

David Lee, 19, LAKEWOOD

During the middle of his career at Lakewood High School, David Lee recognized it was time to get more serious about his studies. Too many friends and relatives were traveling down the wrong path, and he didn't want to join them. So he started showing up for class. He stopped smoking. And this year, he's a freshman with plans to earn his associate degree through Tri-C's automotive technology program.

Ask Lee why he settled on auto tech, and he explains in practical terms.

"My whole life, I've taken the bus," he said. "I told myself, I'm going to get an education and get a nice car so I don't have to take the bus anymore. I have a cousin who's a mechanic. This is just a lucrative field."

Lee took a couple of summer classes, but now he's a full-time student. His goals for the semester: Find a job, earn straight A's, "get my body in better shape" — he's a regular in the weight room at the recreation center — and find a steady girlfriend.

If that sounds like a lot to tackle, Lee says it's all doable. "You just work at it day by day," he says.

Lee says his biggest concern about college was that he'd heard the teachers don't care whether or not students do well. His experience so far has been just the opposite, he says. When they realize students are serious about learning, they'll go above and beyond.

"The teachers will help you succeed," he said. "They want you to succeed."

