

ABAC NEWS

**November
December
2022**

The Official Newsletter of the Auto Body Association of Connecticut

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Pre-Storage Charges

Short Pays DOI Complaints

DRP's

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Solutions!

Hear from the Best!



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Front and Center at ABAC Meeting**

Your Car, Your Choice - Find us at www.abaconn.org

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Vendor Spotlight

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ABAC President's Message

Bob Amendola

Forward Momentum



I would like to begin by thanking all of our members who attended our most recent quarterly meeting. It's been confirmed that we set a record for the highest number of attendees to date! Your participation and engagement in our association is pivotal in changing the industry for the better. Let's keep this ball rolling... I hope to see each and every one of you at our next meeting, too.

Second, a special thank you to Dave Fogarty, for rallying us all together in a way that only he can do. I think we can all agree that his zeal and enthusiasm for improving our industry remains unmatched. Thank you to our sponsors: Liberty Bank, Sherwin-Williams, and TechZone for your continued partnership. We sincerely appreciate it. Last but certainly not least, thank you to all of our speakers who put in such a great effort to share tools from each of their "toolboxes" in an effort to help fellow members. Joanne Dawley, Alex Pesarik, Bob McSherry, Kevin Clavette, Attorney John Parese, Bill Denya, Tony Ferraiolo, Joe Cavallaro, Tony Cavallaro Jr. and Randy Serkey, thank you. Thank you for your wisdom and your willingness to share it with others.

Looking ahead, we need to maintain this forward momentum we've created within our association and as an industry of trained, experienced and dedicated repair professionals. We as business owners need to understand that we must run our businesses in a fashion that protects consumers, upholds safe and proper repair standards and is profitable. Without all three facets, we will not be able to sustain, advance our industry and attract the next generation to pursue careers within our industry. All of which are imperative. Technology has already advanced our industry to levels we never previously imagined. It's our time now. Take what you've learned at the meeting and run with it. Add the word NO to your vocabulary and utilize the tools shared with you to make changes for the better. Make the necessary changes to position yourself for success. Finally, don't be a stranger. Take advantage of the network we've built as colleagues within our association. Don't be reluctant to reach out and ask questions. Making changes may not be easy but you have a network of people eager to help. One of the single best things you can do is attend our meetings. Not only are the topics we cover educational but the opportunity for networking is even more beneficial. Now is the time!

Sincerely,

Bob Amendola

Autoworks of Westville - President - Auto Body Association of Connecticut

ABAC Donates \$15,000 to CTECS Automotive Collision Repair Program



(L-R) Ashley Burzenski-ABAC Vice President; Collision Repair Instructor Jesse Morton; Tony Ferraiolo – ABAC; State Rep Kathy Kennedy; Automotive Cluster CTECS Consultant Luis Camacho; Carlos Vazquez; Heather Russell; Jaden Page; Principal Dr. Justin Lowe; Himalaye Barroso-Concepcion; Jonah Levey; Samantha Castro; CTECS Superintendent Dr. Solek; CTECS Chief of Staff Ronke Stallings; Collision Repair DH Rich Benedict; President Bob Amendola-Auto Body Association of CT

On June 15th 2022, the Auto Body Association of Connecticut hosted our 1st annual charity golf outing at Lyman Orchards Golf Club in Middlefield. The event was a huge success, raising \$15,000 to donate to the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System. Specifically, the Auto Body Repair Program. The donation will help the Auto Body Repair Program purchase various tools, supplies and equipment necessary to teach students the trade of Auto Body repair.

A donation ceremony was held on Wednesday, December 7th at Platt Technical High School. ABAC President Bob Amendola, ABAC Vice-President Ashley Burzenski, Immediate Past President/Board of Director Tony Ferraiolo, and ABAC Lobbyist Andy Markowski attended the event, representing the ABAC. The check was presented to a group of students in the auto body repair program, CTECS Consultant Lou Camacho, Department Head Richard Benedict, Instructor Jesse Morton, Principal Justin Lowe, CTECS Superintendant Dr. Solek and various school officials. State Representative Kathy Kennedy also attended the event to show support for the program.

The ABAC has a longstanding commitment to our partnership with the Auto Body Repair Program and is so proud to be able to make this donation to directly benefit students. We are thankful to all of the instructors and school officials within the state's Auto Body Repair Program who are shaping future technicians. We look forward to continuing to do our part to help students succeed and create a fulfilling career within our industry.

A special thank you again to those who worked so hard to make the golf fundraiser such a success. Without their efforts, donations such as this wouldn't be possible.

Until next time,

Ashley Burzenski - Autoworks of Westville - Vice President - Auto Body association of Connecticut

“Revolution of Solutions” Seminar Front and Center at ABAC Gathering



A special event seminar took place on Wednesday November 9th at The Woodwinds in Branford hosted by the Auto Body Association of Connecticut with Master of Ceremonies, Dave Fogarty. Said Fogarty, ***“Tonight will be a revolutionary explosion of solutions to take this industry and your business to levels you haven’t even imagined yet. By the end of tonight there should be no more excuses, only solutions. Tonight, we have the largest all-time attendance in the history of the Auto Body association of Connecticut. Every one of you here tonight is a dedicated professional looking for ways to improve your business.”***

Dave then introduced the President of the ABAC, Bob Amendola.

Bob thanked Dave for the introduction. Said Amendola, ***“This attendance tonight is amazing, and I want to thank you all for coming to this event this evening. I realize what an effort it is for all of us to take time from our busy schedules to attend this meeting, but I feel this is the time, this is our time. It’s the time for things to really continue to change in our industry and all of the solutions that Dave was just speaking of are all in this room tonight. This is about educating members, helping to teach how to repair vehicles properly, correctly and safely for our customers.”***

“I know that I say this at every meeting, but I again want to sincerely thank all of our ABAC Corporate Sponsors and our ABAC News Supporting Advertisers. They have all made a financial commitment to support YOUR Auto Body Association of Connecticut. In return we’d like to ask all our members to remember to Support Those Who Support You,” said Bob.



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Buckley Wynne and Parese is our Platinum Sponsor of the ABAC News Advertisers Directory as well as Bald Hill Dodge Chrysler Jeep/Kia who is our Gold Sponsor of our Directory," continued Bob.

I'd also like to announce our newest advertisers to the ABAC News Supporting Advertisers Directory. They are:

- **Shoreline Hyundai – Old Saybrook**
- **Shoreline Dodge Chrysler Jeep Ram – Old Saybrook**
- **Alloy Wheel Specialists - Danbury**

The Sponsors for the night were:

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“We have seen a tremendous increase in ABAC Membership, even in these challenging financial times. I want to thank Dave Fogarty for his relentless pursuit to build up the ABAC Membership. I also want to thank Dave for getting us all here this evening. It takes a lot of work, dedication and time to do what Dave has done. He realizes what this meeting will mean to all of the shops here in attendance tonight, and I want to make sure we all show him our appreciation,” said Amendola.

Bob then listed many of the new shops that have become members of the ABAC. They are:

- Superior Auto & Repair Towing – New Haven
- Ranco Collision – So. Windsor
- Auto Sports – Hamden
- Precision Collision – Pomfret
- Shippan Auto Body – Stamford
- Theroux & Co. Auto Body – Hamden
- Hansen Auto Body – Stratford
- Crossroads Auto Body – Danbury
- Heritage Collision – Guilford
- Georgetown Auto Body – Ridgefield
- Girard Collision Center – Groton
- Ultimate Auto Body - Cheshire

Atty John Parese then read the Anti-Trust Disclaimer.

Returning to the podium, Fogarty then took us on a trip down memory lane. ***“40+ years ago the body shops were getting paid around 10% more per hour than the average mechanical repair industry was receiving. So, what happened? Why has the collision industry labor rate become so suppressed? Well, there could be several factors. Back in the 80’s, 90’s and beyond, the insurance companies developed the DRP program! At that time there was a lot more competition in body shop repairs and that caused many of these shops to sign up for this program. (We have lost a lot of shops since COVID. For example, at the time of the Hartford Lawsuit, we were at 1,000+ shops in the State of Connecticut. We are now down to 333 shops!)***

“What we didn’t count on as an industry was that the insurance industry used those DRP contracts that those shops signed up for to suppress our collision repair industry into a fraction of what it once was. Well, I’m happy to report that it appears that the DRP program that once had a stranglehold on our industry has become greatly diminished in many areas of our state. The “noose” that you had around your neck is loosening. To prove that to you, I have 3 brave shop owners who are going to tell you how many DRP relationships they had during that time and how many they have today, why they made changes and whether or not they are better off or worse off today,” he continued



**ABAC President
Bob Amendola**

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DRP's

The first guest introduced by Fogarty was Bob McSherry, owner of North Haven Auto Body in North Haven as well as Sabo Auto Body in Seymour. Fogarty asked McSherry the following questions:

How many DRP's did you have a few years back?

McSherry: Thirteen

Fogarty: How many do you have now?

McSherry: 4

Fogarty: Why did you make changes and start removing them over a period of time?

McSherry: You can't answer to a master. So, when you go heavy into OEM Certification, DRP's must go away. In all honesty, as you work your way down the OEM path, why would you work under insurance pressures when you have all the documentation, all the technology at your fingertips to do the right thing and be profitable in doing it?

Fogarty: Would you say that you are better off by reducing DRP contracts?

McSherry: Absolutely! It's nerve racking to make the decision. I had a \$2M per year account that I'd had enough of, and I threw them out. And the next year we grew. You have to understand that once you make that turn away it's all about how you market yourself to your customers and what differentiates you from the competition. Where I'm at with my North Haven Auto Body location, I have a great competitor down the road. I love competing with him, they're great people, they're the type of people you want to compete against. We never bad mouth each other, and we always tried to help each other out.

That's example #1, said Fogarty

Next, we have a shop in the room that I had a discussion with recently. Tyler Rook, owner of Victor Auto, and an ABAC Board of Director whose shop I consider the largest shop in Middletown is here tonight. I asked Tyler point blank, How many DRP's did you have in your heyday? His answer was 'I did business with 8 companies on contract.' I then asked him how many he currently has today? His reply was, '2. I fired 6 of them!' And I asked him why he fired 6 of them. His reply, 'I'm tired of working for free. I'm tired of doing free total losses. Doing 2-3 hours of administrative work, filling out forms and I can't charge them (the DRP) anything. Getting paid well below labor rate, mandatory aftermarket parts that don't fit properly. It wasn't difficult to make that decision. Fogarty continued, "Tyler tells me that he's looking very seriously at the 2 relationships he has left. I then asked Tyler if he's better off after making those decisions and he tells me, 'I have more work in my shop that I even know what to do with. I'm booked solid for weeks. Is your profitability up? His reply: Absolutely.

That's example #2



MC Dave Fogarty (R)
Bob McSherry - No. Haven AB

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"I'd now like to bring up Alex Pesarik from B&D Auto Body in Montville," said Dave

Fogarty: How many DRP's did you have a few years back?

Pesarik: We had 9

Fogarty: How many do you have now?

Pesarik: We're down to 2

Can you share with us the story you told me about a certain carrier that you fired?

Yes. We attempted to fire an insurance company and they made it very hard to fire them based on what my demands were, and it worked out in our favor. They basically agreed to pay us what we wanted for independent claims. I told them, now you're talking my language! If they want to send me customers because of the quality of my repairs and there are zero complaints I told them to bring them in. And they pay my rates.

Fogarty: Would you say that you are better off by making those decisions?

Pesarik: Definitely better off. As Bob McSherry said, this business is becoming very admin heavy in the front end and to take on DRP work is just not profitable. To be able to schedule your own work when you want to schedule it and not listen to anyone else, it allows you to fix vehicles properly and be profitable.

There was a short break for dinner and then Fogarty returned to discuss more solutions.

Labor Rate Survey

Now, let's talk about a Labor Rate Survey. Is it important? It is absolutely very important. Let's ask our ABAC Attorney John Parese for his take on the subject.

How can I lawfully do a labor rate survey in my marketing area? Can I call a shop in my area, ask them what their posted labor rate is and use that in a court of law?

Parese: Yes. You can call a competitor's shop, ask them what their posted rate is, track that and use that in a court of law. The one thing you can't do is share that information with other shops. If you do a labor rate survey, you can use that with your accountant to establish your own business practice and you use that in court to establish that your rate is reasonable.



MC Dave Fogarty (R)
Alex Pesarik - B&D Auto Body



ABAC Legal Counsel
John M. Parese

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Can you use it to defend your position with an appraiser? Yes, you can. The ABAC can provide you with a sample form to help you perform a labor rate survey. You can find those forms on the ABAC website: abaconn.org.

Employee/Technician Shortage

Fogarty: The next subject we will discuss is something that is very critical to every shop owner in this room. We have a tremendous shortage of qualified technicians and employees available to our industry today. No one will fix this for you. There is no magic wand. Fortunately, our ABAC Vice President, Ashley Burzenski is in charge of the Social Media for the ABAC and she is prepared to offer some insight.



ABAC Vice President
Ashley Burzenski

Said Ashley, *"The first thing I want to do is thank Dave for all his hard work putting this together. This is an awesome turnout and I'm happy to see all these faces. The second thing is the ABAC Board of Directors and I acknowledge the labor shortage. We, at the ABAC, are working on a program or a campaign to rebrand the auto body industry and to market to the next generation a viable career path that potential employees will see the longevity, benefits, flexible schedules, etc. The first part involves the rolling out of billboard advertising focusing on the rebranding of the industry and what it means to be involved in the auto body industry because there is still that stigma and obviously, we know that does not apply anymore with just the amount of technology in today's vehicles. So, between using billboards, social media and our website we're looking to rebrand and create a funnel to direct potential candidates to the Auto Body Association's website where we'll have a separate page (for example: "Job Postings" or "Careers"). As an added benefit for our members, if you have a job posting, it's basically free advertising and a direct funnel for you to get more applicants. As we roll this out keep in mind that this is not to replace what you currently use. We recommend that if you're using other sources, to continue to use those sources such as Indeed.com or*

other job search engines. So, if you had a job posting(s), you would send that to us, and we would post it on our website. The idea is as people are driving by will see our billboard advertising or they'll see it on Facebook or Instagram, and they will go to our website and see all these job openings available. Hopefully, this will bring some quality applicants to you.

She continued, "These last two parts really must come from within. In terms of rebranding, you need to rebrand your business. You need to make sure that your presence on social media and your solid website show that you're current with the latest technology, the latest operations, because potential candidates will pass you by if they go look at your website and can't see top ratings and that you're reinvesting in training and equipment. This plays a big part."

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"Next is to reevaluate your pay scale, compensation, benefits package, etc. These things matter. As candidates finish up their tech schooling and begin to look around and weigh out their options, they will pass you by if you're not competitive. That's why tonight's meeting is so important and we're trying to give you solutions to be more profitable and you can take the next step of reinvesting in your business, and you can take these steps to try and get more candidates for your work force."

"My last suggestion is to participate more. Participate in the Career Fairs at the Tech Schools, reach out to companies such as Hire a Vet or Work Force Alliance. We've had great success with Hire a Vet. We have a great Marine employee and Workforce Alliance, which is federally funded, is also a great program that will reimburse you 75% of the employee's salary for 90 days of employment."

All of this information will be available to all members via email soon.

Short Pays

Fogarty: *"On to our next subject. A few years ago, who would have thought about 'short pay'? Who would have thought of the idea of telling your customer the truth and charging them the short pay out of their pocket? A lot of shops got scared by that and it was fully understandable. Well, I can tell you that today, I know of quite a few shops that have said to themselves, 'we're done with taking hits to our checkbooks' and 'we're done losing'." Fogarty then asked for a show of hands to see how many in the room have charged customers the short pay or the difference between what the insurance company paid and what it actually cost to repair the vehicle. Many hands were raised.*

"The next guest I will be introducing, in my opinion, has the best customer relations presentation to her customers that walk into her shop." He then brought up Joann Dawley who along with her husband Bill, own Dawley Collision & Custom in Waterford, CT. Said Joann, "In your folder this evening, you will find a document that we use. I have every customer read, asking them questions and then sign it. I explain to them that their insurance company usually treats us like their medical insurance, and they understand that. They ask me questions and I don't always know those answers until the end of their repairs. I compare it to the medical terms they know, in-network and out-of-network and that helps to make it better to understand. We started doing this in January 2022. Since then, we have had only 3 customers who were not comfortable signing the document and not knowing what they would be charged. We let our customers know that we will fix their vehicle by OEM standards. We charge them our posted labor rate. Nothing below what we have posted. On every estimate that we provide to insurance company, we have 3 things listed right at the top of those estimates:

1. Our posted labor rates
2. This rate is not negotiable
3. Customer will be charged any rate not met



MC Dave Fogarty (R)
Joanne Dawley
Dawley's Collision & Customer

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*She continued, "The best part of this is the customer isn't upset with our shop. **They are upset with their insurance company.** We instruct our customers how to file a complaint and assist them with the follow through."*

Fogarty: What is your percentage of short pays?

Dawley: I would say probably about 70%

Forgarty: When you talk about your posted labor rate, is there a reason why you charge everyone your posted labor rate on every invoice? What if they don't pay?

Dawley: The posted labor rate is the rate that we do business at. The customer pays the difference. We have had no problems having our customers pay the difference after they have signed our form.

Fogarty: When the customer comes in your door, and you're going to write an estimate, do you inform your customer ahead of time that this is your posted labor rate, and this is what you will be charged? You let them know that the insurance company may not pay that rate and that they're responsible for the difference BEFORE you write the estimate?

Dawley: Yes. Even if the customer brings in an insurance appraisal. Every customer is informed and must sign our form before we do anything. To sum this all up, we started with our forms in January, we had 3 customers refuse to sign our agreement and we are booked out 6 weeks. We have plenty of work. And we get paid!

Now that you've been doing this for almost a year, and the appraisers know that you will be charging your customers the difference, do you find that the appraisers are willing to work with you more?

Dawley: YES! Some of our customers have complained that they were charged the difference and their insurance companies have reimbursed them.

DOI Complaints

Returning to the podium, VP Ashley brought us through the steps to filing a complaint with the Department of Insurance (DOI). She said, *"The easiest way to file a complaint is the do a google search for '**Connecticut department of insurance complaint form**'. This will take you right to the DOI Website and give you the option to file a complaint. There are only 2 ways to file a complaint that I would recommend. I would use '**Send an email**' if you are filing on behalf of yourself as the shop owner. Most of the time I would use '**submit a complaint online**' using the form provided after you click on the link. The reason that I use this method is because I help our customers file complaints. Once done, make a couple of copies and give one to the customer for their records and put the second copy in your customers' file. Your customer will be the one to receive any correspondence from the DOI and advise them to make sure they forward any of that correspondence to you. Make sure to email a copy of that and any further correspondence to Heather, the biggest reason is that we have ongoing conversations with the DOI and it's frustrating when the DOI says that they haven't received any complaints!"*

Ashley then took everyone through the Complaint Form step-by-step so everyone attending was aware of what to do to be able to help their customers.

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Charging for Pre-Storage

Fogarty then brought up Kevin Clavette from Ace Auto Body in Hartford to offer up his solution to charging storage.

"If you want to collect storage, first off, get off the DRP programs. Otherwise, you will NEVER collect," says Clavette. He listed the following steps they use:

- Have SOPs. When the vehicle arrives have Standard Operating Procedures.
- Customer has authorized repairs. Authorization form
- Full tear down
- Blueprint repairs.
- Write your estimate.
- Notify the insurance carrier that the car is ready for inspection.
- Use email so there is a record of the request. Let them know about the charges that are being requested.
- For us, what we do in our email signature is wording letting the carrier know that after so many days from that email, they will be charged.
- Always request an in-person inspection.
- STOP sending insurance companies photos! There is no reason for that.
- Make sure you record the date that you sent your supplement and the date the appraiser came in.
- Make sure to put the claim number in the subject line.
- After 24 hours, make a call to the claims department.
- Let them know if the charges are paid, the customer will not be able to pick up their vehicle. Put their carrier in the position of having that uncomfortable conversation with their insured!

Now, let's talk about getting paid by the insurance company. There's only one number that matters and that's the final total of the repairs that you performed.

We start the conversation on solutions with our ABAC President, Bob Amendola.



BOD Kevin Clavette
Ace Auto Body

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Solutions

Bob Amendola: *"It's really simple. Everyone should evaluate what they are charging to see if it's reasonable. The only way to do that is to sit down with your accountant to find out what that number is for you to make a profit and be successful. Then set your rates on your computer and post them on your wall and that number is what you need to put on every estimate that you write. It's that simple. I didn't say it was easy but if you don't do this, our industry will never move forward. Make your changes quarterly to suit your business model. But, if you don't know what your number is, you don't stand a chance. It's like not having a budget."*



BOD Randy Serkey
A&R Auto Body Torrington

Randy Serkey: *"I've been in your position for 54 years and I know what you're going through every day. In September of 2016 I decided that I wasn't going to take 'short pay' anymore. I decided to sue the insurance company. I got my ass kicked losing 4 out of the first 6 claims against them. It was a very humbling experience. My attorney, David Torrey and I went back, with our tail between our legs and I said to him, 'I don't like to lose.' He said, 'neither do I' and we returned and rewrote the book on litigation. We took the next 26 cases, to the current day, and won 92% of them against the best legal system that they could throw at you. They don't like to lose either and they'll use house money to fight you. At the end of those 32 cases and 6 years of my life I've come to the realization that the industry is fighting the wrong battle. We need a change of our mindset. I'm going to give you 5 words. Write them down. **WHO DO YOU WORK FOR?** 'The answer is quite simple. You work for the **CUSTOMER!**"*

At this point Randy brought up a few slides on the screen to go over litigation. He covered the customer repair contract, 3rd party interference, the customer's registration, and the customer's leverage when negotiating with an insurance company.

Tony Ferraiolo: *We are a service driven business. We are a service department. You should look at a 'service' department and see what they do since there is no 3rd party interference. We must start forgetting about that 3rd party interference and start billing the customer and then assisting them to get reimbursed after the job is completed. There is a 2-letter word that is the most powerful word in our English language. That word is **NO!** For many years in this industry, and we've seemed to forget that word. **USE IT!***



BOD Tony Ferraiolo
A&R Body Specialty - Wallingford

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Let's talk about invoices. Parts invoices. Sublet invoices.

Ferraiolo: *By Connecticut law, you do not have to furnish parts invoices. Period! But many of us do. Why? Because we want to be open and show them we are doing the work. However, you DO NOT have to show the insurance companies what you paid for that part or what you paid for that sublet work. It's none of their business. Your cost of those items is between you and the vendor that you chose to do business with and that was part of your negotiating a price for those parts and services through that vendor. Your markup is none of the insurers' concern since you need to make a fair gross profit. Keeping sublet in mind, our shop provides our own sublet invoice as a courtesy to the insurance company.*



**BOD's Tony Cavallaro JR
&
Joey Cavallaro**

Speaking to attendees next were Tony Cavallaro Jr and Joey Cavallaro. Tony started with, "We hired a company to come in and assist us with revamping our whole system. It's helped us increase the amount of work that we do and it's not so much that we're fixing more cars, but we are writing better sheets and we are collecting on everything that we do. We built teams; we have a front-end customer service representative; we have a back-end estimator, and we have a parts person. If you're a small shop, you can have just one team. We've heard a lot tonight about admin and the admin in today's repair is just as important as doing the repair itself. Don't be shy to hire that person or those people because they will pay for their salary many times over by catching and correcting mistakes that you yourself would have made by trying to do everything alone and not having that time."

Tony Jr. and Joey then went over all of the processes they use at Airport Rd Auto Body including what each person is responsible for.

Stepping to the podium was **Bill Denya**. "First of all, thanks for coming tonight. I know it's getting late, and I want to be brief but what a tremendous show of support tonight having close to 200 attendees! We're at a pivotal time in history right now. Every one of your shops is busy. You know what that means? It means you can call your neighbor's business. You can call the mechanical shop that's replacing wheel bearings, brakes, exhaust, etc. and ask them what their labor rate is. The tax base in your town is the same tax base whether you're a mechanical shop or collision repair center."

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The techs are getting paid the same. Your insurance is a little bit more due to hazardous material that you have in your shop. So, when you do your labor rate survey, you need to believe in yourself. Don't believe things that have happened over the years. Post your labor rate.

- Signed authorizations – a MUST for every customer repair
- Photos – The insurance companies want photos; you tell them NO. State law – send an appeal assignment.
- Email – Use this for all your correspondence with the insurance company and customers. This provides documentation.
- Appraiser appointments – All appraisers must make an appointment to see the vehicle. When you go see your doctor, you need to make an appointment, right? Our shops are not emergency rooms. The appointment is all about respect.
- Write the appraisal on the vehicle – R&I's – List our labor rate if you want to put I on there, this way here, the appraiser is already aware
- Depending on the appraiser, no photos until they've negotiated a plan.
- You are responsible if there are any issues resulting in a collision or fatality due to using aftermarket parts, hoods, bumpers, reinforcements, etc.
- If the appraiser becomes difficult to deal with and gives you a hard time, write a letter to human resources at their company. Why? Because they are not complying with regulations.
- Allow the appraiser to go write the estimate with your technician. The tech knows what he needs to do to repair the car properly. He can educate the appraiser so that he doesn't miss that .1 or .2 or .3 hours on your estimate. It all adds up.

"You all have the opportunity, if necessary, to litigate in court; it can be a complex process or a simple process. When you get it right, your percentages of being successful increase exponentially," said Denya.

Back to the podium, John Parese offered, *"Dave Fogarty did a tremendous job getting everyone here this evening and his enthusiasm it unmatched. We all owe him a big debt of gratitude, no one more than me. Use these solutions in your business. Everything we discussed this evening was to help you help yourselves. Only YOU can make the changes necessary to affect your industry!"*

Members left with new solutions to consider. All attendees were provided with a folder containing the following documents:

- Appraisers Code of Ethics
- DMV Letter Pre-Storage
- Updike, Kelly & Spellacy, P.C. Labor Rate Document

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- Sample Labor Rate Survey
- Dawley Letter to Customers Collecting Short Pay
- DOI Complaint Demo
- Blumenthal document confirming insurance companies are not entitled to sublet invoice etc.
- BWP- Repair Contract, Direction to Pay, Assignment for Money Due, Small Claims Checklist Etc.
- Check Stamp (copy)

All the above documents can be found on the ABAC Website: abaconn.org

This ended the ABAC's night of education. Once again proving how important it is to be a member of this association!

Before concluding our meeting for the evening, Bob reminded everyone, ***"Our future in this industry depends on all of us working hard to find solutions. I recommend that you reach out to your friends and colleagues who are shop owners and invite them to join the Auto Body Association of Connecticut to help better their future to help better our industry. The knowledge that you obtain when you attend these meetings is so invaluable."***

Submitted by Don Cushing



Record Breaking ABAC Attendance!
Over 200 members and guests fill the room at The Woodwinds in Branford

It's time to stop insurance companies from meddling in auto body repair.



John M. Parese is a partner at the New Haven-based firm of Buckley Wynne & Parese

Cheating consumers to improve insurance profits is not a new problem. Insurance companies have long pressured auto body repair shops to compromise quality and safety. Advances in vehicle technologies and other market forces, however, have exacerbated the danger this presents to our motoring public. Legislation is sorely needed to help protect us and our families.

Insurers are responsible for indemnifying insureds after a loss. That basically means that consumers pay premiums, and in the event of a crash, the insurer covers the cost of repairs. Coverage includes the right to a safe and proper repair. Since so many insurance companies are competing for business, it is impractical to reap profits from raising premiums. Profits must instead come from continuing to market and sell policies at discount premiums, only to cheat customers by paying less on claims.

How do they do it?

The way insurers pay less on claims is by establishing direct repair networks and otherwise asserting immense pressure on repair facilities to fix cars on the cheap – often contrary to the better judgment of the licensed repair professional and manufacturer guidelines. This can also be done by refusing to authorize reimbursement for necessary repair procedures or mandating the use of imitation repair parts that do not fit or function correctly. This is a serious problem because vehicle technologies (including advanced safety systems, and greater use of materials such as aluminum, magnesium, carbon fiber and advanced high strength steels) have given rise to a greater level of repair complexity and the need for new levels of information, knowledge, and skills. Most vehicle manufacturers have issued position statements on the importance of following recommended repair procedures and the dangers of using inferior parts, including warnings that such deviations may compromise the vehicle's warranty.

Every day here in Connecticut, we have non-licensed, non-trained repair people being directed by self-interested insurance companies wielding incredible power over the type of repairs being done. These pressures and dictates, which often implicate the very safety of the vehicle's occupants, are done with no risk of being held liable. Since the insurer did not and cannot fix the vehicle, it cannot and would not be legally responsible for a substandard repair that caused injury or death. Most consumers have no idea how scary this situation has become.

This past legislative session, the General Assembly took up a bill to prohibit outside interference from pressuring licensed repairers to cut corners on the quality and safety of repairs. Unfortunately, it did not pass.

It is my sincere hope that our state legislators will take up this issue again. Prohibiting outsiders from pressuring or forcing repair shops to deviate from proper repairs will protect the motoring public.

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In one instance in Texas, for example, repairs were not done consistent with procedures set by the original vehicle manufacturer. The result: a couple was trapped inside their vehicle while it was on fire. They were severely burned, resulting in a \$42 million dollar verdict. Legislation here in Connecticut is necessary to help avoid unnecessary tragedies such as this, and to ensure consumers get what they are entitled to: a safe repair.

Attorney John M. Parese is a partner at the New Haven-based firm of Buckley Wynne & Parese. He can be reached at 203-776-2278 or jparese@bwplaw.com.

Caliber, national nonprofits & AAG working to recruit, train new generation of technicians

The Caliber family of brands, alongside nonprofits TechForce Foundation and Learning Undeclared, have launched a pilot program to introduce high school students to the collision repair industry.

Throughout the pilot, which began in October and lasts through this month, students in Maryland and Texas learn about Caliber's Technician Apprentice Program (TAP) and participate in hands-on experiences in a live shop environment with Caliber auto body technicians. They're also going on tours, getting one-on-one demos, and participating in timed assembly challenges, remote control car racing, and more.

The entire automotive industry, including collision repair, has been [grappling with a shortage of technicians](#) for years that, according to TechForce, reached 232,000 in 2021. In collision alone, the demand was 35,000 techs while only 4,500 graduated. That makes programs like TAP and others more important than ever to recruit young talent.

TechForce and Learning Undeclared are participating in Caliber's pilot program through the "Collision Career Pit Stop" event series, which includes hands-on demonstrations and general educational content about collision repair technician careers.

Repairer Driven News asked Caliber for more details on what TAP specifically teaches technicians in training. They said apprentices learn the latest in automotive technology advancements, such as advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS); experience a safe and engaging work environment using state-of-the-art equipment and quality materials; and receive company-paid collision repair certifications, such as those offered through I-CAR.

Technical training includes:

- Repair planning and safety practices;
- Replacement and alignment of bolt-on panels;
- Plastic bumper and steel panel repair;
- Disassembly and reassembly of parts, trim and hardware;
- Corrosion protection, seam sealing and foams replacement;
- MIG welding and spot welding on steel panels;

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- Removal and replacement of weld-on panels;
- Frame set-up and light sheet metal structural pulls; and
- Electrical and mechanical repair basics.

Although TAP is a proprietary Caliber training program, TechForce Chief Marketing and Strategy Officer Mike Pressendo told RDN companies that support the nonprofit's charitable mission have access to its social network, which includes more than 15,000 next-gen technicians that are active in the community.

"Those companies can promote internships and apprenticeships via our community and that is where students sign up for these opportunities as well as the more than \$1.5 million in scholarships we award annually," he said. "Part of the benefit to supporting TechForce is that we have relationships with hundreds of schools and thousands of students who look to us to connect them with these types of opportunities and experiences."

TechForce CEO Jennifer Maher said the partnership with Caliber and Learning Undeclared "is a great way to leverage the expertise of our complementary nonprofits combined with Caliber's commitment to workforce development." "Using our techforce.org platform to promote and engage students, together, we're introducing them to rewarding careers in collision repair, while leaving a lasting imprint on our communities," she said.

Caliber President and CEO Mark Sanders said the company is "committed to inspiring all teammates to reach their full potential." "Through our Technician Apprentice Program, we are influencing the next generation of auto body techs and helping students achieve their goals, as well uncover career opportunities, which they may not have previously considered, within Caliber's supportive culture," he said. "We are excited to leverage this partnership to expose even more students, teachers, and parents to Caliber and TAP."

Learning Undeclared CEO Brian Gaines added that "there's power in numbers, and this partnership will benefit thousands of students." "Hands-on learning experiences help open students' eyes to career possibilities and build excitement about the high-demand field of collision repair," he said.

Another recruitment and training effort underway is Automotive Apprentice Group (AAG)'s apprenticeships in which apprentices are compensated at a competitive wage and have no out-of-pocket expenses for training. The program recently expanded to the Dallas-Fort Worth area of Texas to address the technician shortage there. An estimated 30% of Dallas-Fort Worth auto service bays are going unused because of a lack of service technicians and nearly 2,000 technician job openings are posted on area job recruitment sites, according to AAG.

Through the program, AAG matches auto dealership and truck center operations with area residents for two years of hands-on training and a U.S. Department of Labor certification upon completion.

AAG initially launched in Louisville, Kentucky then expanded to Cincinnati and Indianapolis. Jobs that apprentices land after completing the program pay, on average, an initial annual salary of nearly \$65,000.

"The fundamental premise of the Australian apprentice model, and certainly of AAG, is straightforward," said AAG President Joe Atkinson. "It's connecting career-minded people such as recent high school graduates or those currently working unrewarding jobs with career opportunities in need of motivated, skilled people. The key to success is taking a holistic approach to the challenges of identifying, vetting, teaching, hiring, and retaining good, long-term, committed career technicians."

To learn more, visit aagamerica.com.

Source: www.RepairerDrivenNews.com - Article by Lurah Lowery

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