

## Cincinnati State, Kenwood Dealer Group announce 10-year partnership

By Brian Planalp, Staff Reporter  
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Kenwood Dealer Group, Greater Cincinnati's second-largest auto group, has gifted more than \$1.2 million to Cincinnati State Technical and Community College to help bridge a growing labor gap of auto technicians, especially those with the expertise to service hybrid and electric vehicles.

"Today's auto technician is a highly skilled professional. Gone are the days when you can learn to be a mechanic in a back alley garage," Dave Fay, director of fixed operations for Kenwood Dealer Group, said at a press event Nov. 16.

Cincinnati State will rename its automotive program the Kenwood Dealer Group School of Automotive Technology.

"The auto trade is going to change a lot over the next 50 years," said Chuck Butler, professor and automotive program chair at Cincinnati State. "This partnership is going to allow us to take our program from where we are to where we need to be."

Bob Reichert, CEO of Kenwood Dealer Group, which has 14 dealerships and nearly 1,200 employees, described it as "a groundbreaking, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" for his business. Kenwood Dealer Group is the region's 18th-largest private company, according to *Courier* research, with \$987 million in 2022 revenue.

The gift will augur a 10-year partnership, with funds used to create scholarships, expand offerings, fund facility upgrades and purchase new hybrid and electric vehicles to supplement the program's 30 vehicles on-hand so students can learn from state-of-the-art machinery.

"That's one of the biggest things I see with some of these schools – they have a lot of cars, but they're from the '90s," Fay told the *Business Courier*. "So what we want to do is start upgrading that fleet so the students that are here are working on the newest technologies, and when they get to the dealer, its not the first time they're seeing these new things."



Kenwood Auto Group has announced a 10-year partnership Kenwood Dealer Group's Bob Reichert (center right) and Dave Fay (center left) announced a 10-year partnership with Cincinnati State to train the next generation of auto technicians. with Cincinnati State to train the next generation of auto technicians.

The automotive industry doesn't have enough workers to service the 290 million cars and trucks on American roads.



Kenwood Dealer Group's Bob Reichert (center right) and Dave Fay (center left) announced the 10-year partnership with Cincinnati State to train the next generation of auto technicians.

The National Auto Dealers Association estimates the industry needs to replace 76,000 technicians every year just to keep up with retirements and new job demand, but U.S. career and technical colleges and training programs produce just half that.

Cincinnati State's program currently enrolls around 75 students. It is expected to expand to around 100 students in the first year of the new partnership.

"We will attract more students by raising the awareness of just how lucrative a career in the automotive field can be," Fay said. "A tenured certified auto tech has exceptional earning potential without a decade of student debt to go along with it."

The students Kenwood Dealer Group recruits to Cincinnati State will be free to get jobs anywhere they choose afterward.

"I think Cincinnati State is the most underappreciated educational institution in the city," Reichert said. "I'm proud and excited that we can be part of a program that can prepare these techs for a rewarding career no matter where they're employed."

A spokesperson said Cincinnati State receives generous support in different forms from many local companies, but the partnership with Kenwood Dealer Group is groundbreaking in its comprehensiveness, and the college sees it as a model for other programs.

"I think Cincinnati State has been that secret on the hill for the last half century, and maybe today people are gonna find out about it," Butler said.