AWS Celebrates Its Past by Focusing on the Industry’s Bright Future

The Welding Journal is celebrating its centennial by looking to the future and showcasing the welding industry’s young professionals. From January to December, 2019, Society News will profile AWS members under the age of 40 from each AWS District.

The following section profiles Erin Meyers, Dist. 13, and Andrew Eickmeier, Dist. 14. To nominate an AWS member, contact Katie Pacheco at kpacheco@aws.org.

District 13 Member Profile

Erin Meyers

Coming from a family of blue-collar workers, Erin Meyers is no stranger to working with her hands. As a teenager, she helped her grandfather and father build various home projects, including a deck, her basement bedroom, and a shed. Meyers and her dad are currently building a lake house.

“I really do put my heart and soul into what I do, and I bust my butt every time I work on a project,” she explained. “I love building things whether it’s at work or not at work. It’s something that I fell in love with a while ago, and I’ve been lucky enough to have my parents who support it.”

Meyers also has a softer side. As a child, she competed, and won, several beauty pageants and Irish dancing competitions. She has also scored acting jobs, earning a slot as a paid extra on two episodes of the Showtime television series Shameless.

Originally set to pursue a degree in accounting, Meyers changed her mind after failing an algebra class. She then took a semester off from her studies and applied to be a part of her father’s Operating Engineers Union, where she was encouraged to learn welding. Taking this advice, she enrolled in a semester of welding classes at Moraine Valley Community College, Palos Hills, Ill., and discovered a penchant for the craft.

“I like hands-on work, and I like that it’s challenging,” she said when asked what she likes about welding. “If you get good enough, you will make good money.”

Soon after, Meyers was hired to be the college’s welding lab aide, where she moved and cleaned materials, kept the lab organized, supervised students, and provided hands-on training. She also helped with the local high school welding competitions, which she lists as her favorite part of the job.

“They see how much fun and challenging welding is, and it pushes them,” she said. “They learn that they don’t have to get a college degree to be successful in life.”

Meyers’ hard work and dedication was awarded with several American Welding Society (AWS) scholarships.

“I was paying for everything out of pocket, and I was pulling a lot of hours working for school and my dad, and on the weekends; anything I could do to make money,” she recalled. “The scholarships allowed me to focus on school instead of working myself to death.”

Despite her busy schedule, Meyers made time to volunteer with the American Legion, a veterans’ organization her father helps run. Although she has volunteered in many capacities since childhood, she recently lent her welding skills to build aluminum signs to replace old ones that were rotted.

Graduating in 2018, Meyers has earned welding certificates in multiprocess welding, individualized welding, welding combination, and pipe welding, as well as an associate’s degree in general studies.

Today, Meyers works with the Piledrivers Union, where she has been for almost a year. She performs an array of tasks for her job, including shielded metal arc welding.

“They started me out welding eight hours a day right off the bat, which I was very surprised. I was thrown into the wolves, and I had no idea what I was doing, but somehow I survived,” she said with a laugh. “But I caught on. It’s a lot harder in the field than in the shop. You have to figure out lots of different ways to accommodate for different angles and things not being right, but I like that because it challenges me to be better.”

Meyers enjoys the variety her job offers her.

“I like that I am not seeing the same thing every day. I’ve been all over the city,” she said. “It’s cool to see the different machines, how they work, what they do; the whole thing sparks my interest.”

In the future, Meyers hopes to become a journeyman, then an AWS Certified Welding Inspector. When asked about her dream job, Meyers said it’s the job she currently has.

“I’m that happy with it,” she affirmed. “Once I got in, I was like, ‘This is for me.’”
District 14 Member Profile

A true hobbyist, Andrew Eickmeier first tried his hand at metalworking to enhance his wood-carving projects. At the age of 20, he began blacksmithing and learned to upcycle old metal to create art projects and other useful items.

“I would make tools such as punches and chisels, and even blades, out of old materials I could find laying around,” he recalled.

Proving that one man’s trash is another man’s treasure, Eickmeier enjoyed the challenge of turning “junk” into beautiful, coveted pieces.

“What I like the most about metalworking is being able to create something from nothing. People can look at scrap metal and see trash, but I see potential. I see the ability to create something amazing,” he said.

Eickmeier’s passion for blacksmithing led him to welding, and he credits it for enabling him to pick up welding quickly.

“I taught myself the different types of metals and their properties, and how they work for different projects,” he explained. “I built a small workshop that I create many projects in, and I even forge welded several items.”

Eventually, metalworking became much more than a hobby for Eickmeier, and he enrolled in the welding and fabrication engineering technology program at Vatterott College in Missouri.

“I wanted to work with my hands and never stopped striving for excellence in welding. It was not just a hobby to me; I want to be the very best I can be,” he said.

He credits the college’s instructors for helping him develop his skills and passion.

“Keith Allen, my welding instructor, has taught me a lot, and has not just instructed me on my welding technique but helped grow my love for the trade,” he said. “Him, Scott Thornhill, and John Brown — my other instructors — have really helped put me on a great path into the world of welding.”

Eickmeier was also actively involved in the college’s American Welding Society (AWS) Student Chapter, serving as the secretary and vice chairman.

“I joined the AWS and several other groups related to the field so I can soak up as much knowledge about it as possible,” he said. “I will always go the extra mile to achieve my goals in welding so that I can one day teach someone else about the art that I enjoy so very much.”

Despite Eickmeier’s love for learning the craft, his education has been temporarily put on hold with the closing of all Vatterott Colleges. However, the setback has not derailed him from a career in welding. He hopes to continue his education elsewhere with the help of an AWS District Scholarship he recently received.

“The AWS scholarship will help me with paying for the vital education that is needed for me to learn as much as I possibly can about this amazing trade,” he said.

In the meantime, Eickmeier has made the welding industry his classroom. He is currently gaining experience as a welder at Hillsdale Fabrication, where he helps build large structures, such as stadiums, high-rise buildings, and bridges.

Aiming high, Eickmeier hopes to one day become an AWS Certified Welding Inspector, own his own business, and use his skills to see more of the United States.

“I would like to travel around the country doing all types of welding jobs, from structural to fabrication, gaining experience and learning from others,” he affirmed. “After I have done that for some time and have more knowledge, I would like to start my own fabrication shop doing various jobs, like building gates or structures and welding repairs.”

Candidates Sought to Receive the MIT Masubuchi Award

The Prof. Koichi Masubuchi award, with a $5000 honorarium, is presented to one person, 40 or younger, who has made significant contributions to the advancement of materials joining through research and development.

Send a list of your candidate’s experience, publications, honors, awards, and at least three letters of recommendation from fellow researchers to Prof. Todd Palmer, tap103@psu.edu. This award is sponsored annually by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dept. of Ocean Engineering.