

College loses one, gains another

Automotive instructor retires after 33 years

By Kathryn Burke

The Goodland Star-News
After 33 1/2 years of grease, transmissions and countless students, Tom Purvis, auto technology instructor at the Northwest Kansas Technical College, has hung up his wrench.

"I loved what I did," said Purvis, dressed in a stain-free sailboat shirt and shorts befitting a man retired. Purvis started his career as a mechanic at a young age, learning to fix cars with his father Ernest. His father and grandfather were mechanics, he said, so naturally, he followed in their footsteps.

After he graduated from the tech college in 1969, he filled out a form that outlined goals for students. One of his goals was to come back to the school some day as an instructor.

"Somebody must have been paying attention," he said, and in December of 1972, he got his teaching job.

Before coming back to school, Purvis worked at the Kump Motor Co., the Ford dealership in Oberlin, as service manager.

Purvis started teaching at the same time as Gary Ginther, who retired five years ago, and the two worked in a program for handicapped and disabled students.

He moved up when others retired. Purvis said the program was set up differently then, and he was as-



Tom Purvis

signed to the second-year classes at first.

"The biggest obstacle was teacher certification," he said, adding that he needed 18 hours to start off and five more every three years.

While he didn't need a teaching degree, he did need to take certain courses. He said as a young man interested in mechanics, he didn't like studying much, so the courses were tough.

The program has changed formats, now set up for four 16-week blocks that cover 16 months.

When the course changed to the block system, Purvis said, he took over transmissions and clutches

Instructor remembers college fun and hardships

In his 33 1/2 years of working at the Northwest Kansas Technical College, Tom Purvis has heard it all.

Students are expected to be in class every day, he said, but one year a truant student turned in a three-page report explaining his absence.

Purvis said the student claimed to have been abducted by aliens.

"I think he believed it," the ex-teacher added with a chuckle.

Another student was always late to class, so he parked in the handicapped parking space.

Purvis said he found the template for the handicapped symbol, and his fellow instructors and students painted the insignia on the hood of the student's truck.

He said the already beat-up pickup wasn't damaged by the paint.

Through the years, Purvis gained the nickname Barney (Rubble). While he isn't sure exactly where that came from, it stuck, and his is still called Barney today.

He claims he gained 100 pounds over the past 33 years.

While teaching at the college has been a laugh, Purvis said, he remembers some sad moments, too. He said taking students to funerals of classmates has been the hardest.

The school lost about one student every two years, he said, mostly in car accidents.

"You're kind of responsible for them," Purvis said, adding that he will miss the job.

because he had experience in the field. He has been teaching that part ever since.

Purvis said he has picked up tricks and has learned his craft through repetition, but cars are always changing.

"It went from bolts and nuts to electronics," he said. "You can't say it any easier than that."

He had to work to stay ahead of the technology so his students could get the best education. Today, he said, much of what he taught is available on electronic media.

When he started teaching, he said, "We hired people to clean erasers."

They had one lift for cars, compared to the eight or nine now in the

shop. He said the amount of electronic equipment that has been added to the program is staggering.

Teaching students, he said, makes you take on many roles, sometimes mothering those on their first time away from home. He said he is proud of his students and keeps in touch with some.

"We have a graduate in every

dealership in town," he said.

Retirement, he said, means he has to leave a big part of his life behind. His wife, Patti, was at the college 18 years, working as events coordinator until she quit last year, and three of the couple's children went through the school.

Tracey, his oldest, took engineering and then came back to teach for seven years. J.D. took auto body and now works at Tombstone Paint and Body in Burlington. Mande McClung, the youngest, went to cosmetology school and now works at a salon in Hays. Rande Hendrich, Mande's twin, went to Colby Community College and now lives in Dallas.

For the future, Purvis said he wants to work again. He has looked into doing some delivery work for a recreational vehicle company and is interested in the new energy center.

"I'm not ready to hang it up yet," he said.

He plans to keep sharp on his automotive skills, working on family and friend's cars out of his home.

And while he asked the administration at the college to remember him if they need any part-time help, he is definitely retired.

"It's a milestone," he said. "I had a good retirement party."

"I had been in school for 46 years."

After 10 years, former teacher comes back to college

Instructor to teach transmissions

By Kathryn Burke

The Goodland Star-News
A former student has returned to a teaching position at the Northwest Kansas Technical College.

Curt Goodwin said he went through the auto technology program in 1979, taught at the school for 10 years and now is back again.

Goodwin fills an empty spot left by Tom Purvis, who taught transmissions at the college for 33 1/2 years.

"He was my instructor when I went to school here," Goodwin said.

He said he grew up in Flagler, Colo. After graduating from high school, he came here and went into the auto mechanics program.

Goodwin went to work at J and J Parts in Flagler, Colo., for four years before coming back to the school in 1984 to teach engine performance and automotive electronics.

In 1994, he went out on his own, opening the Corner Garage in Goodland.

"We did everything there," he said, adding he did a lot of transmission work.

Goodwin closed down the shop last year and became service manager for Vince's GM Center in Burlington.

His hands-on experience in the field helps him teach, he said.

"I've seen a lot of (car) problems," he said, adding he has worked on everything from BMWs to Chevys.

Goodwin says he's excited about the job and has already jumped in. "I felt like it was an opportunity for sure," he said. "I just like to fix stuff."

Students go through the program in 16-week sections or blocks, he said, adding that he still needs some time to get in the groove of teaching. Goodwin said has no plans for big changes, but he wants to incorporate more electronic diagnostics into the program.

He wants to look at developing new ideas and changing along with technology.

"I've always been kind of cutting-edge," he said, adding that he hopes to bring that quality into the classroom.

The school has changed since he was a teacher 10 years ago, he said, from a trade school to a technical college.

The school can award associates degrees, an option they didn't have the first time he taught.

Transmissions have changed, too.

"There were no electronics when I started," he said, adding that



Back to class

Curt Goodwin (above left) helped Lane Linthacum reassemble a transmission in the shop at the Northwest Kansas Technical College. Goodwin (right photo) asked Linthacum to pick up tools and parts from the nearby table.

Photos by Kathryn Burke/The Goodland Star-News

chalk boards at the school have been replaced by electronic media.

"PowerPoint just thrills me," Goodwin said.

He said he always planned to come back to spend the last few years of his career teaching. As it is, he hopes will be spending the last

20 years at the college.

"Jobs over here don't come open that often," he said.

Goodwin only has good things to

say about his predecessor, and thinks his experience and teaching skills will be hard to replace.

"Mr. Purvis was on his game,"

Goodwin said. "They are hard shoes to fill."

"I'll never be Tom, but I do steal some of his jokes."