

# Blind auto mechanic employs deaf apprentice

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COTTAGE GROVE, Ore. — Larry Woody shares his automotive know-how twice a week with his apprentice, though he's never seen the young man nor spoken directly to him.

Woody is blind. His apprentice is deaf.

"So much of it is done by feel anyway," he said. "I use my hands to see what I'm doing now."

Woody lost his sight five years ago when a truck blew across the median and drove over his Toyota Celica. The wreck nearly killed him.

With more than 30 years of fixing, racing and restoring cars, Woody vowed to return to work. With help from his wife, Della, and the Oregon Commission for the Blind, he achieved that goal less than a year after the wreck.

The 46-year-old mechanic recently bought his own shop, D & D Foreign Automotive, and hired Otto Shima, 17, an apprentice from Cottage Grove High School.

Interpreter J.J. Johansson accompanies Shima, who was born deaf, on his twice-weekly visits to the shop. Her hands fly as she translates what Woody says. She then turns and voices Shima's reply.

They recently leaned under the open hood of a truck in need of clutch parts.

Woody felt among boxes until he grasped the right one. Removing a hose, he ran his fingers along it, telling Shima what role it played in the engine.

"He's just another student, and I'm just another guy trying to help him," Woody said. "I kinda put the disabilities aside."

Shima said that Woody



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**Mechanic Larry Woody, right, who is blind, instructs apprentice Otto Shima, left, who is deaf, with the help of interpreter J.J. Johansson.**

inspires him because "he never gives up."

Woody has learned Braille and how to navigate with the aid of a red-tipped cane.

About a year after his wreck, he was behind the wheel of a race car. Taking direction from a friend through an earphone, he drove about 30 mph around the Cottage Grove Speedway track at least 25 times.

Woody walks without hesitation through his shop. He handles the paperwork with the help of a talking computer. He still changes fuel lines, adjusts carburetors and tinkers on his 1968 El Camino.

"Some people wake up and say, 'Oh, man, I've gotta go to work,'" he said. "I get up and say, 'Oh man, I get to go to work.'"