AWS District 3 Member Profile

In 2000, Eric Merriel got his foot-hold in the welding industry at the age of 20 when he began an entry-level job as a grinder at American Hydro in York, Pa., where he upgraded turbine blade surface contours and fillet profiles. After four years in this role, Merriel aspired to enhance his value to the company, as well as earn an uptick in pay. When provided with a chance to expand his education, he quickly took it. “I looked to expand my knowledge and skills, and was offered the opportunity to begin the company welder training program to learn the ins and outs of arc welding,” he explained.

According to Merriel, this training allowed him to move up in the company as an assembly technician, where he “assisted in assembling some of the larger Kaplan (mechanical) turbines and distributor assemblies.” Merriel held this position for 15 years before becoming the company’s welding technician. The new job pushed him to become an AWS Certified Welding Inspector within his first year in the position. He also began accumulating hours toward an ASNT certification.

“I have always taken on the challenge to better myself and knowledge base,” he said. “When my current position as welding technician became available, it became the driver for continuing education.”

Merriel’s job involves drafting initial and final welding procedure specification documents, as well as supporting procedure qualification records; creating welder performance qualification records for every qualification; creating welder performance qualification records for every qualification; major repair projects; as well as testing to verify proper welding consumables; and evaluating welding consumables and processes, including welder training; evaluating welding consumables and processes, including welding consumables and processes; creating operating standards to achieve repeatable results; and implementing induction heating methods.

Merriel continues to invest in his education and is currently pursuing an associate’s degree in industrial technology at HACC, Central Pennsylvania Community College. He is set to graduate this year.

Next on the list, Merriel is considering a four-year degree, as well as completing ASNT Level II certifications for magnetic particle, penetrant, and ultrasonic testing. Cognizant of the shortage in skilled workers, Merriel stresses the importance of lending a hand: “I will gladly help spread my knowledge, experience, and encouragement for anyone who has the desire to learn the trade. This type of work is an art, and the welding industry is in need of skilled and knowledgeable artists.”

AWS District 4 Member Profile

Born into fabrication, Hannah Wolfe has been welding at her family’s auto body repair shop in Covington, Va., since the age of ten. Specializing in auto collision repair, the shop also performs gas metal arc welding on custom and classic cars.

“My most enjoyable project was our 1939 GMC rat rod that was eventually sold to NASCAR driver Joey Logano,” she said.

While in high school, Wolfe continued to advance her skills by taking welding classes at Jackson River Technical Center.

“I have always enjoyed working with my hands and creating something out of nothing,” she said. “I wanted to challenge myself to learn, understand, and be good at a male-dominant profession.”

High school exposed Wolfe to various welding competitions. She battled it out at an AWS Weld-Off competition, placing fifth, plus a SkillsUSA district competition, where she finished first and earned the honor of representing one of the largest districts in Virginia at the state competition. She has continued to compete in SkillsUSA post high school, placing 16th at nationals.

“By competing, I learned to have patience, deal with unexpected situations, and that hard work pays off,” she explained. “Competition taught me how to stand up for what I know is right and ask lots of questions.”

As a high schooler, Wolfe also completed a mentorship training students in safety, plasma cutting, oxyfuel cutting, and other welding processes required for a first-year student. The mentorship allowed her to clock in more than 300 lab hours.

“I hope that sharing my knowledge of welding with these students created in them a passion for welding that I have gained over the last three years,” she affirmed.

A busy bee, Wolfe also became a member of various organizations, including SkillsUSA, AWS, National FFA Organization, Beta Club, and National Honors Society.

Today, Wolfe is pursuing a degree in engineering technology. In her first year in college, she received an AWS District scholarship.

“It gave me a sense of self accomplishment to receive this award among many other qualified candidates,” she said.

Wolfe’s plans for the future include securing a job in a manufacturing environment, as well as becoming an AWS Certified Welding Inspector and Certified Welding Educator. She also has her sights on television.

“My dream job is to be the next Jessi Combs,” she concluded.