

Innovator of midnight welding hired full-time

By Isaac Soper
The Clackamas Print

Nov. 21, beloved welding instructor and Clackamas Community College alumnus John Phelps finished submitting his paperwork to become a full-time instructor at the college.

"[Phelps] absolutely puts students first and cares deeply about their success, so much so, that he sacrifices much of his own time, he will come early, stay late, work with them over the phone, do whatever it takes to help students be successful in learning skills and attaining knowledge and ultimately getting jobs," said Scott Giltz, dean of tech health occupations workforce (THOW).

For approximately six years, Phelps has worked as a part-time instructor on campus. His employment started when he was approached by the department chair six years ago to teach a summer class, in which he accepted.

"He is a really good teacher," said welding student Artem Kot.

Though he is a welding instructor, Phelps hasn't always been interested in welding. In 2002, Phelps had applied for a plumbing apprenticeship; rather he was put on a waiting list. Phelps had the idea to take some welding courses at Clackamas to try and get a higher number on the list when he applied again later. "What happened is, I got here and I started having fun. The people here were like no one else I'd ever met. They were really genuine and sincerely cared. It became addictive, actually. I wanted to be here; I'd go to work and I would look forward to coming to class after work," said Phelps.

Three years ago, Phelps founded a "midnight welding course" on campus. "The midnight welding class everybody's enjoyed solid enrollment, in something that you wouldn't think would be attractive to anyone from a time standpoint," said Giltz. The course meets

either two or four times during the week for the entire term, from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. "It's a lot of fun because that's the type of people you get in that class which makes it really fun to teach and really fun to take, because you have someone who's there who's serious," said Phelps.

Phelps is not only a promoter of the welding department; he is also a great supporter and promoter of the college and its entire staff. "I think we have one of the best programs in the state; I love the college in general. I am very fond of the staff here, campus-wide. I'm a graduate of our program, so it took me four years to get my two year associate degree, going at it part-time. Along the way, [during] those four years, I met a lot of people," said Phelps. "I made a lot of friends along the way."

Phelps wants students to know about the welding department and to know that there are other classes than just "welding," including plasma cutting and blacksmithing, a course that is not readily available at most colleges. According to Phelps, every step of the blacksmithing process takes great skill, including the form in which one swings the smith's hammer down to the location of each blow made on the red hot steel.

According to Phelps, the welding department is one of the most utilized buildings on campus, being used by staff and students seven days a week. One of the reasons for the success of the department is that Phelps, along with his colleagues, are attempting to save funds within their program by using more sustainable practices. The scrap metal left over from projects is recycled and some of the metal, particularly aluminum, that the welding department uses, is donated from local businesses, in which Phelps and all of his colleagues are very thankful for.

"I think I got the best job in the world. I love helping people," said Phelps.



Matt Wylie, a welding and automotive student, practices his aluminum welding skills inside one of the student built welding stations.

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ELECTION: College offers to help state fix 'unclear' guidelines

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When Truesdell was still contesting the ruling, she stated in a recent College Council meeting that there were 36 agencies having the same issue with clarity on violations. But according to Andrea Cantu-Schomus, the communications director for the Secretary of State, the Oregon elections office fined 29 people for breaking the election law since 2006. Six of the people fined challenged the ruling.

Several issues in the investigator's report left the three seeking clarification on many things. According to Paulson, one issue arose when they were given a large majority of the evidence used in the Portland Public Schools investigation when they had asked for their own. There were also other clarification issues such as the ballot title being declared impartial and the lack of explanation on documents that the investigator reviewed.

"It's also important how the county elections division accepts the ballot title. They post it for seven days to ensure that if there is anyone who objects to the language in there. The elections division and bond council also review it," said Truesdell.

"It directly says, 'The ballot title does

not meet the factors to be an impartial document.' That's the language they used that I found to be very unclear," said Parini, whose job during the May bond was in overseeing and coordinating bond information. "Speaking for myself, I found it a bit unfair because we were depending on those materials to keep us pointed in the right direction along with information received from the compliance officer herself."

The report also states that most of the documents have the same issues as a postcard that Parini sent for compliance advice earlier in the year. Among the factors stated are the balance of factual information, the tone of the document and the use of the words "will" and "need."

"Those are some of the factors that lead to the accusation that we were violating the law and I have to say that we don't agree with that. Because those are not factors that we found in the ORS law," said Parini. "We were working very hard to stay within compliance but the guidelines [from the election's office] are subjective - they suggest. And that is where we got into some areas of grey."

According to Truesdell, the Secretary of State's office and the election division will

draft a set of guidelines for their administrative rules, with or without an advisory group, and will send a copy to Paulson, Parini and herself to be reviewed and add suggestions to. Depending on the division, the rough draft of the rules will be open for a certain amount of time before they are finalized. The feedback that they would send back would be how the guidelines would have pertained to them as individuals rather than a whole.

"We're going to help fix these guidelines so that there is no room for areas of grey so we are very clear, even in terms of simple details like 'will', 'need' and 'should,'" said Parini.

The college has not yet made any plans to go for another bond measure soon but doesn't dismiss that there will be one soon since the same issues around campus still need to be resolved.

"Those needs still exist and we are trying to address them in different ways because that is what we have to do. Equipment still has to be purchased and some of the electrical panels still have to be dealt with; so we'll be dealing with those through the operating budget," said Truesdell.

The election division currently has not drafted any guidelines for review.



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