Fayetteville Technical Community College’s (FTCC) new associate degree program in advanced collision repair is aimed at preparing its students to fill the more than 180,000 open positions in the auto collision industry. The program is the result of a partnership between national industry leaders, the Inter-Industry Conference for Automotive Collision Repair (I-CAR), and the North Carolina Business Committee for Education.

According to the nonprofit Collision Repair Education Foundation (CRER), the collision industry is facing a critical shortage, with too few qualified graduates filling jobs left open by an aging technician population.

Hearing of this labor shortage from local car dealers and body shops, FTCC president Dr. Larry Keen sought input from the auto collision industry in January. North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE) executive director Sue Breckenridge credits FTCC’s leadership for engaging with the industry with an open mind. “President Keen and his administration approached the table and said, ‘Tell us what you need,'” says Breckenridge. “The result is a program that offers students guaranteed job readiness.” In fact, Gerber Collision and Glass Vice President for Business Development Steve McGlothlin has already committed to hiring the program’s first graduates.

This month’s Featured Educator is Paul Gage. A technical training consultant with 22 years of experience, Gage is the director of the new I-CAR Program at FTCC. Described by his students as an animated and engaging teacher, Gage has developed a program that serves as a shining example of a highly successful business-education partnership.

Are you one of North Carolina’s best spaces for innovation? Click here to enter for your chance to be a speaker at the 2015 Forum!
Paul Gage (this month’s featured educator), a technical training consultant with 22 years of experience, leads I-CAR. Using his knowledge of the industry and his connections with industry experts, insurers, collision shop operators, and manufacturers, Gage developed a program that assures a well-trained, adaptable workforce.

Students in the I-CAR program will be trained in structural and non-structural analysis, damage repair, mechanical and electrical components, plastics and adhesives, painting and refinishing techniques, and damage analysis and estimating. This training will help address the essential need for state-of-the-art professional car repair. Beyond the technical training, the traditional courses such as English, mathematics and humanities have been customized for the program so they include interpersonal skills, contract negotiations, geometric angles (for front suspensions), and customer service and conflict avoidance.

The first class of 17 students, known as Team One, began the program back in August 2014. Set to graduate in 2016, Team One includes soldiers from the National Guard, recent high school graduates, and displaced workers seeking to retrain. The rolling enrollment supports transitioning military personnel by adding a class of as many as 20 students every eight weeks until the program reaches its 160-student capacity. Meanwhile, the rolling graduation provides employers job-ready candidates on an ongoing basis.

FTCC is located in Cumberland County, where the local government is partnering to support the program’s development. The county’s commissioners have invested $3 million in the property where the innovative I-Car program will ultimately be housed. As a collaboration between state and local government, industry, and educational leadership, this project has created a new pathway for education and industry to work together to solve skills gap issues within industry by training and developing training and educational solutions based on the curriculum/certifications required by the industry.

Interested in learning about more ways North Carolina’s companies and communities are innovating to compete in a future of accelerating everything? Join leaders and learners from across North Carolina this February 9-10 at the 30th Annual Emerging Issues Forum: Innovation Reconstructed.
Do you know a teacher who is working hard to help students succeed? Let us know, and s/he could be featured in the next education issue!