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Bonita Unified Graduates Work Toward Welding Certifications, Lucrative Careers

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – Bonita High School Class of 2024 graduate Ryan Barton has always wanted to work with his hands. Ever since his grandfather taught him the basics of gas metal arc welding (MIG) when he was 11 years old, Barton has dreamed of establishing a career as a pipefitter.

Barton is one of eight recent Bonita Unified graduates taking advantage of a pilot program and partnership with the Pomona Valley branch of America’s Job Center of California (AJCC), the Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity (LACDEO), and the Welding Certification Center (WCC) in Pomona to receive professional welding training that can lead to union jobs and lucrative careers.

The 16-week program runs from July to November and includes both a lab component and a lecture component. Students spend two days a week learning the ABCs of shielded metal arc welding (SMAW), or stick welding, used in the construction of heavy steel structures and industrial fabrication. The students also spend four Saturdays prepping for their exams and meeting union reps.

“This is an amazing opportunity for our students who are looking for careers that don’t require a college degree, where they can get hired immediately after acquiring their certifications,” BUSD Career Technical Education Coordinator Vanessa Tilford said. “The best part is, thanks to our partnership with the AJCC, LACDEO, and WCC, our students only have to pay for their registration, supplies, and a codebook.”

LACDEO is covering the cost of tuition for the prospective welders, a group that also includes students from Pomona and Glendora, at the WCC, the only stand-alone state-licensed private welding school in L.A. County. The program debuted at the end of the 2023-24 school year, but since all students are required to be 18 years old to be eligible for financial assistance, Barton and his classmates had to wait until after they had graduated high school to begin.

Barton has long dreamt of becoming a structural welder and was already searching for trade schools to earn his certification when WCC representatives came to his campus and made a presentation.

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During the presentation, Barton asked a rep if he could earn a certification that would lead to an apprenticeship at Local 250, the pipefitters union. When the rep said yes, Barton signed up immediately.

“I knew that WCC was the school to go to, not only because it’s close to home, but the instructors were really kind and invested in your success,” Barton said. “At WCC, everything they teach you is geared towards graduating and receiving your certifications.”

A typical day at the welding center finds students working on a specific aspect of SMAW welding as they prepare to take and pass two American Welding Society and Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety certification exams, one for Vertical (3G) welding and one for Overhead (4G) welding. WCC students have a 95% passing rate on these exams.

During the Saturday sessions, students continue their test prep. Special emphasis is focused on career placement after passing their exams. Representatives from several trade unions visit the students to talk about gaining apprenticeships and joining the union, including Ironworkers Local 433 and Local 855, and the Steamfitters/Pipefitters Local 250.

“Our partnership with AJCC and LACDEO is paying huge dividends for our young students, who are eager and poised to earn their certifications and immediately join the workforce, and at a tremendous savings,” WCC Vice President of Financial, Administrative & Student Services Vanessa Londo said.

“Welding is a universal skill that allows our graduates to move anywhere in the country to find work and set themselves up for high-paying jobs and long-term careers.”

PHOTOS:

BUSD_WELDCENTER1: Bonita High School Class of 2024 graduate Ryan Barton takes a short break during a training session at the Welding Certification Center (WCC) in Pomona. Barton is taking advantage of a Bonita Unified program that pays for his tuition while he works toward receiving certification that will allow him to work as a professional welder. Pictured with Barton are WCC Vice President of Student Services Vanessa Londo and head welding instructor and site admin Dan Londo.

BUSD_WELDCENTER2: Bonita High School Class of 2024 graduate Ryan Barton works on his vertical welding skill at the Welding Certification Center (WCC) in Pomona. Barton is one of eight Bonita Unified graduates enrolled in a 16-week training program as they seek to pass welding certification exams that can lead to high-paying jobs. The program is a partnership between the District, WCC, America’s Job Center of California, and the Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity.

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