

Safety First: Elks Lodge Donates Goggles To MTC Students

By KATE ELIZABETH QUERAM

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HARRISONBURG — For most students heading back to school, supply must-haves include things like pencils, pens and notebooks.

But for students enrolled in vocational or technical classes at Massanutten Technical Center, the most important back-to-school item is a pair of safety goggles.

Almost every one of the school's 20 career programs — including welding, collision repair and electricity — requires students to don the specs for safety, according to Marianne LaRocco, spokeswoman for MTC. "Even in cosmetology, you have to wear safety glasses because you're working with bleach," LaRocco said.

Because glasses are a must-have, MTC has always bought and given them to students at no charge. But for the past three years, specs for the entire student body have been donated by the Harrisonburg Elks Lodge, as part of the statewide Virginia Elks Safety Glasses Project.

"It's an ongoing expense for us, and the Elks have

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Harrisonburg Elks Lodge member Page Sencindiver hands out safety glasses to students in Randy Ryman's electricity class at Massanutten Technical Center on Thursday morning.

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Goggles Project Began In '08

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provided some really nice safety glasses," said Marshall Price, director of MTC. " We hope it continues."

The project, which began in summer 2008, was the brainchild of Price and Bob Hinkle, a member of the Staunton Elks lodge.

Hinkle approached Price to see if the center was in need of scholarships for the upcoming school year, Price said.

“ I had suggested ... doing something that is really needed by us each year. And statewide, for vocational education, everybody has to have safety glasses,” he said.

In the project's first year, the Virginia Elks donated about 3,000 pairs of glasses to 10 technical schools, including 700 pairs to MTC. By the end of this year, they'll have handed out roughly 20,000 — 2,200 of which stayed here in Harrisonburg.

Eight hundred of those were dropped off at MTC Thursday by Harrisonburg Elks member Page Sencindiver, who drove the boxes over in his sport utility vehicle and stayed to hand some out to a morning electricity class.

Though students said they appreciated not having to pay for the specs — in the shape of sporty sunglasses, with black frames and a discreet “ Virginia Elks” tag on the left lens — the best part was that they weren't the typical oversized, scuba- mask goggles.

“ They're pretty good,” said 15- year- old Adam Shank, a sophomore at Turner Ashby High School. “ The ones you have to strap to your face leave the red marks. These are better.”

Meeting the needs of students, and expanding the project to more vocational and technical schools, is the entire point, according to Hinkle.

“ There's a lot of kids who are not ever going to get to college, but they still have an impact on our communities,” he said. “ This is a way of getting some benefit to them.”

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