced they would no longer be

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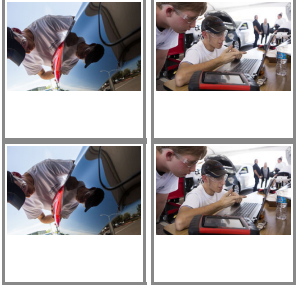
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hosting their long-held state and national competitions in September last year.

Bryce Bond, automotive instructor and programs chair at MCC, said he felt an obligation as an educator to keep the tradition going. He immediately approached his fellow automotive instructors, including fellow MCC

instructor Steve Skroch, Don Davis at Glendale Community College and Steve Folks at Gateway Community College. It didn't take long for the group to get the event fully sponsored.

"We went out to industry partners. A lot of people wanted to keep it alive," Bond said.

One of those industry partners was Keith Billings of ABC Nissan, who competed in an automotive challenge sponsored by Plymouth in 1986. He provided 10 2016 Nissan Sentras for the students to repair in the challenge, as well as tools, catering, prizes and more.

Billings was impressed by the instructors' passion and saw an opportunity to encourage new talent to enter the automotive manufacturing industry, which he says has seen a shortage since the recession.

"A lot of people left the business and young people didn't want to get into it," Billings said. "We lost almost a decade's worth of technicians, so we need to get the new ones in and we need to bring them up to speed quickly."

Bond, along with the other automotive instructors agreed: The industry needs workers who are knowledgeable in dealing with newer technology.

"Cars are getting complicated and training is needed," Bond said.

The awards ceremony hammered this point home, with speakers offering employment advice and inviting participants to consider opportunities at their own companies. Even Mesa Vice Mayor Dennis Kavanaugh attended the event to encourage the students to work for the city.

Natasha Alday and Steven Upton from Flowing Wells High School in Tucson won first place, each taking home a \$1,200 scholarship, awarded by the Rocky Mountain Fleet Management Association. That's enough to cover tuition for one full-time semester at any of the Maricopa Community Colleges. Yoshael Cisneros and Jake McConnell from West-MEC in Peoria won second place. Nathan Kulpa and Sean Christensen from East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT) in Mesa followed up in third. Kulpa broke a three-way tie and won a socket set with his high score on the qualifying exam.

"It's a lot harder than last year's," said Kulpa, referring to Arizona's 2015 Ford/AAA Auto Skills competition, in which he placed sixth. He and his teammate have dreams that don't necessarily involve working as a technician for a manufacturer. Kulpa wants to open a classic restoration shop and Christensen hopes to eventually move beyond the automotive industry and get into engineering. But both students enjoyed the competition and were happy with their performance.

"They had fun," EVIT automotive instructor Randy Golding said. "Win lose or draw, they can put this on their resume."

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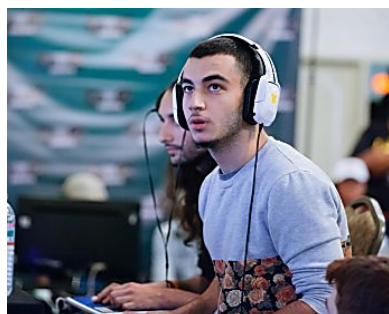
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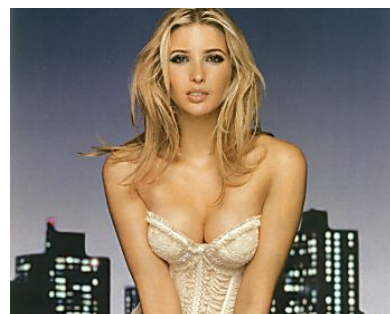
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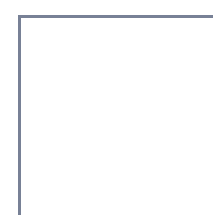
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