

Greetings from ESM Spartan Garage,

I wanted to take a moment to thank everyone for your continued support over the years. As we begin our 14th Annual Car Raffle, we reflect on years past. What a ride? Both literally and figuratively! Without the support we have from our community, this project would never become a reality.

It is with the utmost appreciation and dedication that I introduce you to this years' build.

Quite sincerely, Thank-you. -- Ryan J. Beckley

High School Students Restoring '55 Thunderbird to Raffle

Born in 1955, the "baby bird" being restored by high school students will be more than ready to leave the nest by the July 21 raffle drawing.

In this case, the "nest" is the two-bay Spartan Garage right inside East Syracuse Minoa Central High School. This is the 14th car the upstate New York automotive technology students have built or restored and then raffled to fund the following year's project.

The nickname "baby bird" represents the first generation Ford Thunderbirds that were built as two-seaters. Students are restoring a 1955 Thunderbird, the first-year for the model. It has a 292 cubic-inch V8 automatic engine. Painted an original color called "Thunderbird Blue" the car will also have a removable white hardtop and sport wide whitewalls with aluminum spoke wheels.

"We just happen to work on cars because they're cool and they fit in the garage. But the skills and abilities students develop in here can transfer to numerous trades. Cars, boats, trains or planes—it doesn't matter—it's all a similar process," explained automotive technology teacher Ryan Beckley.

The raffle car previously belonged to Stan Neu, a former Manlius, NY resident. His wife, Diane, loves the first generation Thunderbirds.

"It was a great project for my son and I. We did a lot of work on it over 20 years, but life got in the way," Mr. Neu explained. Preparing a move to Florida, Mr. Neu donated the Thunderbird to the Spartan Garage program so students could finish what he started.

"I'm a real believer in this auto tech program and I've been impressed with the students. As a teacher, Ryan instills passion, experience and interest in his students," explained Mr. Neu.

The students definitely appreciate the program. "I look forward to going to class. It's something different than normal schoolwork. For me it's easier to learn with my hands than through a textbook," explained high school senior Buddy Wolfe.

"This program definitely helped me decide my career path. I've only gotten into cars the last few years. I found I really enjoy it and it's what I want to do," explained senior Tim Crouse.

"Most high schools don't even have a program where you can work on cars. I love how we restore a car every year and get a complete experience from it. We also work on teachers' cars too so we're learning both the modern technology and the older technology," said senior Wayne O'Neill.

Students work on about 275 vehicles a year, most belonging to high school staff. "Many schools programs have a fleet of their own vehicles and they do simulated repairs. We do live work including

tires, batteries, brakes, oil changes and light mechanical work. Each repair is unique and that car goes back out on the road so we have a high level of responsibility,” Mr. Beckley explained.

“There is a social aspect and a camaraderie to working on cars, much like being in a sports program. It’s a journey. It’s finding parts and meeting people and doing the work throughout the process,” Mr. Neu said. “By donating the car, it feels good to be some small part of the program.”

The ESM Spartan Garage Booster Club is a group of dedicated parents that assists with the raffle. The raffle funds the following year’s project vehicle. Proceeds also support graduating students who are motivated and driven, whether they are headed to the military, workforce, or college.

The program depends on the many partnerships the high school program has developed through the years. Students benefit from hands-on internships as well as field trips. Many local businesses help with the annual raffle car project. This year the Spartan Garage also appreciated Mr. Neu’s Thunderbird donation. Among the many partners, East Syracuse Chevrolet paints the vehicle in their body shop. Ace Auto Trim helps with re-upholstering. Ray Miller builds the transmission. Saves Auto Body donates paint.

Spartan Garage students display and talk about the vehicle and their work at car shows sponsored by numerous car clubs throughout the spring and early summer. The Thunderbird will be at the Syracuse Nationals, the Northeast’s largest car show, from July 19-21 at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse, NY.

Raffle ticket information is available on the Spartan Garage’s website at www.spartangarage.org or by contacting technology teacher Ryan Beckley at rbeckley@esmschools.org or 315-434-3313.

To order by mail, raffle tickets are \$10 each, 3 for \$25 or 15 for \$100. Make checks payable to ESM Spartan Garage Booster Club or “ESM SGBC” and mail to: East Syracuse Minoa CHS, Auto Tech. Dept. Attn. Ryan Beckley, 6400 Fremont Rd., East Syracuse, NY 13057. The raffle drawing is July 21.