

WCTC highlights

WOMEN IN WELDING



Submitted photo

Waukesha County Technical College Instructor Joe Chaney speaks with student Kasey Wilichowski during a welding course before COVID-19.

Technical college showcases career opportunities

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PEWAUKEE — Waukesha County Technical College on Friday hosted a presentation focusing on women in welding and the opportunities awaiting prospective students.

WCTC instructor Karen Feliciano said she got into welding by accident. Initially exploring engineering at the college in 2007, she was deterred by the longer timeline of that program; when her advisor suggested welding, she jumped in.

"I fell in love just by looking at the machines because I've always liked working with my hands, I've always liked getting dirty," she said. She's been teaching at WCTC for six years.

Mike Cook, another WCTC welding instructor, said he sees more and more women going into the field.

"In this area, we have such good job placement, we get to see how what we put into them has a direct influence on their lives," he said, noting that in just two or three years in the field, students' lives are noticeably impacted in a positive way.

The welding options at WCTC are varied, ranging from a certificate requiring only nine credits to a technical diploma requiring about one to 1.5 years of study, to an associate's degree which usually takes about two years.

"This is really a great program that allows you a lot of different avenues after you graduate," Cook said. He emphasized even with a focus on welding, students have gone on to work as engineers or program laser machines.

The presentation included unique capstone projects from former students, who created custom tables,

benches and more. Students have recently even made barbecue grills they can take home to cook on this summer.

Two current students shared their experiences as well.

"I love it," said Chianti Kirk. "It started out pretty challenging but I've had some great instructors that encouraged me (and) now I feel I'm continuously growing, I'm getting there." She said she'd recommend WCTC's welding program to other women.

Shirley McCullum, another student, said she feels the courses are preparing her for real world jobs.

One prospective student on the Zoom presentation said she's a 32-year-old social worker and wants to get into welding but wanted to see how that works if she's working full time. Kirk and McCullum offered reassurance, saying they both work full time and haven't had issues.

"Women who weld, it really is a thing," Cook said. "It's a real phenomenon going on, there's a lot of ladies in welding... we get a lot of people who just fall in love with it."