Good Corporate Citizenship in the Welding Community

In his book *Wealth of Nations*, Economist Adam Smith described “an invisible hand” of the market that guides the action of individuals, but produces an unintended economic benefit for society.

Society has changed a bit since Smith wrote *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. Today, social responsibility is no longer an option. Companies cannot remain isolated. They must give back to the industries, communities, and people they affect. In the case of the welding industry, the “hand of the market” is quite visible; good corporate citizenship produces direct benefits and creates a self-reciprocating relationship between the industry and those we help.

WEMCO Importance

As a 20-year member and past president of WEMCO, an association of welding manufacturers and a standing committee of the American Welding Society (AWS), I am a proud member of an organization dedicated to promoting the welding community.

WEMCO’s membership roster includes roughly 80 manufacturers in the welding industry who care about its future. A primary tenet is its focus on education. WEMCO wants to make an impact by positively influencing people to consider welding careers.

Each year at FABTECH, WEMCO and AWS honor the industry by announcing the winners of their Excellence in Welding Awards. These recognize individuals, businesses, AWS Sections, distributors, media, educators, and others for their unique and exceptional contributions.

For the second year, the Excellence in Welding Awards has included a veteran category to honor those who help active service forces, civilians, and veterans acquire skills and pursue careers in welding. I had the pleasure of spending time with the winner of the 2015 veteran award, Lyle Palm, who was able to offer some additional insights.

Palm teaches welding skills to active duty, veterans, and wounded warriors for the nonprofit organization Workshops for Warriors in San Diego, Calif. He has taken this program to the next level with his expertise and dedication. As dean of welding, Palm helped develop the curriculum, welding processes, and implementation of Workshops for Warriors and continues to work closely with business and industry to develop partnerships and ensure the program meets various needs. The program has trained hundreds of veterans, its job placement rate is nearly 100%, and veterans attend for free.

Reinvesting in the Future

The Workshops for Warriors facility contains 18 welding booths, but Palm would like to see it expand into a full welding technical center that contains 40 to 60 booths.

*Welding Journal* readers know about our aging workforce and the need for hundreds of thousands of new welders. With millions of service members leaving the military in the next five years, the welding industry has a huge opportunity to transform into welders those who want to learn a new set of skills for civilian society.

Palm pointed out that veterans demonstrate a remarkable work ethic and understand what it takes to work as a team. “They make great welders,” he said.

I visited Palm’s workshop and witnessed a dozen young Marines under their hoods learning my industry’s trade. They made me proud of my industry and country. However, we have to do more. Whether it’s Workshops for Warriors, a local training facility, or your nearest technical college, welding equipment manufacturers need to become more involved so that schools can keep overhead low and tuition affordable.

As Palm explained, “We want the welding community to get excited with us and invest in our graduates. Funding is our biggest challenge, and we are working toward our Capital Campaign to build a new facility that will train five times as many veterans who can go into advanced manufacturing careers each year.”

Actions, however small or large, can literally change the arc of a person’s life, whether a veteran or someone else who wants an opportunity to earn a decent living. Actions, each and every one, will direct the future of the welding industry. Paying it forward takes on a very literal meaning in the welding community. By giving, we literally create the next generation of our own customers.

As a final thought, ask yourself what the welding community means to you. The answer may not be simple, but it will undoubtedly lead to the unintended benefit of an “invisible hand” that improves society when we pursue what matters most to us.

Jim Horvath
VP – Distributor Relations, ESAB Welding & Cutting Products, and Past WEMCO President

“Paying it forward takes on a very literal meaning in the welding community. By giving, we literally create the next generation of our own customers.”