

RESIDUAL VALUES

Insights & Opinions from Automotive Industry Leaders



“The industry needs qualified techs to help fill the pipeline with more young people who want to pursue the profession.”

- Jennifer Maher

Executive Director
TechForce Foundation

Interview with Jennifer Maher

What’s your backstory?

I was born in upstate New York, and our family moved every three years as my father climbed the corporate ladder. As a result, I got very good at making new friends quickly. We moved to Arizona, where I attended high school, and then went to Arizona State. I’ve had roots here ever since.

You earned a degree in Political Science with a concentration in Asian studies, and you speak Chinese.

I’ve always loved travel, international cultures, language and affairs. I had taken French throughout high school, so I wanted to push my limits in college, and opted for Chinese, which I believed would become one of the dominant business languages.

I spent two summers in mainland China, including the summer of 1989 when I had to evacuate after the Tiananmen Square uprising. I dreamed of either doing international trade or government protocol, but when I graduated, I couldn’t find anyone wanting to hire a woman to work in China. My pursuit of an international career was derailed, so I leveraged the event production skills learned from running the student

government political events in college. That helped me gain an entry level position handling meetings and events for Marriott Corp.

How did your career path go from event planning to serving in automotive/ transportation-related charitable organizations?

At Marriott, I learned that I liked working “with” Corporate America but not “for” Corporate America, and that I preferred using my skills to do good in the world. I first moved into the nonprofit sector when my local YMCA asked me to serve on its Board of Directors, and then asked me if I’d consider a professional position with their organization. I worked for the YMCA at the local and national levels for 10 years.

After that, I was hooked, and have dedicated my life to finding charitable missions and causes that I believe in, and working to make a positive impact. I’ve enjoyed working with numerous blue chip charities. When I was introduced to TechForce, I immediately recognized my passion for helping young people discover an education and career pathway that fits them. I’ve become an advocate for career exploration and workforce development.



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What are a few of the things that you've learned about generosity over the past 27 years?

Most people want to and are willing to help. You just have to ask and give them easy ways to contribute. Cash donations are extremely important. No money, no mission. But I also value and embrace the other contributions people and companies can offer, which I call the 5 Stars:

- Money
- In-Kind Products and Services
- Marketing Muscle
- Volunteerism / Time and Talents
- Networking and Introductions

All of those are valuable and important to deepening and strengthening relationships. And in the end, it's 100% about relationships and creating win/win experiences.

How large is the gap between the future needs of the automotive industry and the availability of technicians trained to address those needs?

Based on Bureau of Labor statistics for the auto / diesel / collision industries, TechForce estimates that we need 125,000 new entrant techs each year, just to keep up with demand in those three sectors. But tech schools are only graduating 57,000 a year, and desperate recruiters are throwing money and

tools at these future techs, hoping to land one.

The industry needs qualified techs to help fill the pipeline with more young people who want to pursue the profession. We need to help those in the training pipeline to avoid self-doubt and financial stress that can derail their graduation. And we need a nonprofit, like TechForce, to support these future techs throughout their career journey, connecting them to the resources they need to succeed.

Our biggest challenge is that companies don't always want to invest in the solution; they'll invest only in the end of the funnel where they hire a trained tech. But that doesn't work. The industry needs to invest in the entire pipeline, from start to finish.

What are the main reasons why this skilled labor gap exists?

The main reasons for the skilled labor gap include outdated stigmas held by parents or counselors who discourage their kids from entering the profession; failure of STEM programs to recognize automotive technology as a STEM career; and a fragmented industry that's unable to effectively offer a clear career path to Generation Z youth.

Unfortunately, too many employers limit new technicians to working on the lube rack, don't stand up for women techs, and apply old school management practices that turn off this new generation. The industry

also struggles with disparities involving issues like pay, access to tools and other economic issues that allow some techs to have great, solid middle-class jobs, while others are left floundering.

What is TechForce doing about this labor gap?

TechForce works to discover the positive, solid solutions and opportunities – including great schools, scholarships, internships, apprenticeships, on-the-job experiences, training programs, mentors, and entry level jobs – and helps future techs take advantage of those resources. We also shine a light on the employers and businesses that are effectively supporting technicians, helping to provide solutions and are dedicated to their long-term success. We find companies – large and small— that want to walk the talk and champion the technician workforce. Through their commitment, all boats rise.

TechForce's mission is to champion the community of future and working techs. We're here to help them achieve the education and career of their dreams by showcasing and reframing the profession; through hands-on experiences to ignite and build the passion for the industry and career, by providing scholarships and grants to those with financial need to obtain their technical education. We're also building a peer-network that serves as a one-stop-shop for future and working techs to connect to all the resources they need to be successful.



Do the big automotive companies manage and promote their own technical training programs?

Yes, there are a ton of companies, associations and schools – for profit and nonprofit – that offer technical training programs, and TechForce intends to work with them ALL. As a nonprofit with the charitable mission of helping students succeed, our job is to ensure they can find any and all resources out there to become trained, qualified technicians. We always want to know about quality training programs and schools, so we can connect students and let them individually decide what's best for them.

How has COVID affected the TechForce mission over the past year? Longer-term, how might it affect career aspirations?

COVID hurt most nonprofits across the world, as many companies and individuals either halted donations or shifted to healthcare, food banks, etc. TechForce had a handful of corporate partners pause giving for 2020 due to the pandemic, but we expect they'll be back in 2021. We've also picked up some new supporters who, more than ever, recognized technicians as essential workers and that we need them to keep the food, equipment and supplies moving throughout the country.

I'm proud to say that TechForce tightened its belt aggressively in 2020 and had to pull back on some projects, but we never furloughed a single employee and we're able to address 2021 with all hands on deck.

Longer term, the need and respect for "essential workers" – in which auto / diesel techs are clearly included – has been spotlighted by COVID, and I'm hoping that this will open the eyes of more young people as to the job security, demand and opportunities available in this career. At TechForce, we often say these are skills that allow you to live and work anywhere, to enjoy solid, middle-class compensation, and can't be outsourced or shipped overseas. And they are in high demand.

Does TechForce have any affiliation or informal partnership with the Mike Rowe WORKS Foundation?

We have an informal relationship in that TechForce – when it was formerly called the Universal Technical Institute Foundation – did donate funds to support Mike Rowe's Work Ethics scholarships. We applaud everything Mike Rowe and his Foundation have done to advance the conversation about the importance of skilled trades, challenging our country's stigmas, and the absurdity of educating kids for jobs that no longer exist. We would love to have a formal relationship with Mike Rowe's

WORKS, and hope that they're aware of TechForce and our leadership in the auto / diesel / collision technician space. We'd welcome anyone who could help me broker that strategic alliance.

In what ways has it been an advantage or disadvantage to be a woman working in a male dominated industry?

The advantage is that I stick out like a sore thumb in my red dress at a trucking convention, and that I can bluntly say things like how we need to start talking to 52% of the population (women) if we truly want to solve the tech shortage.

In fact, I've been delighted in how wonderful this industry has been to me. I came in as a newbie in 2014, and have never felt disadvantaged as a woman in an executive role. However, I'm well aware that this may not always be the case for the female technicians whom I represent, knowing they often do face more challenges in having to deal with many of the stigmas, old-school chauvinists, or feeling they need to prove themselves as better and stronger than their male counterparts.

But it's also exciting to know that women bring additional skill sets and talents to an industry that needs them. So it's exciting times, and I love the work we do with active women and men in promoting "Women Techs Rock," which is our program to diversify the profession.



What makes you a life-long fan of Arizona?

You never have to shovel sunshine, and I don't have to deal with humidity, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis or blizzards....only the occasional haboob (dust storm).

I escape every summer to the state's 'best kept secret,' the White Mountains of eastern Arizona, where I enjoy the cooler air and pine trees. Phoenix is the fifth largest city in the U.S., and yet a relatively "small state" feeling. It's been good to me, but I do miss the hustle and bustle of the east coast, at times.

Any insights into your personal life?

I've been married 25 years, and have two kids, aged 18 and 20. I like to play golf, travel the globe, and go sailing. I'm constantly curious and eager to learn new things, and a huge theatre, Broadway, and West End buff.

Any words of advice for young people interested in exploring a technical career, who get push-back from "white collar" career parents?

Tell your parents it's no longer a blue-collar but a NEW collar career. STEM (Science, Technology,

Engineering and Math) is the future, and cars today are computers on wheels. The transportation industry isn't going anywhere, and it's just becoming more sophisticated, computerized and needs smart, skilled professionals.

Today's parents are often GenXers who grew up in the "me" generation, but today's young people are in the "You Do You" generation, meaning 'do' what fits you and is important to you – not what other people push onto you. So figure out your interests and your wiring, or what makes you tick. If you enjoy problem-solving, working with your hands, fixing things and if keeping America moving is 'you'... then this may be the right career. Let TechForce help you explore and pursue that pathway.

Jennifer Maher Biography

Jennifer Maher currently serves as CEO/Executive Director of TechForce Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting students to and through their technical education and into careers as technicians for the transportation industry.

Jennifer is a 27-year veteran in the nonprofit industry, having personally negotiated and secured more than \$100 million in strategic alliances with corporate partners, ranging from Disney, JCPenney, PepsiCo, KFC, NASCAR and IndyCar Racing to UnitedHealthcare, Brooks Brothers, ESPN, UAW-GM and Kimberly-Clark Corporation. She has served on the senior leadership team for Make-A-Wish of America and spent 10 years with YMCA, eight at YMCA of the USA and 2 at Valley of the Sun.

