

Internships Provide Individualized Learning, Job Opportunities for BOCES Students

Motorcycles have been a passion for Holland Patent senior Alex Prokopienko since his early teens, and now he's aiming to turn that passion into a career with some help from the Oneida-Herkimer-Madison (OHM) BOCES and Harley-Davidson.

"When t was 13, I was working on a three-wheeler with my brother," notes Prokopienko when asked about the beginnings of his interest in motorcycles. Prokopienko's early fascination with motorcycles has now led him to his second year enrolled in the Outdoor Power Equipment program at the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Center at OHM BOCES in New Hartford.

In the Outdoor Power and Recreational Equipment Technology program students learn to repair, rebuild and tune up several basic types of engines including snow blowers, lawn mowers, rototillers, farm tractors, construction equipment, motorcycles, jet skis and snowmobiles. Students also learn metal skills, including electric arc, MIG and oxyacetylene welding.

While Prokopienko enjoyed what he was learning at BOCES he still had a desire to spend more time working solely with motorcycles.

Most people are familiar with the hands-on training provided for skilled trades through the OHM BOCES Career and Technical Education Center, but many local high school students like Prokopienko are also getting early experience on the job through internships coordinated by BOCES.

For the last few months, Prokopienko has been interning at Harley-Davidson of Utica, an arrangement that both he and Sales Manager Shane Gatto are very pleased with.

"Alex has become an asset here at the dealership," said Gatto. "We're very happy to have him aboard!"

Gatto was so impressed with Prokopienko's enthusiasm, work ethic and passion for Harley-Davidson motorcycles that he also hired him to work part-time in addition to his internship.

"I got a job here, so it's going really well, said Prokopienko. "I'm getting my name out there, getting more experience and I get to work on motorcycles."

During his time at Harley-Davidson, Prokopienko has shadowed one of the master technicians to learn the basics of setting up a new motorcycle, repairs and everything in between. Gatto has also had him working on washing and detailing motorcycles to help him learn his way around the dealership and the bikes,

OHM BOCES Internship Coordinator Jerry Greene set up the internship for Prokopienko and emphasizes that internships are a "win-win" situation for both the employer and the intern. "Employers who offer internships to high school students are able to fill their talent pipelines and remain competitive in the marketplace while the interns gain valuable contacts and experience in the field," stated Greene.

From the perspective of an employer looking to hire, Gatto knows the experience that Prokopienko is gaining is invaluable.

"I think actually having him work here hands on is definitely a more effective way of getting somebody trained. Of course, I also believe in the classroom education part, but there's nothing like experiencing a real shop and doing real work with real customers."

Prokopienko sees this internship as great experience and the foundation for his future career. "I'm going to college in July for motorcycle mechanics," said Prokopienko. He plans to attend the Motorcycle Mechanics Institute in Orlando, FL where he will build on the foundations of construction and repair of motorcycles, ATVs, side-by-sides and personal watercraft that he's already learned.

Gatto sees a bright future for Prokopienko in the motorcycle industry, "He's a good kid and someone young like that taking an interest in the Harley-Davidson brand is very positive for us. I know when I was 17,1 would have loved to have gotten a chance to work for a Harley shop."