AWS Educator Member Profile

Lisa M. Legohn

With more than 15 television appearances on BIG and Monster Garage, coupled with nine mentions in the Guinness Book of World Records for creating colossal welded pieces, Lisa Legohn is a bit of a celebrity. She uses her stardom to influence students, 10 to 15% of whom come from correctional facilities.

"Some of my students recognize me. They say, 'You're that lady from TV. I watched you in prison,' and I say, 'You gotta watch me live and not go back to prison,'” said Legohn, who views welding as an opportunity for a fresh start. "Welding is a second- and third-chance profession. They can make $30 an hour and not go back to unlawful behavior. I have seen them change their lives.”

Like many of her students, Legohn was initially attracted to welding because it seemed like an unconventional thing to do.

"I saw welding on the list of trades at my high school, and I asked a counselor, 'What is welding?' I thought it sounded rebellious," she explained.

Legohn’s journey as a young female welder wasn’t without its obstacles. Because of her gender, some people questioned her ability to be in the trades.

"When I started in 1978 at my high school, it wasn’t a thing women did. My mom would get slack from people who asked, ‘Why do you let her do that?’ And she would say, ‘Because she loves it.’”

Despite the challenges, Legohn landed a job working as a welder right out of high school. She also attended Long Beach State University and Los Angeles Trade Technical College, where she has taught for 23 years. She teaches various arc welding processes as well as D1.1 Structural Steel and D1.3 Sheet Steel for Certification Preparation, where students learn how to use the AWS codebook.

“Our classes are geared toward licenses and certifications,” she said. “This gives our students a chance at a new life with a great paying job.”

Legohn’s welding lab typically houses about 40 students. She describes it as a place for eliminating social and cultural barriers.

“No matter your age, ethnicity, or economic status, you are in a welding family in my classroom,” she said. “People who normally wouldn’t speak to one another are now engaging in conversation.”

Legohn also reminds her students that it’s okay to be different.

“At first my students are surprised that I’m female,” she explained. “I tell them I love teddy bears and roses, but I also love my welding boots and a good E-7018 electrode.”

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Cynthia Galbavy

Cynthia Galbavy is an example that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. As a child, she became interested in welding by watching her father and grandfather repair equipment at their family ranch in Elk Park, Mont. Although her high school did not offer welding classes, Galbavy was able to practice welding at home.

After earning an associate degree in welding technology from Montana State University–Northern, she pursued a bachelor’s degree in applied technology to become an instructor. She also earned a master’s in K–12 school counseling.

Today, Galbavy has 17 years of teaching experience under her belt. Fourteen of those years have been spent at Helena High School, where she teaches welding I–IV and welding/manufacturing co-op. At night, she also teaches adult education.

"I get to teach the most amazing students a life skill and trade," she said.

Galbavy prides herself in her school’s program, which helps students learn the skills needed to land a welding job.

"We offer dual credit classes with our local colleges to help our students become certified welders," she explained. "The local Ironworkers Union 732 members come in and help certify our welders."

To foster a love for welding, Galbavy also helps run the school’s welding club, where she teaches through community projects.

“They learn so much from each project,” she said. “We are the only AWS high school club in Montana, and our club does a lot of community projects such as art for medical benefits and local community fund-raisers.”

The club also refurbishes abandoned items, such as an original 1954 Last Chance Tour Train, a vehicle that provided historic tours.

“It was found in a field outside of Helena,” she said. “It was in bad shape, and we turned it into a climbing toy for kids to play on. Our students learned how to preserve our community’s history with that project.”

In addition to helping her students and the community, Galbavy is trying to change misguided perceptions about welders.

“The most challenging thing about teaching high school is informing the community on how smart our students in the trades are,” she said. “Most people still believe the trades are where all the bad kids go to learn, instead of where students can learn a trade and become very successful.”