

THE MOTORSPORTS ISSUE

HAGERTY

MAY | JUNE 2019 // HAGERTY.COM



NASCAR

FROM MOONSHINE TO PRIME TIME



Krukowski is applying the knowledge his dad gave him, the lessons learned at Penn College, and the practical skills he's picking up daily at the Creative Workshop.

RPM Foundation provides scholarships, formal training, and mentorship to the next generation of automotive, motorcycle, and marine restorers and preservationists. Learn more at RPM.Foundation.

LIFETIME LEARNER

Boyhood experiences and genuine curiosity are Michael Krukowski's keys to success.

BY ANY MEASURE, MICHAEL KRUKOWSKI had a perfect upbringing for a kid who loves cars. His father was a car nut, and the two made regular weekend trips to swap meets and car shows. When Krukowski was 10, his dad opened a collision repair shop near the family home in Fairfax Station, Virginia, and it wasn't long before his father began teaching him how to bend panels, weld, and refinish.

These days, 20-year-old Krukowski recognizes that his boyhood experiences are the exception rather than the rule among young people aspiring to get into the restoration profession. But he has some advice: A background in cars isn't everything, and in some cases, what you know can actually hurt you.

About half of Krukowski's classmates in the collision, repair, and refinishing vocational program at Chantilly High School had

never really worked on anything mechanical before. It was the same story after he graduated and enrolled in the two-year automotive restoration program at Pennsylvania College of Technology.

"At school, I found that a background in cars only gives someone a good base to start from. I had classmates who thought they were farther ahead than they really were, and they came off as arrogant. That attitude can impede self-improvement, especially when it comes to learning a new way of doing something."

In other words, if you're seeking the education and experience to land a dream job in classic-car restoration, check your ego at the garage door. And, Krukowski adds, get involved with people and organizations that want to see you succeed.

"The RPM Foundation really helped the restoration program and its students at Penn College," he says. "It organized field trips to area museums and car events and provided gap funding for students away from home. It also helped with transportation and rooming costs for students volunteering at shows and concours events."

Krukowski seized every opportunity provided by RPM, and his hunger to absorb and learn all he could about a given subject

helped raise his stock in the eyes of his professors. When Jason Wenig, a longtime RPM donor and owner of the Creative Workshop, came calling in 2018 to fill an entry-level junior technician position at his prestigious shop in Dania, Florida, Krukowski's name came up first.

"Because of the early work with my dad, I've always had a knack for metal fabrication," Krukowski says. "But now I'm learning about the mechanical end of things and the intricacies of assembly. I've discovered the joy of taking a box of parts and a bare shell and turning it all into a car that can move under its own power."

As the youngest member of a small restoration team, Krukowski finds that the challenge of working on elite-level exotics and one-of-a-kind classics continues to inspire him. "I really don't believe a background in cars is as critical as a person's motivation to learn," he says. "I'm always excited when something new comes through the door because of my interest in the stories vehicles can tell. I love the research involved in restoration almost as much as the physical labor. For me, the fascination in cars is how they're a link to history and a window into experiences I never had."—*Bob Butz* **editor@hagerty.com**



AMERICA'S AUTOMOTIVE *Trust*

RPM Foundation is the educational arm of America's Automotive Trust.