SOCIETY NEWS

AWS Member Profile

Elizabeth Bryant

In 2012, Elizabeth Bryant was en route to becoming a certified nursing assistant (CNA) with the help of Wisconsin’s Youth Options Program, which gives high school students the opportunity to take postsecondary courses for free. However, after completing a certificate to become a CNA, Bryant still felt unsure about a career in the nursing field.

“As a young kid in high school, I never knew what I really wanted to do for the rest of my life,” she explained. “I picked CNA because I love helping people, and I always admired nurses. It was a great course, but I didn’t love it all.”

Taking a break from postsecondary schooling to raise her son, and motivated by the encouragement of her parents, Bryant decided to try something new. Unsure of what career path to pursue, she let fate decide when she randomly chose a program at Blackhawk Technical College, Milton, Wis.

“I honestly closed my eyes and pointed at the piece of paper, and my finger landed on welding. No harm in just seeing if I liked it. I loved it,” she affirmed.

Having never welded a day in her life, Bryant enrolled in the school’s welding program in 2015.

“I did not pick up a whip or stinger until I was 21. I said to myself, ‘Well, if I don’t like the first few weeks, I can always withdraw,’” she recalled. Although the classes were daunting at first, Bryant discovered a passion for the craft. She quickly learned how to perform flux cored, gas metal, shielded metal, and gas tungsten arc welding. She also learned other processes as well as how to read blueprints.

“The first day of welding class we tore apart our machines to learn each part before we even plugged the machine in. It was intimidating at first, but the second day I was ready to go,” she said. “I love the sounds and the environment, making things with my hands, and how rad it is to melt metal in seconds and how it physically changes the metal.”

She’s thankful to the school’s teachers for helping her learn the ropes. “All of my classes were led by the most amazing staff. These instructors started from ground zero with me — from bending, cutting, line burner, plasma cutters, and everything else you can put in a shop,” she said.

Bryant completed a certificate in welding in 2016, and promptly began working toward an associate degree in welding technology at Milwaukee Area Technical College, Milwaukee, Wis.

As part of a student program, Bryant also worked as the college’s weld lab tech in between classes. Some of her tasks included shearing metal for class use, maintaining and cleaning the welding booths and equipment, and completing welding projects for the shop.

“I loved this job because it was hands on and challenging to learn all the things that make the lab run daily. It gave me good behind-the-curtain knowledge. I think it gave me an upper edge,” she said. “Spending time in the labs and helping others was a great way to share tips and tricks.”

She graduated with her degree in spring 2019. She is qualified for gas metal arc welding, and holds a Wisconsin State Weld Test Conductor certification.

Bryant also picked up hands-on experience at E. K. — from giant tanks and floor work to custom fab and table work. But, learning new projects and things to build will always be a plus. I can never learn too much,” she said.

Bryant also recently attended the 2019 FABTECH show in Chicago, Ill., as a graduation gift to herself.

Looking to the future, she’s still unsure of where she’ll end up, but she’s confident it’ll involve welding. She plans to attend the University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, Wis., for a bachelor’s in technical education and training. She also hopes to one day become an American Welding Society Certified Welding Inspector.

“I love to help others learn and to lift others up like they have lifted me,” she affirmed. “I love a ton of the branches welding has to offer. You never know what is ahead of you and what could change! I’d also love to teach, so it is up in the air. And that is okay to me.”

Elizabeth Bryant poses with a welded flower at Blackhawk Technical College, Milton, Wis.