WELDING JOURNAL

APRIL 2026



Fresh Insights for Welding Educators

National Welding Month

IN THIS ISSUE: HANDLING HEAVY WELDMENTS ■ MEET AWS'S FUTURE LEADERS ■ SCHOOL PROFILES

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Forging Confidence: Girls Who Weld



Peter C. Daley
M.Ed./CWI
Welding instructor,
Hutchison High School

During the spring of 2022, I was a career and technical education (CTE) instructor taking a professional development class for continuing education credit. I was tasked with creating a project to augment our current program. It made me reflect on my own welding program, which served 100 students. I was looking through past years' rosters and realized the dearth of girls in my classes. Around the same time, I had read in the *Welding Journal* that women only make up 4% of the welding industry (Pascal, R., et al. 2022. Welding's arc toward change. *Welding Journal* 101(5): 32–36). It clicked in my head that this would be the focus for my project. Thus, the Girls Who Weld program was launched.

In researching similar initiatives around the country, I stumbled across an article by Samantha Farrugia. She created a Women Who Weld program in Detroit, Mich., and, fortuitously, she was offering a Zoom seminar on women in welding. Women from various industries were present. After hearing about ill-fitting personal protective equipment and different learning approaches, I realized I had to run this class differently. This led to further pedagogical study, phone calls, videos, and more reading on learning theory.

I decided to run the class in June. We met Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Hutchison High School in Fairbanks, Alaska, where I teach. I initially limited the class to 12 girls to maximize learning time and ensure quality instruction. In later years, I opened it up to 16. I flipped my approach to how I normally structure my welding processes, sequencing, and pacing: After the requisite safety training, we began with gas metal arc welding and plasma cutting in the first week. I did this intentionally to bolster confidence and success in the shop. In the second week, we transitioned to shielded metal arc welding and oxyacetylene cutting. The third week focused on a collaborative group project that benefited the community. In the final week, the girls fabricated personal projects.

In the inaugural year, we made four bicycle racks for the community of Fairbanks. In years two and three, we made large flower planters for the North Pole Library and North Pole High School, respectively. This past summer, we made a staple-style bike rack out of pipe with a cutout of the golden heart of Fairbanks in the center, which went all over the city. Watching the girls break into groups, coalesce, and delegate roles is something magical to behold. From print reading to layout, fitup, welding, grinding, and painting, these girls are learning skills that will take them well beyond my high school program.

Each day, we start with a female industry guest speaker. I reach out to female graduates who are pipefitters, electricians, operators, process technicians, mechanics, and engineers to share their career paths with students. This is the secret sauce that makes the class so unique. The girls start to envision themselves in those roles. They hear the women's testimonials and are encouraged to be bold and take the plunge. I also include a field trip as part of the class. We have gone to welding fabrication shops as well as Fort Knox Gold Mine. The trips inspire students when they see women welding and running huge equipment.

I am beyond overjoyed that I stepped up to the challenge to launch the summer Girls Who Weld Program. You should see the confidence when the students start the school year and end up showing up the boys. This truly has changed the way I teach. In fact, one of the girls from the original cohort is now a union pipefitter. She also changed my life by nominating me for Alaska Teacher of the Year, which I won in 2026. So, remember, teachers, we change lives one student at a time. The best part of all is that students change our lives, too! WJ

"I am beyond overjoyed that I stepped up to the challenge to launch the summer Girls Who Weld Program. You should see the confidence when the students start the school year and end up showing up the boys. This truly has changed the way I teach."

POINT OF VIEW



AWS Vice President J Jones gives a demonstration at the AWS Instructor's Institute.

The Importance of **Professional Development for Welding Instructors**

BY W. RICHARD POLANIN

A look at the evolving needs of welding educators and the programs helping them keep pace

Through 2029, the United States will need an estimated 320,500 new welding professionals (Ref. 1). Welding is foundational to the U.S. economy. It directly supports the construction of ships, steel-framed buildings, bridges, and critical infrastructure, and it indirectly sustains industries such as oil and gas, where processing equipment relies heavily on welded components. From transportation systems to telecommunication towers, nearly every part of our lives is impacted by welded products.

Meeting this workforce demand depends not only on recruiting new welders but also on ensuring they are properly trained. Today's welding professionals must master both fundamental welding techniques and emerging technologies, including automation and artificial intelligence (AI) in welding applications. Preparing students for this evolving field requires instructors who are highly skilled, current, and continually developing their own expertise.

Keeping Welding Instructors Current in a Rapidly Evolving Industry

Professional development for welding instructors is essential. Educators are the gatekeepers of the profession. They are responsible for equipping both new entrants and experienced welders with the knowledge, technical skills, and adaptability required by industry. As welding technologies advance, new

materials are introduced, and codes and standards evolve, instructors must remain at the forefront of these changes. Without ongoing instructor training, the workforce cannot remain competitive, safe, or aligned with industry needs.

Investing in welding instructor development is critical to ensuring a skilled, future-ready welding workforce.

But how can welding instructors stay current with the ongoing changes in the welding industry? Completion of a degree or experience in the welding industry may provide the foundational knowledge and skills for entry into welding education. However, the ever-changing technology and the needs of students require welding instructors to stay current with both welding and instructional technology.

The Transformation of Welding Education Postpandemic

In a 2024 AWS marketing survey conducted by Weld-Ed (The National Center for Welding Education and Training), industry representatives cited advanced waveform gas metal arc welding (GMAW) as a welding skill lacking for entry-level welders. However, only 55% of the instructors reported that advanced waveform GMAW is taught. There are other examples of industry experts reporting lacking skills in areas such as robots and collaborative robots, nonferrous materials and newer materials, and additive manufacturing, specifically wire arc additive manufacturing (WAAM).

Instructional technology has also changed. The COVID-19 pandemic's startling impact on the U.S. education system required innovative thinking from teachers and administrators. As we struggled with the pandemic, specific patterns in delivery methods and limitations in welding education emerged. Data analyzed by Weld-Ed from its April 2020 survey of 333 welding instructors showed that 93.3% or 308 schools were closed as a result of the pandemic.

As a result of school closures, 83.3% of the instructors were providing online instruction. However, 29% of the instructors reported that less than 50% of their students were participating in online instruction. In the follow-up 2021 Weld-Ed survey, instructors reported that only 50% of schools provided any education and training to prepare instructors to teach online.

In the Weld-Ed 2024 survey, participants indicated that schools were back to teaching in the classroom; however, online instruction remains a significant method used to supplement face-to-face delivery. This instructional technology has improved the ability of instructors to interact with students remotely, during periods of bad weather, and when they have unexpected absences from class.

Students of all generations commonly use technology in their daily lives and as an online aid to understand difficult concepts. The development of instruction for either in-person or online delivery requires the instructor to understand the fundamental ways humans learn. Often, welding instructors moving from industry to the classroom lack the education and training in learning theory and student learning preferences to develop effective and efficient lessons.

Given this gap, it is important to consider what kinds of professional development (PD) welding instructors currently receive and what they feel they need. How much PD is available to them? What types of PD are offered? And how do welding instructors want the PD to be delivered? Some insight into these questions was found in the recent Weld-Ed spring 2025 welding instructor survey. Instructors reported that they would prefer in-person PD, with 31% of the instructors preferring a full week of in-person PD and 35% preferring 2–3 days of in-person PD. Only 7% of the instructors surveyed preferred online instructor-led education and training.

In the 2024 survey, instructors were asked about the PD content they wanted to see, and 22% wanted to learn more about instructional design and teaching strategies, 18% were interested in advanced welding processes, and 12% wanted to learn more about welding metallurgy. These statistics are similar to data gathered in previous Weld-Ed surveys.

Investing in welding instructor development is critical to ensuring a skilled, future-ready welding workforce.

The data indicated that welding instructors overall are looking to remain current with both welding technology and instructional technology. But, funding and time constraints are limiting factors to continued PD. Fortunately, there are some options available for welding instructors.

Continuing Education Opportunities for Welding Instructors

The AWS Education and Training Department has developed both in-person and online courses to help instructors stay current with welding technology and understand the fundamentals of instructional design and teaching methods. AWS also continues to offer the Instructor's Institute, which is open to one welding instructor from each AWS District per year. The Instructor's Institute reviews new welding technology and teaching methods. AWS funds the cost of travel and attendance at the event.

AWS Education and Training has also developed a Train the Trainer course that covers welding techniques, welding technology, and teaching methods. The course is currently being further developed for



AWS Past President W. Richard Polanin (left) discussing hardness testing with instructors during a Weld-Ed professional development class.

delivery throughout the United States (see page 32 for more information).

As an AWS partner, The National Science Foundation-funded Weld-Ed program offers a suite of PD courses taught at community colleges and partner companies nationwide. These courses cover welding processes, metallurgy, robotics, codes and standards, instructional design and teaching methods, and nondestructive testing. The courses are generally taught in the summer but can be customized to fit local or regional educational needs. Currently, Weld-Ed is covering the lodging costs for the instructors attending the courses.

Other continuing education and training options exist through major welding equipment manufacturers at no or reduced cost to welding instructors. Lincoln Electric provides in-person continued education courses at its welding school in Cleveland, Ohio. Miller Electric and ESAB provide online resources for welding instructors. And there are a variety of online videos that describe welding techniques and processes. (However, there is also an abundance of poor video representations of welding and misinformation online. Welding instructors need to carefully review the information before recommending any online sources to their students for their own use.)

Conferences organized by Weld-Ed and AWS offer welding instructors the opportunity to hear from leaders from both industry and education. Conferences held at FABTECH, SkillsUSA, and regional events allow welding educators to learn about the most current welding processes and weld inspection methods. Professional development hours are given to educators who participate toward recertification as Certified Welding Educators or Certified Welding Inspectors.

Maximize Your AWS Membership

AWS membership provides networking opportunities at local Section meetings. Networking also allows welding instructors to observe and often to work in local welding and manufacturing facilities. Working or observing welding operations allows educators to take significant information back to their classrooms. Partnerships with local industry are vital to building a successful welding program.

AWS membership is free for welding students and should be encouraged by instructors, as it allows students the opportunity to attend Section meetings and build their own relationships with industry personnel. In the Weld-Ed 2025 study, only 41% of welding instructors reported that their students were AWS members. It is our responsibility as AWS members to ensure information about the benefits of membership is disseminated to welding educators.

Conclusion

Continuing education for welding instructors takes many forms, from formal classroom and laboratory training to informal online professional development. Because the welding industry plays a critical role in the strength and growth of the U.S. economy, it depends on a highly skilled and well-educated workforce. To meet this need, welding instructors must continually update their knowledge and technical skills. Ongoing professional development ensures that instructors can deliver the latest welding technologies and apply the most effective instructional methods to prepare their students for success. WJ

Reference

1. American Welding Society. Shining a Light on the Welding Workforce. Retrieved January 26, 2026, from *weldingworkforcedata.com*.

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BY ALEXANDRA QUIÑONES

WELDING *Changed My Life*

Three individual journeys show how welding creates opportunity and purpose

Welding has the power to transform. It turns raw steel into bridges, ships, aircraft, and the infrastructure that supports whole communities. And just as welding can bring a city to life, it can also reshape individual lives.

This April marks 30 years of AWS celebrating National Welding Month, a time to spotlight the welding industry and the professionals who keep it moving forward. In honor of that mission, we share three stories of transformation. Each highlights a different path into welding, but together they show the same truth: The trade opens doors, creates opportunity, and changes futures.

Welding as a Second Chance

For some people, welding is more than just a viable career. It's a lifeline.

In a segregation cell in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Joseph Sivadon knew something had to change.

Before he was incarcerated, Sivadon was using and selling drugs. He became homeless, eating free bar pretzels and digging through trash cans for food. Life had gotten so hard that when he was arrested, he felt



Joseph Sivadon holds his CWI of the Year award.

relieved. Isolated in segregation, he had time to think.

"I could hear color and see sound, if that makes any kind of sense at all," Sivadon said. "I started kind of having hallucinations . . . I got to grips with myself and decided I was going to keep busy."



Sivadon on a jobsite.

He wrote on one sheet of paper who he was, and on another, who he wanted to be. "They were nothing alike," Sivadon said. He decided to close the gap. He was going to become the man he wanted to be, and welding would help him do it.

He wrote letters to prison staff responsible for placement, hoping to be transferred to a facility with a welding program. At the time, he said, only three prisons in Texas offered welding training. He ultimately received the transfer, an event he describes as divine intervention.

Persistence followed. He entered the system with a 5.9 learning level and needed a 6.0 to qualify for the welding program. After spending a couple of months studying a GED book, he tested at 12-plus and entered the welding class. He credits welding instructor Jimmy Perry as pivotal — both for setting the standard and for inspiring the way Sivadon now mentors students himself.

After release, Sivadon got his break working as an assistant in an oil field. A warning not to weld on the job turned into a promotion when the crew needed a welder. From there, he said, everything began trending upward.

He has since worked on projects including stadiums for the Rams, Raiders, and Rangers; the Gerald Desmond Bridge in Long Beach, Calif.; and many hospitals and schools. Despite increasing financial stability, he often slept in his car at job sites so he could send money home. And when he wasn't working, he was studying.

"I just went to work every day," he shared. "When I got off, I studied till the sun went down . . . I'd go shower and then get a pizza. Go back to work every day. Rinse and repeat."

His efforts paid off. He earned his Certified Welding Inspector (CWI) credential, as well as International Code Council (ICC) certifications, and moved into inspection.

"What I've done with my life is I come to work, I love what I do, and that's how it changed my life. Now, I'm changing other people's lives," Sivadon said.

Today, he actively mentors at-risk students and veterans, guiding them toward welding careers and helping them navigate personal challenges. He works with several nonprofits and uses his own resources to support young people who need a second chance.

"So long as I can tell somebody how to weld, I can always make sure they can get food, they can always take care of their family. Nobody has to go through what I went through," he said.

Sivadon won the AWS Sacramento Valley Section CWI of the Year Award in 2024. He is a senior special inspector with Kleinfelder, serving as lead inspector on Sacramento International Airport's pedestrian walkway project. Welding took him from sleeping in a car to leading major ironwork and inspection efforts across the country.

He keeps track of exactly how many days he's been out (11 years, 10 months, and 10 days at the time of his interview). Every day is worth counting when your life has purpose.

"I'm not happy I went to prison," he noted. "But it has not slowed me down in the grand scheme of moving forward in my career, and it made me the man I am today."

Medals, Metals, and Mettle

In September 2000, Scot McKneely stepped onto the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in Parris Island, S.C., unsure of what the future held. He had just earned his diploma after dropping out of high school, and boot camp marked the start of a different life. A small card handed to him that day read "Honor, Courage, Commitment." Nearly 26 years later, he still carries it in his wallet. Those words would shape the values he lives by and guide his eventual path to welding.

McKneely served ten years, including combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, and left the military a decorated veteran with distinctions such as the Presidential Unit Citation, Combat Action Ribbon, and Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal. The return to civilian life, however, brought its own tests. He started in residential construction and quickly realized that the tempo and standards he was used to in the Marines didn't always translate on a typical jobsite. The question wasn't whether he could work hard. It was where to invest that effort.



Scot McKneely during his time in the Marine Corps.


McKneely at Georgia Trade School.

An uncle who was a fitter-welder offered the missing direction: learn pipe welding and fitting. The path promised steady work, portable skills, and a future he could build on. McKneely dug in. "Given my background as a mechanic in the Marines, I realized I had the drive, dedication, and work ethic to excel in this field," he said.

Those qualities would serve him well, as McKneely admits that welding did not come easily to him.

"I committed myself to this craft with unwavering focus and determination," McKneely said. "Countless hours were spent practicing and fine-tuning my techniques, and I embraced every opportunity to learn and grow. Through this dedication, I transformed into the welder I am today."

Just after turning 30, he enrolled at Georgia Trade School (GTS). Sitting among younger classmates felt unfamiliar at first, but it became an opportunity to share experiences while sharpening his own skills. He earned pipe and plate certifications and began to understand the industry's depth. "Looking back, I realized that this field was far more expansive and multifaceted than I had ever imagined, offering endless opportunities for growth and exploration," McKneely said.

Early on, a hiring experience at a prefab pipe shop in Louisiana tested his resolve. After completing a gas tungsten arc welding pipe test, he was verbally offered a position before radiographic results were returned. The weld failed.

Expecting to be sent home, he instead received another set of coupons and a second chance. He passed. The experience reinforced the discipline he had learned in the Marines and the opportunity welding could provide.

McKneely's field career began as a fitter helper and tack welder at the shop in Louisiana, followed by roles at fabrication shops in Tennessee. He later settled in Georgia, joining a hydraulic and pneumatic fluid power shop where he handled repairs and fabrication.



Lexi McDermott at a Niagara Frontier Section meeting.

Eventually, his career came full circle. GTS has a tradition of hiring alumni, and when McKneely received a call inviting him to join the faculty as an instructor, he saw it as both an honor and a responsibility. Today, he serves as vice president of GTS, helping lead a program that graduates approximately 200 students each year into the welding industry.

"Embracing this role has transformed not just my career but also my understanding of the potential I have to ignite passion and purpose in the next generation," he said.

His commitment to growth led him to earn his CWI credential, and he is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree — a notable milestone for someone who once left high school early.

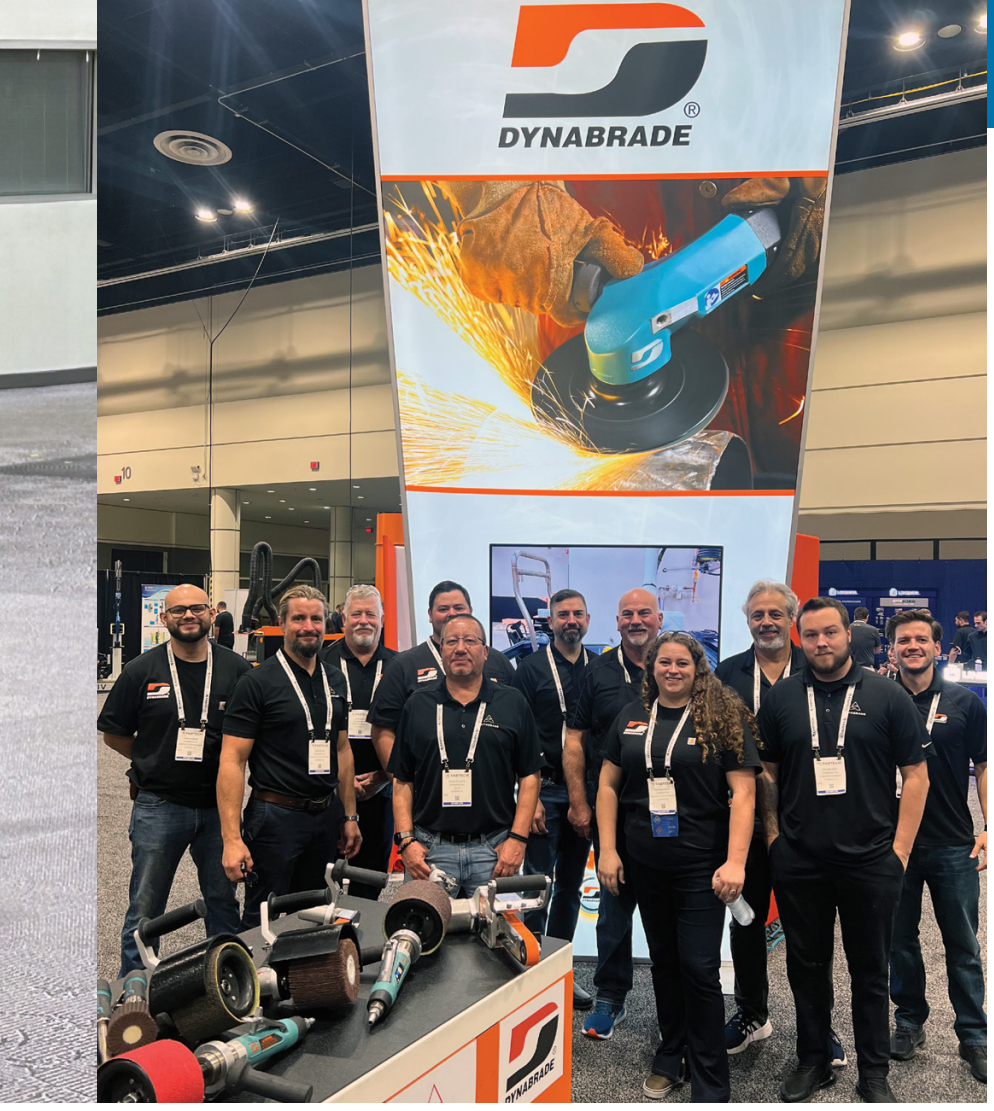
"The journey has been a roller coaster; my own career had its ups and downs, but nothing has been more rewarding than witnessing the young men and women I have trained thrive in their own careers," he said.

For McKneely, welding began as a means to support his family. Over time, it became a calling, shaped by the same principles of honor, courage, and commitment that first defined his service.

Beyond the Torch

Some careers in welding begin with striking an arc. Others begin by helping others do it.

Lexi McDermott is a welding sales specialist at Dynabrade Power Tools in Clarence, N.Y., working in channel development for the welding and



McDermott with the Dynabrade team at FABTECH.

metal fabrication segment. She travels nationwide to deliver training, support customer evaluations, and represent Dynabrade at industry events and trade shows. Her work sits at the intersection of manufacturers, distributors, and end users, serving as a reminder that the welding industry extends far beyond the booth.

Her path into welding was not a traditional one. Before Dynabrade, she worked in industrial printing at Eastman Kodak, focused on distributor management and sales training. Joining Dynabrade during the COVID era gave her time to learn the market in depth. Later, she completed introductory welding courses with distributor partners to build technical fluency and better understand the realities facing welders in the field.

Within AWS, her involvement started by attending FABTECH and volunteering locally. She stayed because the opportunities kept expanding. "I like to joke that I forgot how to say no and kept getting 'voluntold,' but in reality, I kept showing up and taking on new challenges," she said. Today, she serves as chair of the Niagara Frontier Section, deputy director for District 6, co-leader of the AWS Leadership Summit, and a member of the Marketing Advisory Committee. She also leads the Leadership Symposium Alumni Network and is active within GAWDA.

Coming from outside the welding world sharpened her appreciation for the industry's breadth. "Welding and gases touch nearly every sector, and there's always more to learn," she said. What surprised her most was the depth of mentorship across end users, distributors, and manufacturers. The welding community boasts a shared commitment to education and developing the next generation that stands out from other industries.

That perspective reshaped her approach to her day job. "It shifted my focus from purely driving sales to thinking about long-term industry growth through education and workforce development." The throughline is a train-the-trainer mindset: supporting one program or instructor can influence hundreds of students over time, and better-prepared entrants help close the skills gap.

The same mentorship that she champions has shaped her, too. "The mentorship I've found through AWS has accelerated my development by providing guidance, perspective, and a nationwide network. One lesson I've learned is to embrace challenges, especially the ones you get 'voluntold' to take on."

And for anyone who still thinks welding is "just a trade," she points to the range of roles the industry offers — hands-on welding, automation, inspection, engineering, sales, training, leadership — with real upward mobility, strong salaries, and work that directly impacts the world around us. Not everyone in this industry welds, but everyone contributes, helping build and sustain the workforce that keeps infrastructure moving forward.

Looking Ahead

Sivadon's second chance, McKneely's service-to-skill journey, and McDermott's ecosystem impact show how this trade opens doors and turns effort into opportunity. As the 30th National Welding Month gets underway, the message is simple. Whether you're striking an arc, teaching the next class, or strengthening the pipeline, there's room at the table and a future waiting on the other side of that open door. WJ

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