

# Co-op gives Stouffville student tools of the trade

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Tammy Davidson is going against the flow.

The 18-year-old Stouffville District Secondary School Grade 12 student is one of 50 students taking part in the school's co-operative education program, which gives teens the chance to spend every second afternoon working at a job they might eventually pursue as a career.

But rather than heading out to an office or a workplace traditionally open to women, Tammy chose Stouffville's Firestone Auto Centre as her placement site last September.

Now in her third year as an auto mechanics student at SDSS, Tammy hopes to enroll in Centennial College's auto mechanics program when she graduates.

And she says her experience at Firestone was just the icing on the cake in terms of making her decision.

"I wanted to find out what mechanics would be like before taking it at college," says Tammy, whose father is a mechanic with Spademan Waste Disposal. "And this has shown me that I like it, so I'm going to stay with it."

Tammy enrolled in her school's basic level auto mechanic's program in Grade 10 "as a filler course."

"At first I didn't know what to expect. There were just four girls there. But by the end of the year, I found that I liked it."

She followed it up by taking auto electrical in Grade 11, and this year has been used as a teacher's assistant in her Grade 12 course.



Photo/BRUCE STAPLEY

Stouffville District Secondary School student Tammy Davidson checks a monitor while working on a co-operative education placement at Stouffville's Firestone Auto Centre. Tammy, 18, has been studying auto mechanics since Grade 10 and hopes to become a mechanic some day.

The Firestone co-op placement says she decided to choose the car repair centre after talking to a male student who went the same route last year.

"He had liked it, so I talked to Steve Langlois (Firestone manager.) He was a little surprised when he found out I was a girl."

And while Tammy has been pressed into service repairing tires, changing oil, and helping with brake repairs, Mr. Langlois says he has been pleased with both Tammy's work and the co-op concept.

"I can't complain at all," he offers. "It's a great program, they get to see if they like the trade. We had one co-op student go on to become foreman of one of our shops in Toronto."

Mr. Langlois says he could even see Tammy someday

becoming an auto technician, "punching the buttons on the scope machine, then telling the mechanics what to change or repair."

Mary Francis-Juk, coordinator of the co-op program at SDSS, feels that Tammy's non-conformist placement might just set a precedent in school.

"It's the first time we've had a female in a non-traditional placement. I'm very pleased, because there is a need for more females in the trades. Right now, they make up only about four per cent."

Tammy admits some customers are a little surprised when they see her in the shop, and that people often ask her why she wants to be a mechanic.

"I could never handle a desk job, or being on the phone a lot. And most people just don't want to give tech a try."

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