

Alumni Spotlight

New Connections

WITC graduate Maren Almstedt is sparking diversity in the classroom and has big plans for her future welding career.

Maren Almstedt has found a niche in a realm—welding—that has long been considered a nontraditional career field for women. But the 2005 graduate of WITC Superior's Welding Program isn't bothered by labels. In fact, she's quite happy with both her degree and her new role as a teaching assistant (TA) for her former instructor. And this is only the start.

Why a technical college?

I've always been a gearhead. I started working on my own cars at a young age, and at first thought I might go into an automotive program. Then, my dad and I started working on restoring a '56 Jaguar. The frame needed welding and I thought the program was a good way to learn the skills I needed. Once I got into it, I realized I really enjoyed welding. Years ago, my father taught economics part time at WITC Superior, so I knew it was a good school.

How did you fit into a male-dominated class?

There was one other woman in the class with me, and we both fit in really well. At first, there were a few awkward moments, but then we all loosened up. Eventually, we turned into a big family. We helped each other out. The group was never divided in thinking guys versus girls; it was just one class and we were all in it together.

What is it like being a TA in the welding program?

It's really a lot of fun to teach the new group of students. At first the guys were a little taken aback that I'm a woman, but that didn't last long. Now we have a great relationship. If they need help with a weld or advice about how to do something, they have no problem coming to me for help. As a TA, I do a little bit of everything—from grading projects to correcting tests and some custom-fabricating work.

How was your experience at WITC?

My experience was excellent! I've got life skills for a career. My instructor, John Palmer, was an outstanding teacher who instilled in us a strong sense of work ethic on the job. I would definitely recommend WITC to aspiring technical students.

What is your life like outside of work?

I still live at home with my family in Two Harbors, Minn. I work part time in a coffeehouse and spend most of my free time taking care of my three horses. I've been riding for nine years and competing in barrel racing and have one English equitation horse.

Plans for the future?

I'd love to give underwater welding a try. Otherwise, I'll probably pursue TIG welding in the aerospace industry.

—Celia Tarnowski

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