The welding industry has been a large part of my life over the past 20 years. As the current chair of WEMCO (Welding Equipment Manufacturers Committee), which is a standing committee between welding manufacturers and AWS, our organization is continually working on and improving many of the issues that face the welding industry.

We all understand the daily struggles of finding qualified welders and the continual decline of the volume of skilled welders in the workforce. Every time a welder leaves his or her long-time career, either due to retirement or attrition, we lose a piece of the backbone of America. As a manufacturer, we also lose somebody who uses our products. That is why I ask, "Are you doing your part?"

As I previously mentioned, this industry is much of my life. It is not the products one sells that makes them successful, but the people who we touch and the industry that we promote and support.

An Investment for You and Future Generations

If we grow the industry by growing the workforce, then we will all be successful. Get involved by supporting organizations that promote welding and by investing in the education needed to become a welder.

How many of you attend regional AWS meetings or have used your facility to host a meeting? Are you involved with AWS, WEMCO, or other organizations that support our welding industry? What I mean by supporting the welding industry is not just writing checks or attending trade shows to sell your products; I am referring to actually getting involved and participating. Do you realize that you will not get that sale if we don’t support the welding community and continually reinvest in the education of new welders?

It can be very frustrating to see many manufacturers that show up to trade shows or industry events just for a sale. The influence that manufacturers have in the welding industry is so much more. It goes above and beyond our marketplace. We affect the healthcare industry and educational facilities, support our military with needed equipment, and help the oil and gas industry with pipelines and transportation.

Think about the inventory of employees who work for all the manufacturing companies reading this article. We have a huge opportunity to get the word out about how great this industry is.

Get Involved

To the manufacturers, welding inspectors, instructors, engineers and designers, supervisors, and foremen: How can you help? The AWS and WEMCO support those currently working in welding as well as taking action to improve the industry as a whole. We are working as one unit, with multiple arms, to make a difference one welder at a time.

To make an impact, we must address the most urgent needs first. A good start is to look internally at your company. See who could volunteer on an AWS committee or help at a regional meeting. To reach young people before they decide on a career path, meet with local high schools and vocational institutions to see how you can reach out and raise awareness of the welding industry and its benefits. In your community, schedule facility tours, and make them available to organizations like the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts. All of these activities help to better the industry and raise awareness of what is available from a professional growth standpoint.

Weld and Shine, an incredible program offered by WEMCO, utilizes seasoned welders who have great stories to tell about their lives and career as a welder. Hearing from the professionals who have been welding America is a great way to influence and attract new welders. Programs like these that WEMCO and AWS work on are just a small part of what we do.

If you are a manufacturer in the welding industry and not a member of WEMCO, it’s time to join and get involved. To learn more, contact WEMCO Program Manager Keila DeMoraes at kdemoraes@aws.org.

Let me end by sharing the words of Ben Franklin: “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”