

■ WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

# Workers with small-engine know-how to be in demand

**I**t seems like every recreation and home-improvement magazine I pick up highlights a new engine that is more efficient, with increased capability, yet still downright powerful ... argh argh argh, more power, as Tim Allen might say.

With all the luxuries available in these new advancements come a complexity in how to care for and repair damages — and it's all tied to technology. Over the last five years, integrated electronic systems and complex computers have come to play a vital role in small engines and their performance.

Most households have some form of a small engine, whether it's a lawnmower or recreational power-sport item. If you have any doubts about the increasing need for skilled technicians, look at the number of small engines in use. Idaho had nearly 425,000 motorcycles, boats, snowmobiles, recreational and off-highway vehicles registered for use in 2010. This is in addition to the thousands, if not millions, of additional small engines owned and operated in the state, including lawn equipment, golf carts, construction equipment and so on.

Today's small-engine technicians can be compared to the programmers of early computers. Small-engine responsibilities have evolved from simple mechanical repairs to high-level technology-related work. In order to keep abreast of technological changes, small engine technicians must keep their skills current in a training venue that provides access to testing new tools for service work and the ability to keep up with emerging trends.

Rob Madsen is a 21-year veteran of power-sports service and the service manager at Moto Tech, a power-sports dealer with locations in Boise and Nampa. Madsen can attest to the evolution of the industry and the increased need for skilled workers to diagnose, repair, and perform maintenance on the complicated systems that are a part of today's machines.

"Technology has and will continue to progress in the power-sport industry," he



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says. "You either need to stay current in technology training or get left behind."

When a piece of equipment breaks down, technicians use various methods to diagnose the source and extent of the problem. The mark of a skilled technician is the ability to diagnose mechanical, fuel and electrical problems and to make repairs quickly. Quick and accurate diagnosis requires problem-solving ability and a thorough knowledge of the equipment's operation. To be successful in the repair of small engines, technicians need a level of education that includes diagnostic and technical repair skills to address the changing intricacies of the engines.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics rates the job outlook as excellent for people who complete formal training programs. Jim Roche, president of Engine Equipment Training Council, echoes the bureau's report of the demand of technicians. "Right now, we are in need of about 30,000 technicians throughout the United States and Canada," he says. "With the average age of 50 years old, we need more workers comfortable with computer skills and new technologies."

Nearly 90 percent of the spring 2011 College of Western Idaho graduates have landed employment in the industry. Of the graduates hired, approximately 83 percent were hired in the Treasure Valley. Local employers that hire small-engine repair technicians include state and federal agencies such as Idaho Parks and Recreation and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers. In addition, power-sport dealers and repair shops, marine dealerships, outdoor power-rental businesses and recreational resorts make up the largest sectors for hiring.

Technology is a staple in the future evolution of small engines. I receive calls regularly seeking workers skilled in small-engine technology, and I have no doubt that this trend in our industry will continue to affect how we care for the new, complex, everyday necessities.

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