

Documentary tells of overcoming obstacles

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Epsom — A documentary film crew trailed Jose Silva as he logged a Buick Riviera coupe into the lot of the Autosmith Car Company yesterday.

Last month, Silva became the first deaf person certified by the state to run auto inspections. Members of a technological college for students who are deaf or hard of hearing hope Silva's story is an inspiration to others.

Silva got word that he passed the state certification program Nov. 4.

"I got shivers, I was so excited," Silva said through an interpreter.

Silva will be featured in the last of the five-part series, "Achieving Goals," a production of the Rochester Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf in New York.

The videos, which previously highlighted doctors, athletes and entrepreneurs with hearing loss, are distributed to high schools and families to showcase professions chosen by those living with deafness.

Silva, a single father from Concord, will be part of a film also presenting a Miami Dolphins cheerleader and a shipbuilder from Mystic, Conn.

"These are unique professions," said David Conyer, executive producer of the series. "If you're deaf, it doesn't matter. You should set your sights on what you want to do."

Silva, 35, is the only deaf member of his family. He came to New Hampshire in 1996 from Boston and settled in as a mason, eventually buying a car from what was then called Capital Auto Mart in Concord.

After being laid off, Silva was in jeopardy of missing his monthly car payments. Managers of the Auto Mart took him on the payroll, employing him to detail their fleet.

"And I've been there for six years," said Silva, through an interpreter.

Silva moved with the company to Route 4 in Epsom, where the business changed its name to Autosmith Car Company.

During Silva's tenure, he picked up knowledge of engines and brakes and passed on his means of communication to his coworkers.

"He's basically a handyman," said business owner Ken Smith, who with Silva and other Autosmith employees invented their own personal sign language to converse with Silva. "He does a little bit of everything."

As an impromptu apprentice, Silva soon began servicing the used cars coming in for resale.

"I never really had much interest in cars until I got the job detailing and then I became fascinated," Silva said. "I decided that was my calling."

Conyer selected Silva for his series after hearing of a lecture panel Silva participated in during an October seminar in Manchester for a deaf and hard of hearing support group.

The films are part of a federal grant administered by the institute.

“This allows the deaf community to see role models who have real jobs,” said Conyer. “These aren’t all glamorous jobs, but they’re inspiration.”