AWS Member Profile

Born and raised on the Navajo reservation in western New Mexico, Michael Thomas got his first taste of welding in high school, where he took industrial courses that included nine weeks of welding.

"I seemed to have a knack for making a good bead," he said.

The first person in his family to attend college, Thomas honed his welding skills at LeTourneau University in Longview, Tex. In 1972, his education was put on hold when he was drafted into the military. After serving two years, he returned to school and earned a bachelor’s in welding engineering technology.

Thomas got his start in the industry as a factory representative, made his way up to a sales engineer, and eventually became the regional sales manager.

In 2004, after 25 years in sales, Thomas started his own business, Thomas Sales Co., which became Rocky Mountain Testing LLC. As the AWS Senior Certified Welding Inspector in his “one-man business,” he performs welding inspections, welder qualifications, training, and consulting.

An AWS member since 1992, Thomas has worn many hats for the Society. He served the AWS New Mexico Section as vice chair and chair, and currently serves as program chair. He is also a member of the AWS B2 Committee on Procedure and Performance Qualification, as well as the B2A Brazing Qualification and B2B Welding Qualification Subcommittees.

Thomas’s additional volunteer work involves chairing SkillsUSA’s sculpture welding contest held at Central New Mexico Community College, as well as serving on the college’s welding advisory committee.

His contributions to the industry have been recognized with several accolades, including the District Director Certificate Award, Dalton E. Hamilton Memorial CWI of the Year Section Award, and Dalton E. Hamilton Memorial CWI of the Year District Award.

"I enjoy it. Welding is my life. I don’t know about anything else. If it has to do with metallurgy or welding, I’m there," he said. "Welding makes my world go round."

A true busy bee, Thomas plays volleyball twice a week and builds homes as a hobby; he is currently building his fourth house.

His success extends beyond his work life. Thomas has been married to his wife, Martha, for 45 years, and has three children plus seven grandchildren. His life motto is simple:

"God first, family second, and then country and welding," he affirmed. "Welding holds America together."

AWS Member Profile

Born and raised in New Mexico, and hailing from the Navajo tribe, Miranda Williams became intrigued by welding at the age of 16 when her older brother brought home a welded stove he made.

"I wanted to understand how that worked and what processes were involved in getting metals to bond together," she said.

In 2013, Williams made a life-altering contact at an AWS New Mexico Section meeting and was offered an internship at Los Alamos National Laboratory, where she worked her way up to a full-time position as a research tech with the materials property team.

"I like it because it helps me understand material properties and how it’s used in the field," she explained.

Through her involvement with the AWS New Mexico Section, Williams has also volunteered in the SkillsUSA competition. One year she helped teachers corrall their teams, and another year she served as secretary. During downtime, she and the SkillsUSA team performed community service by helping to build and remodel houses.

"It was rewarding. I got to travel to see all the competitions and meet a lot of people, and we helped a lot of communities," she said.

Having completed her associate’s degree in welding from Central New Mexico Community College (CNM), Williams now has her sights on earning a bachelor’s in welding engineering. She credits two people for encouraging her continued education — Ron Hackney, her welding instructor; and Pierrette Gorman, retired welding engineer and AWS District 20 director.

"Pierrette has had a huge influence on my career. When I met Pierrette, I didn’t know anything about welding engineering. She told me how long it took her to get her degree; she was in her 40s, but she never gave up," said Williams. "That inspired me to keep pushing myself and keep at it."

With the help of AWS scholarships, Williams is currently taking classes at CNM and plans to transfer to New Mexico Tech to complete her bachelor’s degree. Because of her full-time job, she admits it will take her some time to graduate.

"It’ll take a while, but I’ll get there," she affirmed.

Williams hopes to follow in Gorman’s footsteps by working as a welding engineer at Sandia National Laboratories, New Mexico.

"I love welding. It’s something I find interesting," she said. "I hope I get the opportunity to be a welding engineer."