

Fueling the Future: 20 Years of Building Cars and Careers

This marks 20 years that students in East Syracuse Minoa's Spartan Garage have been turning wrenches and breathing new life into classic cars—one restoration at a time. Each year, they rebuild or assemble a vehicle, then raffle it off to keep the program running and to fuel student scholarships.

More than 50 Years of Mechanics

While the high school program dates back more than 50 years, it changed dramatically in 2004. Automotive technology teacher Ryan Beckley had a vision: give students ownership of their builds. Until then, students restored customer vehicles, but projects often stalled when owners ran out of funds.

Determined to create a more consistent, hands-on learning experience, the program raised enough money to purchase a 1965 Shelby Cobra replica kit. The students built it and raffled it off in 2006, launching the Spartan Garage legacy.

Since then, hundreds of students have built everything from hot rods to roadsters. They've worked on and raffled three classic trucks along with muscle cars like a '68 Dodge Coronet Super Bee, Chevy Camaros ('67, '68), and Ford Mustangs ('65, '69). Nearly five years ago, the program came full circle when former Spartan Garage student Mike Edmunds returned as the program's teacher.

A Plum Crazy Purple '72 Plymouth Barracuda

This year's showstopper is a 1972 Plymouth Barracuda with a modern twist—a fuel-injected 392 HEMI from a 2018 Challenger R/T paired with a 5-speed manual.

But what really makes this restoration special is its color: Plum Crazy Purple, chosen in memory of student Connor Saletta's father, Mike, who recently lost his battle with cancer. It was his favorite color.

"A lot of old Mopar fans will love this car," said student Leland Virag. "Underneath, it's modern, but when you close the hood, it looks just

like an old Barracuda. This will be a really fun street drive, and it will be cool to show people what we've done."

Hands-on Classes Keep Students in School

Much of the work on the raffle car happens outside of class. Students also gain hands-on experience working on staff and personal vehicles, and seniors participate in off-site automotive internships. For many, this program is the highlight of their high school experience.

"When I wake up for school, I know I'm going to be doing something I enjoy and that I look forward to doing every day," Leland said.

Twin brothers Jax and Drake Kingsbury's family even moved to the ESM School District specifically for the high school's automotive program.

"It amazes me that they have this," said Drake. "I couldn't believe it when I first heard about it. It's not a traditional class—you don't sit down with a book. We have a garage with lifts, tools and everything."

"I like working on cars, and this is my favorite class," Jax added. "It makes me excited to come to school."

Starting this May, the Spartan Garage will undergo renovations with new flooring, garage doors and other upgrades to create a safer, more efficient space. When students return in the fall, they'll be stepping into a refreshed garage—ready to roll up their sleeves and restore the next raffle car.

Want to support the program and take a shot at winning the '72 Barracuda? Get your raffle tickets by July 20. Help keep this one-of-a-kind learning experience alive for the next generation of

automotive enthusiasts. The car will also be at area shows including Syracuse Nationals July 18-20, 2025.

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