

Positive reinforcement

EVIT Automotive Technology students get advanced driver training at Ford Driving Skills for Life

by Stephanie Jarnagan / photos: Sam VarnHagen / Ford Motor Company Fund

Nearly 100 students from the EVIT (East Valley Institute of Technology) Automotive Technology program received advanced driver training behind the wheels of Ford Mustangs and other Ford vehicles as part of the Ford Driving Skills for Life program, which helps newly licensed teen drivers gain additional practice and safe driving skills.

Ford Motor Company Fund, the philanthropic arm of Ford, and the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) hosted the program with 10 free half-day sessions at the Phoenix Fire Training Academy, November 9-13. The kickoff session on November 9 was reserved exclusively for EVIT students.

"EVIT has worked with Ford to bring automotive students out to the program for the past several years, with the exception of the two pandemic

years, and it's something our students look forward to attending," said Ricardo Mota, EVIT automotive instructor. "We invite the top students in our program to attend and get first-hand experience driving with professional instructors who are adept at vehicle handling and road safety."

Vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death for novice teen drivers, and they are twice as likely as adult drivers to be in a fatal crash. According to NHTSA, an estimated 42,915 people died in motor vehicle crashes in 2021—the most since 2005.

Crash deaths rose by 10.5 percent in 2021 compared to the year before, making it the largest-ever annual percentage increase in the nearly five-decade history of the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS).

Now in its 19th year, Ford Driving Skills for Life pairs newly licensed or permitted drivers with professional driving instructors for hands-on driving training. Developed by Ford Fund, GHSA and a panel of safety experts, the program addresses issues and critical factors that influence crashes, including vehicle handling, hazard recognition, speed and space management, distracted driving and impaired driving. The free training clinics focus on necessary skills for safe driving beyond what is learned in traditional driver education courses.

"I really enjoyed the program, especially the distracted driving course where we had the music playing loud, passengers yelling at us and we were given our phones to text and drive with on a coned course to demonstrate what you should not do when driving," said Gabe Coronado, 18, a senior from Desert Ridge High School in Mesa, who is also enrolled in the Automotive Technology program at EVIT.

In Arizona, 509 young drivers (ages 15-20) were involved in fatal crashes between 2016-2020,

according to NHTSA's FARS. Teen drivers are nearly four times as likely to be involved in a car crash than drivers age 20 and older, and the rate of young male drivers involved in deadly crashes is more than twice that of young female drivers.

"Our hands-on lessons reinforce the importance of developing safe driving habits while clearly demonstrating, through their own driving on a closed course, the risks involved with driving impaired or distracted," said Mike Speck, a manager of Ford Driving Skills for Life. "We enjoy having the EVIT students out every year because they are enthusiastic about future careers in the automotive industry, and they already have an appreciation for vehicles and the technology in today's vehicles that make them safer."

The Ford Driving Skills for Life team and GHSA recommend that parents of teen drivers positively impact their teen driver's safety by doing the following:

- Follow Your State's Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL), which phases in driving privileges as teens gain more experience. Research confirms the effectiveness of GDL laws in reducing fatalities involving teen drivers.

- Schedule regular driving practice with your teen, even after they're licensed to drive without supervision. Teens whose parents actively monitor their driving are less likely to be involved in a crash and to engage in risky behaviors such as speeding, driving impaired or distracted, and not buckling up.

- Collaborate with your teen to create and enforce a parent-teen driving agreement (PTDA) that clearly states the rules and the consequences for violating them. Posting the PTDA in a location where everyone will see it, such as on the refrigerator or adjacent to the car keys, will help to reinforce its importance.

"Teen drivers are more likely than any other age group to be involved in a fatal crash due to inexperience and maturity," said GHSA senior director of external engagement Pam Shadel Fischer, a nationally recognized teen safe driving expert and co-author of Not So Fast: Parenting Your Teen Through the Dangers of Driving.

"With programs like Ford Driving Skills for Life, we are reaching both new drivers and their parents with information that helps reduce risky driving behaviors." ■

WANT YOUR TEEN TO PARTICIPATE?

In 2023, the Ford Driving Skills for Life program is celebrating its 20th anniversary training teen drivers and their parents/guardians across the country and around the world. The program typically returns to Arizona every fall. To be among the first to get notified when registration opens for the free hands-on training sessions, visit drivingskillsforlife.com and click on Get Notified under the Training tab.

JOIN THE ONLINE ACADEMY

Have a teen preparing to drive now? Ford Driving Skills for Life also offers online driver training curriculum. Register for free access online at drivingskillsforlife.com by clicking on The Academy under the Training tab.

