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Brandon Place

When an unemployed Brandon Place noticed Ross Island Sand & Gravel Co., during a bike ride in 2007, he could not have imagined his subsequent job inquiry would lead him to Kansas City, Mo., via Portland Community College, and an award in the 2010 National Skills USA Competition's Diesel Technology Contest.

Place, 30, a Tigard High School graduate who will finish his associate's degree in Diesel Technology this winter, realized his lack of a college degree was a dead end. He had recently married, he was out of a job and his naïveté had led to bad investments. In retrospect, Place said, that was the year, "the world became real to me."

Ross Island Sand & Gravel took a chance on their walk-in applicant; the 55-truck company hired Place to help out in the truck repair shop. "I worked there

preparing trucks for paint jobs, sweeping floors, watching over co-workers' shoulders, doing small repairs," he said.

In 2008 he learned of the Diesel Technology Program at Portland Community College and he saw an opportunity for himself. He asked his employer to change his schedule to graveyard. His boss was supportive and Place enrolled in the two-year degree program. Within a year of beginning his studies, Place began taking on more sophisticated repair assignments at work.

"One quarter at PCC, it was all brakes, and the next it was all about engines," he said. "Over time I was able to do more and more at work. I noticed my job getting easier."

Place, the father of a 16-month-old son, looks forward to advancing with



Ross Island Sand & Gravel. Even now he said the job has become self-managing. "On any given night, I have five to 10 engine, brake, and concrete delivery system repairs," he adds. "It says a lot that my company trusts me to get (the trucks) ready for the road the next day."

"The diesel engine has changed more in the last 15 years than (it has) since its invention," he said. "(Your PCC instructors) will drill you and make you pull your hair out, but in the end, you will know what you're doing, once you go out in the world, you will thank (them)."



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