

# McPherson College Offers Premier Degree In Automotive Restoration

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With a 35-year history, national celebrity endorsement and a program unlike any other in the world, the Automotive Restoration Program at McPherson College has garnered well-deserved attention.

McPherson College is the only four-year accredited college to offer a bachelor's degree in automotive restoration technology.

Bob Knechel, executive director of the Collectors Foundation, said this emphasis on liberal arts means that McPherson College produces well-rounded graduates. They not only have technical knowledge of classic cars, but can also deal with other aspects of the business such as writing, accounting or management and can contribute to arts and culture in their community as well.

"It's the best of both worlds – they learn to work with their heads as well as their hands," Knechel said.

The restoration program at McPherson College isn't about hot rods, custom jobs and performance racers, but rather on authentic restoration – bringing vehicles back to the condition they were in when they first rolled out from the manufacturer.

With a four-year degree, graduates of the McPherson College program are uniquely equipped with the broad knowledge base, expert research tools and the technical skills necessary for a career at a museum, an existing restoration shop or starting their own business.

The program drew the attention of late night talk show host Jay Leno, known for his own large collection of classic cars. Leno established the Fred J. Duesenberg scholarship in 1997 and a scholarship in partnership with Popular Mechanics a year later.

In a 2007 featured video on his website – Jay Leno's Garage – Leno said that it was harder to find young people who knew about classic cars, but that McPherson College was the place to learn.

"The nice thing is, you get a head start on everyone else in the business because you have an actual degree," Leno said.

The program started in 1976 after a local entrepreneur – Gaines H. "Smokey" Billue donated \$1.5 million into a trust and a \$236,000 antique automobile collection to the school.

Since then, the college's restoration program has appeared on the television show "My Classic Car", participated in the History Channel's Great Race, and were the centerpiece of the 2001 Mystic Seaport "By Land and By Sea" historic car show. The college's Model T build team acts as student ambassadors and advocates for the program as they demonstrate their automotive skills assembling a running Model T from parts in less than 10 minutes. Their current record is 7:04.

Prominent classic car organizations have contributed to the Automotive Restoration Program through the years, including internships and a \$100,000 grants through Mercedes-Benz USA. The Collectors Foundation of Traverse City, Mich., has also contributed more than \$240,000 to fund automotive restoration scholarship, and June 2010 announced an additional five-year commitment for another \$200,000.

Starting in 2011, the Pebble Beach Company Foundation announced scholarships totaling up to \$20,000 annually for three students enrolled in the automotive restoration program at the college. The scholarships are named in honor of legendary race car driver Phil Hill. Also in 2011, an educational partnership with LeMay – America’s Car Museum was established.

The educational opportunities at the college have also continued to expand with the debut of a new motorcycle restoration technology major, offered for the first time in the fall 2010 semester.

“It’s a growing, enthusiastic field for the hobby,” said Brian Martin, director of restoration advancement, of the new major. “The size and affordability of restoring historic motorcycles opens up a window that the current car market has closed to a lot of hobbyists.”

Students applying to the program must be accepted to both the college and to the Automotive Restoration Department. Being accepted to the program requires a portfolio including résumé, a personal essay, letters of recommendation and an optional photo journal.

The program has numerous endowed scholarships as well as general fund scholarships that students may apply for. Campus visits are welcome and can be arranged through the college admissions office at 1-800-365-7402. The program’s websites are at [www.mcpherson.edu/autorestitution](http://www.mcpherson.edu/autorestitution) and [www.facebook.com/MCautorestitution](http://www.facebook.com/MCautorestitution).