The Automotive Technology Program began at SIU in January 1952. In 1953, L. D. Willey was hired to lead the Program, which he did until his retirement in 1975.

Mr. Willey’s persistent drive to promote the Program during its formative years established industry connections that resulted in numerous component donations and the hiring of graduates. It is because of many of these industry connections that the Program survived and flourished.

The foundation that Mr. Willey developed allowed SIU to be recognized as this nation’s premier automotive technology program.

Through support of alumni, this endowment was developed to recognize the SIU Automotive Technology outstanding student each year. The faculty select the student whose conduct and performance meets the following criteria, as Mr. Willey would have sought:

- Attitude toward work
- Ability to work with peers
- Motivation to achieve
- Enthusiasm to learn
- Class attendance
- Grade point average