

TCTC Instructor Recognized by Punderson Lodge and Resort

Bob Olesky-Sparks and Bright Lights



A visitor to the welding lab at the TCTC does not command immediate attention. They should not expect to be greeted at the door because program students are never standing near the door. Although the occupants wear goggles and hoods instead of hard hats, the reality is soon apparent to all. Welding is very much a worksite. Students are engaged with the tools of their trade and the instructor, Bob Olesky, is busy supervising, demonstrating and explaining.

Although the economy is sluggish and the job market slow, welding is a career field on the rise. Proficiency in the craft is a passport to employment. This is a story about a teacher who is the catalyst for the program's success.

Bob Olesky's interest in welding was kindled at a very early age. The bright lights and sparks coming from the garage next door to his house fascinated him. He said, "My neighbor liked to tinker with cars, and he would weld frames and body parts. I pestered him so much that he shared his knowledge with me. From that time forward, I was hooked."

After completing his sophomore year at Austintown Fitch, Olesky enrolled in the Welding program at the Mahoning County Career & Technical Center. Upon graduation in 1975, he received more than a diploma. He also had the necessary certification required for employment as a welder. He has not looked back. "I've had to change companies a few times, but I have never changed careers."

Olesky worked in the field for 21 years before entering the ranks of teaching. He welded parts on navy vessels related to weapons systems that were classified information at the time. He has also welded some of the largest equipment on earth, such as the monster cranes featured on the History Channel. The opportunity to be employed as a sub-contractor for several construction companies provided exposure to bidding processes, cost analysis and bookkeeping. He is currently in his third year at the TCTC but has taught Welding at the New Castle School of Trades for the past 13 years.

When asked the reasons for the rosy employment prospects for welders, Olesky said, "Even in a down economy where you are not building new, you must maintain the old structures." He pointed to bridges, airplanes, cars, space vehicles, buildings, power plants and oil refineries. The advent of green technology has served as a boon for welders with the emergence of solar panels, wind turbines and water towers.

Wages for apprentices start in the vicinity of \$20 per hour; experienced welders can expect to make closer to \$40 per hour depending on the location and job classification. Olesky said that boilermakers working in the New York Metropolitan area have a wage scale of \$55 per hour. Although the pay is excellent, there is a shortage of qualified welders in the country.

The skills needed for success in welding include good hand-eye coordination and attention to detail. Olesky stressed the importance of attitude. "I can teach someone the skills required by employers, but they also need to understand the importance of regular attendance, accountability and work ethic. The impact of technology is enormous. You must stay current with the trends and realize that learning is a lifelong process."

At the TCTC, the Welding program runs for two years and is available to juniors and seniors from 19 school districts. The curriculum includes classroom instruction, hands on labs and job training. The students work with materials, equipment and the different processes associated with specific jobs. They learn the basics of M.I.G, T.I.G, Stick Welding, and Pipe Welding. Plasma Arc Cutting, Oxygen Acetylene Cutting Process fabrication and blueprint reading are included in the instruction as well.

The welding students are engaged in a variety of competitions and exhibits to highlight their skills. They participate in the Holiday Showcase at the Eastwood Expo Center and the Outreach Gallery in April. Last year, they created a Proud American mural that was presented to the TCTC Board of Education and presented a Pete the Penguin to YSU on their Learning Express program.

As a graduate of a Career/Tech Center, Olesky provides an informed perspective on the educational advantages. "You go through the day without study halls and the emphasis is on problem solving skills with real world application. The teachers, both program and academic, provide hands on learning that promotes retention. The TCTC is a great place to work because there is so much support for staff. I enjoy coming to work every day."

Olesky's students are his most essential constituency. All of them admit that the high pay and excellent job prospects for welders brought the program to their attention. Nevertheless, they provide their teacher with the highest marks.

Cody Silvers, a junior from McDonald, stated, "The first word that comes to mind is respect. He speaks from experiences and he works with us individually and in groups. He really knows what he is talking about, and you can tell that he cares a great deal."

Alexis Wilson, a junior from McDonald, echoed Silver's sentiment. "Mr. O is a role model. He is respectful of his students and so we in turn are respectful of him. He is always even tempered, but he will let you know if you are falling short of his expectations."

Justine Walters, a junior from Badger, selected Welding after touring the program last spring. She said, "The lab was impressive and Mr. O seemed organized and passionate about the career field. He is a strong believer in the concept of a well rounded student. He is constantly checking how we are doing in our academic classes."

Bob Bonish is the Supervisor for Trade and Industry at the TCTC. In assessing Olesky's performance, he stated, "He is not a welder disguised as a teacher. He understands the science of teaching and connects theory with practice. Bob can also provide alternative explanations if students are confused about the concepts."

Larry Crawford, Academic Supervisor, appreciates the priorities that Olesky establishes for his students. "Sometimes students balk at being released from lab to receive assistance for the Ohio Graduation Test. Bob makes sure they report every single day. He stresses the long range significance of getting your diploma and works cooperatively with my staff."

Business guru Seth Godin wrote a best selling book called *Linchpin*. The premise was that it's easier to transfer your passion to your job than finding a job that matches your passion. He reasoned that you don't have to get what you want if you already have what you want. This is a classic description of Bob Olesky. His personal Field of Dreams is located in the Welding Lab at the TCTC. His passion is to develop his students' talents to their fullest potential. Therefore, he has what he wants. And so do the students who hope to follow in his footsteps. They are also mesmerized by the sparks and bright lights. With Bob Olesky as the instructor, how could they not be?

Olesky received two nights free lodging at the lodge at Punderson State Park to recognize him for professional excellence.