

Ocean State Automotive Contest draws Coventry team



Jessica Selby-Daily Times

Andrew Jennings and Robert McConnell work on one of the bugged cars at the competition. Each team was tested in several areas of automotive maintenance.

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COVENTRY — They are still just learning the tricks of the trade, but last week they had to perform like professionals.

Andrew Jennings and Robert McConnell, seniors enrolled in the automotive program at the Coventry High School Regional Career and Technical Center, had to diagnose a malfunctioning motor, analyze an alignment matter, identify a faulty brake system and detect the electrical troubleshooting system on several vehicles. The tasks were all part of the annual Ocean State Automotive Contest, which was held at the New England Institute of Technology Automotive facility last Fri-

day.

Each year the competition is hosted by New England Technical Automotive Center in conjunction with the Rhode Island Automobile Association. Representatives from both agencies as well as instructors from the local career and technical centers that will be participating come together prior to the competition and determine what the student teams will be asked to repair or at least diagnose at the competition. Then they bug several vehicles prior to the competition so that the students have actual vehicles to work on.

The two-student team from Coventry was among a dozen or so from other Career and Technical schools around the state that had

been invited to perform in the annual competition this year.

Each of those two-person teams had to travel through eight stations trying to detect the malfunctions on the vehicles at each station. They had approximately 15 minutes to complete the tasks assigned to them at each station.

Virgilio Tavares, assistant professor and assistant department chair of automotive technologies at the New England Institute of Technology, helped to design the challenges in the competition. He said that the student teams were asked to examine a brake station, an engine repair station, two electrical stations and a vocabulary and research station, just

See **AUTOMOTIVE**, Page A-2

Automotive competition brings on the heat

Continued from Page A-1

to name a few.

He said that the stations were set up to challenge the students, but were intended to be based on information that all of the students in the competition should have received prior knowledge of. He said that is why the competition organizers meet with faculty from each of the participating career centers prior to the competition to make sure that all of the students have covered all of the information that will be directed at them prior to coming to the competition.

Despite that preparation angle, there is still a degree of expertise required for the competition, Tavares said, and therefore the competition is open only to seniors.

James Thomson, the automotive instructor from the Coventry High School Regional Career and Technical Center, said that

he opened up the competition to all of his seniors this year, but in the end invited Andrew Jennings and Robert McConnell.

Thomson said that those two students are his top two students in the program this year.

The students completed most of the tasks at the competition, but admitted that the challenges were just that, "challenging."

"I knew it was going to be hard, but I honestly didn't think that all of the tasks were going to be this tough," McConnell said. "Some of the stations were very involved."

At the alignment station, the students had to use a computer alignment system, which measures to 100,000th of an inch, to determine the alignment errors on a bugged vehicle.

McConnell said that the task was "really" tough. He said that his school's program has the equipment to do that task, but admits that it is no where as

new as the system that was provided to them at the New England Tech competition.

At the information station, McConnell said that he and his partner had to search 10 different automotive systems on the Internet looking for specifications and potential remedies on faulty vehicles. That, he said, was not as challenging, but was still nerve wracking because of the time limits placed on each station.

Although McConnell and Jennings did not place in the competition, they still said that they enjoyed participating in the event and learned a lot about the industry in talking with the professionals at the competition.

The winners of the competition received full scholarships for one term to New England Tech Automotive program, a prize valuing is \$18,525.00. Second and Third place winners also received scholarships, those valued at \$1,500.