AWS Educator Member Profile

Emulating his uncle, Hugo Garcia began welding during his first high school year at Reading Muhlenberg Career & Technology Center in Reading, Pa. “I would see my uncle weld when I visited Mexico,” he said. “Now that I’m an instructor, I look back and say, ‘He wasn’t doing it right.’”

Through his school’s welding program, Garcia started working in the industry at the age of 18. By his senior year, he was a full-time employee at Morgan Corp., where he performed welding and fitting for automotive freight bodies.

“I loved it, and the money was good,” Garcia said. “I was making enough money to move out at 18.”

After graduation, he went on to work at Apex Fabrication & Design in Boyertown, Pa. He performed code work and projects for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, including highway components and barriers for the White House.

Garcia’s career route changed when his high school welding instructor, Daniel Millan, called to inform him of a teaching opportunity at Lebanon County Career and Technology Center (LCCTC). At 22 years of age, Garcia landed that teaching job and passed the necessary state tests.

At LCCTC, Garcia teaches “everything from entry to advanced welding.” He uses community projects to pique students’ interest and teach technical skills. One such project included the fabrication and painting of a playground sign for a local park.

“Community projects help them get field experience,” he explained. “They were on the local news, and it gave them motivation.”

His students enter the program as juniors, and in their senior year, Garcia helps them attain employment.

“It is rewarding to know I am giving them a career that is financially stable,” he said. “They’ll be able to get a good job and support a family.”

In addition to being an educator, Garcia is also chair of the AWS Reading Section, where he has attended meetings since he was a student.

“They helped me out while I was in high school; now it’s my time to help out,” he said.

To pay it forward, Garcia takes the Section’s students on facility tours of local companies, where they get to speak to industry professionals.

“You’re not gonna get somewhere unless you know someone, and this gives them a leg up in the industry,” he affirmed.

Garcia is currently working on attaining more teaching certifications at Penn State University. He hopes to one day be an AWS District Director.

AWS Member Profile

After taking a metalworking class in high school, Emilee Brittain put welding in the number two spot on her list of possible career paths. When becoming an emergency medical technician wasn’t what she expected, Brittain decided to give plan B a try.

“I didn’t want to have my daily interaction with the community be with people on their worst day, so I made a career change,” she said.

Brittain moved to Wisconsin to earn a technical diploma at Blackhawk Technical College. While completing her studies, she built agricultural equipment at Kuhn North America, where she also worked full-time after graduation. She then moved on to making large diesel tanks for industrial backup generators at United Alloys.

Fueled by curiosity, Brittain returned to school for a bachelor’s in welding engineering at Ferris State University, Big Rapids, Mich.

“I’ve loved welding since my first arc strike, and I am always driven to learn more about it,” she said.

Brittain used her time at Ferris to compile more work experience through internships. She performed power source installation and programming for NCI Group in Houston, Tex.; worked in small welding and machine shops; and interned at Polaris in Spirit Lake, Iowa, where she got firsthand experience with robotic applications and offline programming.

“I wanted to exercise skills that would make me more functional as a weld engineer,” she affirmed. “I dislike the idea of weld engineers being able to discuss something in depth but not being able to perform the tasks themselves, so building a strong background was crucial to me.”

Today, Brittain works with Caterpillar as an engineer in the rotational development program. Her job includes working at a different facility each year for her first three years.

“It allows me to see different divisions and job roles that relate to weld engineering within a company as large as Caterpillar,” she explained.

Brittain just finished her first year for the company’s North American HEX division, which builds excavators. She serves as a technical expert and supports the manufacturing engineering team. She’s excited to see where her job will take her next, and lists the people she works with as the most rewarding aspect of her job.

“I take a lot of pride in my work and what I put my name onto, but the relationships I build along the way is what gives me the most motivation in my career,” she said.