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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – July 6, 2011

PCC Auto student wins gold medal at SkillsUSA national competition

PUEBLO – Months of practicing his presentation and delivery paid off big time for Pueblo Community College student Jonah Castillo recently when he won the first-place gold medal in the Automotive Service Technology "Job Skills Demonstration A" category at the SkillsUSA National Conference held at Kemper Arena in Kansas City, MO.

Jonah competed on June 22 and learned he was the gold medalist during an awards banquet two evenings later. The Pueblo native did his demonstration on an automobile starter, explaining how the various parts work and comparing a starter to the heart of a human.

He had practiced and rehearsed relentlessly since October with Auto Tech Chair Robert Maez and Auto instructor John Cain. Two-time national gold medalist and PCC graduate Frank Cowgill also worked with Jonah, who is in his second year at PCC and was competing in SkillsUSA for the first time.

He qualified for nationals by winning the gold medal in state competition held in April. But despite winning state, Jonah's presentation was changed dramatically for nationals.

"Robert basically revised the entire thing and we even added a chart to go with it," Castillo noted. "Leading up to nationals, we met almost every day to practice the presentation."

Accompanying him at the national conference were Maez and Auto instructor James Cordova.

Jonah is 22 years old, married and very active in the Victory World Outreach ministry that helps individuals overcome substance and alcohol addictions. A product of home schooling, he has earned all A's and two B's at PCC and expects to graduate in December.

PCC offers both Automotive Service Technology and Automotive Collision Technology programs that have associate degree, certificate and mini-certificate options, and the College provides the highly-technical skills that workers need for employment with auto dealerships, independent shops and other auto-related companies.

The Automotive Service Tech program prepares students for a wide range of careers in automotive maintenance and repair service as well as service writing and parts management. The Automotive Collision curriculum prepares them for careers in structural and non-structural collision repair, refinishing, estimating, upholstery, paint-less dent repair, glass installing, and custom body and refinishing.

Students can complete an associate degree in two years, but along the way they earn a new mini certificate in a specific competency area each semester. Skilled technicians are in great demand, and students can be hired for internships during their first semester at PCC, allowing them to earn a good income while also attending school.

PCC's automotive programs are accredited by the National Institute for Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF). They also offer paid apprenticeship for high school students through the Automotive Youth Education System (AYES) program.

For more information, contact Auto Service Technology Chair Robert Maez at (719) 549-3354.

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Founded in 1933, Pueblo Community College is a premier teaching institution focused on providing academic and service excellence to help its students acquire the 21st Century skills needed to better their lives. An educational and technological leader, PCC fosters economic development and utilizes strong partnerships in the communities it serves through its Pueblo, Fremont and Southwest campuses.