

https://www.kpcnews.com/butlerbulletin/article_768835db-15ef-530f-8448-80cfa807c540.html

Industries donate welders to Eastside

By JEFF JONES jjones@kpcmedia.com

Jul 29, 2021



Eastside's welding program received a donation of \$13,500 in equipment, in the form of six new welders. From the left, are Scott Thomas and Chris Rodes of New Millennium Building Systems, welding instructor Brent Keen, Jodi Barber of Heidtman Steel, Jeff Rickman of Steel Dynamics and Cary Davis of Color Master. Nucor Building Systems was also involved in the donation.

JEFF JONES

BUTLER — Companies know the importance of having employees ready to do the job.

Recently, five of them — Color Master, Heidtman Steel, New Millennium Building Systems, Nucor Building Systems and Steel Dynamics — made a \$13,500 investment in Eastside students by donating six new welding units to the school.

“It’s incredible to see the community outreach, the community wanting to get involved and wanting to bring the skilled trades back into the school system,” Eastside welding instructor Brent Keen said.

“The big thing we look forward to with these programs is just exposure, getting kids used to the environment of working with their hands,” he said. “Some kids just do not want to go to college. (This is) giving them that exposure or outlet to do something out of high school that they already have training and a basic skill set and understanding.”

In the program, students can earn up to four certifications that are recognized throughout the welding industry.

“We push a lot of the soft skills as well as the hands-on skills,” Keen said. “We talk to people within the industry on a yearly basis to make sure our curriculum is built around the industry so that we’re not getting complacent, that we’re not doing the same program year after year after year.”

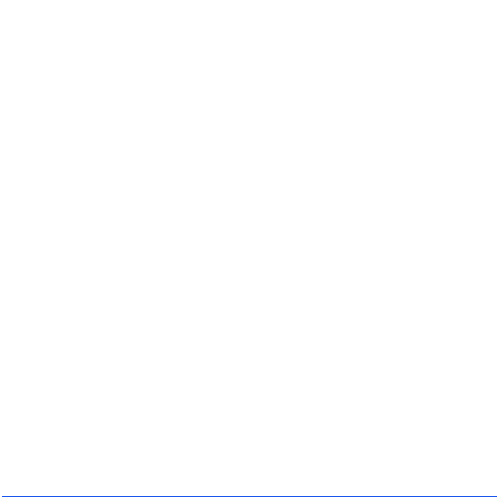
Eastside’s welding program is experiencing rapid growth, with a 60% increase. The donation means 20 welding units will be available for students. The school will offer two sections during the 2021-2022 school year.

Students have the option of taking a semester, year-long class or more, Keen explained. “If kids want to stay in the class after they’ve gained their certification, there are opportunities to earn more certifications, to learn more skills, and to do just a little bit more.”

In addition to the welding units, New Millennium has donated steel to build new welding stations. Heidtman Steel has donated steel for the program. Many industries donate personal protective equipment (PPE) to the school. Industries also send their employees to give lectures, evaluate welders and certify their skills. In non-COVID years, students have been able to visit industries for job shadowing opportunities.

“We have a really good relationship with the industry with regards to this program,” Eastside assistant principal Orié Foster said.

“There’s kind of a lack in the skilled trades right now,” said Scott Thomas, production manager at New Millennium Building Systems. “For us being fabricators, it benefits us in getting kids interested in it early. We employ a lot of younger kids, so it’s great for us.”



“It gives them a chance to see if they’re interested in it,” he added. “A lot of kids don’t know what they want to do coming out of school, and a lot of kids forget about the trades.

“It’s good to give back to the community. The community supports us and we support them.” Thomas said he was impressed about the emphasis on safety before students ever pick up a tool.

“We have a hard time drawing employees who are qualified and have the relevant experience that we’re looking for,” added Chris Rodes, production development manager at New Millennium.

“I think this is a good way to get high school students interested in welding, give them a little bit more experience, and let them know what options are available to them.

“College isn’t for everyone,” he said. “We actually have people in our shop who have college degrees and decided they could make more money working as a welder or a rigger.

“If it’s something they like, they can explore it and see what we’re about.”

While Heidtman Steel has only a few welding positions at its facilities, it was even more important to support the school’s manufacturing classes.

“We love that they are encouraging and giving our students the tools to get into a manufacturing environment,” said Jodi Barber, community liaison and recruiter at Heidtman. “It’s a great need in our community, and just to be part of that and to give our students the opportunity to grow into the manufacturing field is something we greatly support and appreciate.”

“Steel Dynamics looks at any opportunity we can give back to the community,” SDI Cold Mill manager Jeff Rickman said. “We have a lot of welding going on at Steel Dynamics. It’s a chance to give back to the community, and we do it every opportunity we get.”

Like Heidtman, Color Master doesn’t have many welding positions, but helping the community and local industry were major factors, according to human resources manager Cary Davis.

“It’s important to us to get kids interested in manufacturing, interested in the industries,” Davis said. “If they can use tools like this, see it hands-on, maybe they will develop something that can provide an employee to New Millennium.

“That helps our community. It helps keep people in our area as opposed to moving away,” he said. “If we can be part of that, that’s what we want to do.”

“Most of them earn their American Welding Society certification,” Foster added. “They can continue to pursue that career path, whether it’s at Impact (Institute) for another year or two, or take the second year with us and find an internship.

“It’s really getting more students with the skills, when they leave us and graduate, that they can go right into the workforce,” he said.

“What’s coming down from the state with the Next Level programs of study, there’s going to be a push for more vocational training, whether we can do it here in-house or if they go to Impact to get that training,” Foster said. “The broad perspective is we want more kids with more skills to go into the trades.”

“We want to prepare them, just like we would with anyone who’s going to college, so when they leave us, they know what they want to do next,” guidance counselor Lori Kaiser added.

“We’re very thankful for the industries stepping up and helping the program,” Keen said. “Anytime we need help with something or we’re looking for something, we just receive absolute generous gifts.”

JEFF JONES