



Media Release

TAYLORSVILLE AGRICULTURAL TEACHER WINS 2025 HARBOR FREIGHT TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS PRIZE FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Scottie Cook and Alexander Central High School Share \$50,000 Award

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TAYLORSVILLE, North Carolina — Scottie Cook, an agricultural education teacher from Taylorsville, North Carolina has been named a winner of the 2025 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence, winning \$15,000 for himself and \$35,000 for his school's program.

Cook, who teaches at Alexander Central High School, is one of 25 public high school skilled trades teachers across the United States who were surprised with the news that they had won. A total of \$1.5 million in cash prizes were awarded today.

"I'm passionate about creating a learning environment where students walk away with more than technical know-how—they gain real-world skills that make them employable and ready for whatever comes next," Cook wrote in his prize application.

- Cook has secured significant grant funding (including a \$64,000 state grant) to acquire modern, industry-grade equipment such as a CNC plasma table, CO₂ laser, sawmill, skid steer, and upgraded welding tools, greatly expanding student learning opportunities.
- Cook's is the only high school program in the U.S. to train agriculture students in the Safe Farm Steward Program, allowing them to evaluate local farm equipment for safety and help reduce hazards and accidents.
- Cook's students have achieved regional and state-level FFA honors, including a first-place state finish in 2024 for Agricultural Mechanics and Gator Wars teams.

The winners teach a variety of skilled trades, including construction, carpentry, welding, automotive, agricultural mechanics, advanced manufacturing, and industrial technology.

The prize, now in its ninth year, was created to recognize excellent high school skilled trades teachers, a group of educators who are frequently overlooked and underappreciated. As of today, over \$10 million has been awarded to more than 180 teachers and their programs through the prize. The mission of Harbor Freight Tools for Schools is to increase understanding, support and investment in skilled trades education in U.S. public high schools.

This year there are winners from 18 states, including: Arizona, California, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming. A full list of winners is [here](#).

The Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence was started in 2017 by Eric Smidt, owner and founder of Harbor Freight Tools.

“In recent years we have seen growing support for the expansion of skilled trades education in high schools,” Smidt said. “The skilled trades are experiencing significant labor shortages and these outstanding teachers are leading the way in developing a new generation of skilled trades professionals.”

“Through a rigorous application process, our prize winners shared their unique depth of experience and skill for teaching the skilled trades,” said Danny Corwin, executive director of Harbor Freight Tools for Schools. In addition to the cash awards, they will join a network of more than 150 previous winners working to help boost skilled trades education in their local communities and nationally.

This year there were more than 1,000 applications for the prize. The application process included three rounds of judging, each by an independent panel of experts from education, industry, nonprofits, and philanthropy.

The 25 winners and their programs will receive a total of \$1.5 million in cash prizes as follows:

Five Grand Prize Winners

Amount: \$100,000 each

(\$70,000 for their school’s skilled trades program and \$30,000 for the teacher)

Twenty Prize Winners

Amount: \$50,000 each

(\$35,000 for their school’s skilled trades program and \$15,000 for the teacher)

In some cases, due to school, district or state policy, the schools’ skilled trades programs will receive the entire prize winnings.

About Harbor Freight Tools for Schools

Harbor Freight Tools for Schools is a program of The Smidt Foundation, established by Harbor Freight Tools owner and founder Eric Smidt, to advance excellent skilled trades education in U.S. public high schools. With a deep respect for the dignity of these fields and for the intelligence and creativity of people who work with their hands, Harbor Freight Tools for Schools aims to drive a greater understanding of and investment in skilled trades education, believing that access to quality skilled trades education gives high school students pathways to graduation, opportunity, good jobs and a workforce our country needs. Harbor Freight Tools is a major supporter of the Harbor Freight Tools for Schools program. For more information, visit: HFTforschools.org

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