

Welding: College will expand auto, fire science offerings

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“I think it’s really important for these kids to get a jump on this stuff,” said Bristol, who came from a fabrication shop to head the college’s welding program through the 2000s. “Not all of them are going to go on to being engineers or teachers or whatever, and we need these people in the vocational field to carry on. Every day, you handle something that’s been welded. Somebody has to do that.”

A useful skill
For many of the students in the program, learning to weld is an investment. Welding positions are perpetually in demand, offer above-average wages and often require an associate degree or less.

“It’s just a skill I want to learn and get out of the way, and have something to fall back on,” said McGish, who hopes to become a mechanical engineer repairing medical machines. “And it makes for a heck of a hobby.”

When he’s not at class, Chase said, he works construction six days a week with his father.

“Next year we’re going to build a fishing boat, so I wanted to learn how to weld,” he said, adding he hopes to become employed as a welder at Lektro, a Warrenton manufacturer of electric airplane tugs.

The genesis of the summer welding course started with Long, who said he had been trying to become dual enrolled at the college to take welding courses when Warrenton High School Principal Rod Heyen started putting together the class.

In addition to working construction and managing moving crews, Long sings in choir and plays in orchestra, hoping to be a teaching assistant at his high school. For his career, though, Long said he wants to open a fabrication shop.

“Our family’s a lot of jacks



Photos by Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian
Harley Bristol, who headed Clatsop Community College’s welding program from 2000 to 2010, came out of retirement to teach Warrenton High School students during a summer course.

of all trades,” he said. “We don’t stick to one thing.”

Long will most immediately be applying his welding skills to the 8-by-20-foot frame of the tiny house he and his father are making over the summer.

Keeping them interested

Heyen said the summer welding program grew out of the high school’s frustration in trying to fit students into the college’s schedule and transport them to campus. He talked with Kristen Wilkin, the college’s dean of workforce education and training, and quickly set up the course before starting to find potential students.

Working with a slim budget, Heyen has had to be creative in expanding career-technical opportunities at his high school, which boasts a fish hatchery raising juvenile salmon, a volunteer-run auto club fixing up and sell-

ing cars, and robust robotics programs, but no traditional wood or metal shops. He often sends students to the college for academic and career-technical courses, while offering college-high school courses in Warrenton.

The hope among Heyen and Warrenton-Hammond School Board members is that more hands-on, career-technical courses will help encourage academically challenged students, especially males, who often graduate at lower rates than females. Less than 60 percent of males in Warrenton graduated with the class of 2015, compared to 85 percent of females.

Heyen found a partner in the college, which has had to pick up the slack since the closure in the early 2000s of the Area Vocational Center in Miles Crossing, where high schoolers from throughout the county used to go to learn trades. The college and local high schools signed an agree-



Warrenton High School student Christian Saputo grinds down the welding tables at Clatsop Community College on the last day of class Monday.



Students from Warrenton High School got the chance to play around with plasma cutters on the last day of their welding class Monday at Clatsop Community College’s career-technical course.

ment to offer career-technical opportunities after the center’s closure. Educators have been trying to rebuild offerings at the career-technical Marine and Environmental Research and Training Station campus that in the 2000s hosted as many as 60 students a year taking welding, automotive and fire science courses, when budgets were more flush.

Wilkin said at a recent college board meeting that Astoria will be expanding its automotive and fire science offerings at the college, along with adding a course at the high school in industrial control systems.

Bristol said he is confident at least half the students from Warrenton’s summer welding course will return in the fall to take night classes, paid for by

Warrenton-Hammond School District.

“It was successful,” Heyen said of this summer’s trial run. “I want to try and take 15 underclassmen and do it again” next year.

The hope is that students who complete the summer course will continue in night classes during school year, with some leaving high school as certified welders.

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