John McKibben was an established pastry chef when he decided to trade his whisk for a welding torch. After ten years in the culinary industry, he felt drained from the monotonous work and long hours, which included weekends, evenings, and holidays. Remembering how he enjoyed tinkering in the garage as a kid, McKibben’s family encouraged him to pursue a career in welding. This idea was bolstered by a friend whose uncle was a welder.

“I was fascinated watching him work. I have always loved working with machines and creating things,” he recalled.

On route to a new career, McKibben enrolled in the welding program at Long Beach City College (LBCC), Calif. “That was the best decision of my life,” he affirmed. “I enjoyed cooking creatively, but welding has allowed me to create lasting projects and even help friends and family with projects that I can look at and say, ‘I built that!’”

McKibben also took a job in LBCC’s welding department, where he helped maintain the welding labs, equipment, and tools. His job included setting up components according to welding specifications. The experience allowed him to hone his knowledge on gas tungsten, gas metal, shielded metal, and flux cored arc welding, plus plasma cutting from computer designs.

Today, McKibben is a student assistant in the college’s construction department while he continues to take classes for an associate’s degree in metal fabrication technology. As he works toward his educational goals, McKibben continues to grow his professional credentials. He is a Los Angeles Certified Structural Steel Licensed Welder, having passed the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety Certified Welder Exam. Additionally, he is qualified in gas tungsten and gas metal arc welding as well as shielded metal and flux cored arc welding in the 3G and 4G positions. He is also OSHA authorized and has a forklift license.

McKibben is currently in the process of earning more certifications in welding. Due to his passion for learning, he plans to continue his education after he has completed his degree and secured a job in the welding field. When he’s not busy with school and work, McKibben makes sure to be a part of welding-related events. As a member of the American Welding Society (AWS) since 2016, he has attended the AWS student night event at LBCC. He has also attended several metal fabrication trade shows.

Bolstering welding at his school, McKibben held a leadership role in LBCC’s Welding & Fabrication Club, where he performed administrative duties as well as designed, manufactured, and sold fundraising projects.

“The Welding & Fabrication Club gives me an opportunity to share ideas, plan projects, and become involved in welding events,” he said.

McKibben enjoys using his newfound skills to give family and friends gifts, as well as help out those in need. For instance, McKibben recently helped a friend’s mother, who is a disabled veteran, with the broken lift on her van, which was causing her wheelchair to get stuck. To fix it, he cut out the old metal and replaced it with thicker, stronger metal.

“She was very grateful, and it was gratifying to be able to help her with my welding skill and knowledge,” he said.

McKibben’s interests in the welding industry are diverse, allowing him a wide range of career possibilities. “I have an interest in several areas of employment, including joining a union or working in the shipyards near my hometown. I also have a desire to fabricate and create metal works, opening my own business at some point in the future. I enjoy the class environment and am considering a teaching career after gaining welding experience and obtaining my degree,” he explained.

Regardless of where his future takes him, McKibben is sure he’s finally doing what he is meant to do.

“Welding is fun and challenging, and I believe it is my lifelong calling,” he said. “Working in my own shop I have been able to help my family and friends with projects, and I know with hard work and discipline I will be successful as I continue my education toward my goals.”
District 22 Member Profile

When Patrick Michels discovered that his high school taught welding through its agriculture mechanics class, he immediately signed up. Already equipped with a predilection for hands-on work, he immediately developed an affinity for the craft. “My dad was a woodworker, so I had a lot of woodworking experience, but metal, in general, fascinated me,” he said. “At the time, I was interested in welding on skyscrapers and getting into big projects. That idea motivated me up to college.”

At 17, Michels enrolled in the welding program at College of the Sequoias (COS), Tulare, Calif. In his first semester, he was offered a job as a welding shop student technician, a job he maintained for three years. “Already coming into college with a love for designing and fabricating, I think this is where I developed most of the foundation I currently have for the comprehensive science of welding,” he recalled.

His duties as a student technician included fabricating projects for shop and farm equipment, receiving and prepping large metal orders for classes, and maintaining general shop machinery. “This was such a good job for me at the level I was at because I learned so much about what goes into maintaining a shop with hundreds of people in and out of it every day, while also being a welding student myself and developing countless skills,” he explained.

While at COS, Michels was involved in various projects, one of which was a large metal shed for the school. He also became qualified in stainless steel sheet gas metal arc welding (GMAW) and gas tungsten arc welding (GTAW); mild steel sheet GMAW and GTAW; and unlimited shielded metal arc welding in 1-in. mild steel.

However, Michels began to crave greater challenges. He changed his major to engineering and taught himself computer-aided design (CAD) using the welding shop’s plasma computer-aided manufacturing software.

Michels’ quick proficiency in CAD allowed him to secure a position as a contractor draftsman for Southern California Edison Electric Co., where he gained invaluable skills working alongside experienced engineers. At the company, he was given the opportunity to draft an entire circuit in California that covered about 10 sq miles. “It was a really important project, and I got to basically see how an entire distribution circuit works and how big they are. I got to add about 40 branch-line fuses to the map, which covers the few hundred telephone poles in between them,” he explained. “I thought it was cool to be doing a large-scale project like that.”

Michels left the company after six months to pursue a bachelor’s degree in welding engineering at The Ohio State University. He is currently a pre-engineering major and waiting to be approved into the welding engineering program. He expects to graduate in the fall of 2021. “Pursuing welding engineering is the best route for me because I have an inclination to utilize and develop automated processes, while also having thousands of hands-on hours and several American Welding Society (AWS) qualifications to help back up my sense for what works best and why,” he said.

A three-year AWS member, Michels was involved in the AWS Central Valley Section, and has received two Dist. 22 scholarships. Last year, he was invited by Dist. 22 Director Kerry Shatell to attend a district meeting. “I felt very privileged to be the only student in a room of well-established AWS professionals, and the most influencing take-away was realizing how impactful a room of just about ten AWS leaders can be on a state as large as California,” he said. “This meeting was easily my best experience as an AWS member so far.”

The experience left an impression on Michels, who plans to one day secure a leadership role within the Society. “One thing I am sure of is wherever I end up in the workforce, I will always be a part of the AWS and will strive to add to the diverse and comprehensive community that has been created as a result of all of its members,” he affirmed. “I like pushing forward welding education, and I feel like I would be a good advocate as an AWS leader.”

Michels’ future plans also involve working in automation. His job dream is to be involved in the cutting-edge automation taking place at Tesla. “I want to concentrate my career on developing automation processes and creating ways to simplify project design to boost efficiency in either manufacturing or construction processes,” he said. “I tend to have a fascination for the newest innovations and technologies in our industry, and I am certain if I keep building my foundational skills I will soon be on the front of that development.”

AWS Welding Handbook Committee Seeks Volunteers

The American Welding Society (AWS) Welding Handbook Committee is looking for volunteers to work on Volumes 2 and 3 of the 10th Edition of the Welding Handbook. Candidates should be recognized subject matter experts in various welding science and technology topics, or a closely related field, such as metallurgy, manufacturing technology, metal fabrication, or design. Ideally, candidates should have 10+ years of experience in their field and possess good technical writing skills. Previous work on AWS documents is desirable. Qualified candidates should send their résumé and contact information to Kathy Sinnes, ksinnes@aws.org.