

Shakes, Rattles & Rollovers

EDUCATION & TRAINING

AAM Designation is More than a Moniker

30 percent of AMI grads come from collision repair

A class called "Lip Service" stands out in Ann Rupp's mind as one with such important lessons that she sent her front office staff to it the next chance she got. In their pursuit of education, Rupp and her husband also took advantage of topics like financial management, which helped them, in part, with endeavors like expanding their body shop business using satellite shops.

Rupp is on her third career and she knows how to do it right. After teaching for 10 years, she joined her father's construction company. She earned a contractor's license and soon was poised to open her own construction company. But her then-boyfriend owned a burgeoning collision repair business, and, seeing places where he could use her help, she joined him at Akins Collision Center.

In the collision repair business for 36 years, Bill Rupp started working with his uncle, owner of the original Akins Collision Center in Palo Alto, California. He bought out the retiring uncle in 1976, after which a series of work and life events led to ownership of three shop locations with his wife, Ann, in Santa Clara, Almaden Valley and Cupertino, California.

Like she'd done for past careers, Ann Rupp set about acquiring an education in her new field. But in the mid-1990s, classes in business and financial management specifically for the automotive field were mostly available at the annual International Autobody Congress and Exposition (NACE). The classes were extended through the Automotive Management Institute (AMI) with headquarters in Bedford, Texas.

"Ann and I started taking courses to get all the information we could," said Bill Rupp. Once they realized there was a degree available, that became another goal for the pair, in addition to learning how to run a better business.

AIMING AT THE AMI

It's been nearly 20 years since the inception of AMI, which has lent accreditation and served professionals in both the collision and mechanical repair sectors with management education. Toni Slaton is executive director of the AMI.

"AMI courses offer something for everyone," she said, adding that technicians, estimators and office personnel attend courses to improve efficiency and learn skills in critical thinking, communication, conflict management and time management, as well as learn safety and government regulations.

Among those who benefit from AMI courses are shop owners and managers who are skilled in vehicle repair but may not have formal business management education.

More than 150 faculty members, which include paint manufacturers, consultants, the Automotive Service Association (ASA) and automotive insurance, teach courses.

Each year between 100 and 150 graduates can claim Accredited Automotive Manager (AAM) designation, which is earned upon completion of 120 credits, including a required self-study course. AMI offers classes in five areas of focus: marketing and sales; operations and service; management and administration; financial management; and personnel and human

resources development.

So far, there have been more than 1,200 graduates of AMI who've received the AAM designation. About 30 percent of AMI graduates each year are from the collision industry.

"As you know, staying competitive in the collision repair industry is challenging," Slaton said. "To make courses more widely available, AMI continues to seek out and approve courses in a self-study format. We have also made the required course available in an online format."

AMI classes also offer opportunities to discuss problems and solutions with other students who are facing the same challenges.

USEFUL DESIGNATION

When Bill and Ann Rupp were in the midst of earning their AAM designations, classes were not as readily available as they are now. At first, the Rupps were only able to attend courses offered during NACE.

Then one spring they attended an AMI conference and got four or five courses under their belts in a weekend. It took several years to acquire enough credits to graduate, though, which they did in 2000.

Today, the Rupps are concentrating on training for their staff. There is a "Wall of Education" at the shop to prove it. Covering the walls are dozens of awards, honors and certificates emblazoned with the names of everyone working there who has earned an educational honor.

Said Ann Rupp, "When our guys spend the time on education, we want everyone to know it."

23

