

# Welding Skills Open Doors to Many Industries

Growing up in Visalia, Walter Simmons' first childhood introduction to welding was when a welder came out to the family farm to fix their tractor. "Sparks flew and I thought, wow," said Simmons. "I was impressed with how quickly it was fixed and we were back to pulling a disc around the field."

Simmons came back to welding after high school and sampling several potential careers. "Once I'd graduated, I tried taking some classes at community college," said Simmons. "But without a goal, I was kind of flailing and I knew I wanted something more."

Everything clicked when Simmons heard that College of the Sequoias (COS) was offering the intensive American Welding Society (AWS) SENSE program. It required that students commit to attending all day classes, five days per week. SENSE is a comprehensive set of minimum standards and guidelines for welding education programs nationally. "I found the COS welding program appealing because I could gain a breadth of knowledge in just one semester," said Simmons. "It covered SMAW, GMAW, GTAW, FCAW and Thermal Cutting, offered industry certifications, and included computer skills and safety training."



**Walter Simmons, Apprentice  
Plumbers and Pipefitters Union**



**Randy Emery (middle) with COS students**

Randy Emery, welding instructor, COS, and national AWS board member, explained that the college program does more than teach welding skills. "We prepare welding students for work," said Emery. "The soft skills such as timeliness, preparedness, communication and teamwork are just as important as technical skills in making an impact on the job. Each week, welding faculty embeds critical traits for career success into the curriculum."

COS faculty and career services provided opportunities for Simmons to explore welding careers as well. "I really appreciated that with his industry background, Mr. Emery could explain how what we were learning would apply on the job," said Simmons. "He was a great teacher with a wealth of information on local manufacturers and careers in welding. Mr. Emery took us on tours of employers' worksites, hosted

AWS events on campus where we mingled with employers and told stories from his career experiences."

Emery described Simmons as a serious student who was going to succeed. "He was disciplined, had a great attitude and worked well with other people," said Emery. "Walter took advantage of opportunities offered through COS and was one of our first welding interns placed at US Farm Systems. After the internship, Walter was offered a position with them, launching his welding career."

As a result of Simmons' passion for welding, his career path took many interesting turns. "It gives me a lot of satisfaction to see the finished product of something that I worked on," said Simmons. "Welding was the gateway into a variety of jobs where I continued to learn, increase my salary and develop adjacent skills. It was the welding experience that got my foot in the door."

Over the next decade, Simmons leveraged his welding education and manufacturing experience into new employment opportunities. "When working at a sawmill, I was introduced to hydraulics, pneumatics and programmable logic controllers (PLC)," said Simmons. "My background in welding led me to a skylight manufacturer that offered an increase in pay and chance to work on amazing projects including custom homes in Pebble Beach. After several years, I was hired by a food processing equipment manufacturer and again my welding experience proved invaluable as I worked with sanitary stainless steel. I worked there for two years where I grew into a final assembly role, where my eye for detail was put to good use."

While working, Simmons continued to develop his skills both on the job and through community college. "The more I was exposed to at work, the more I wanted to grow my skills," said Simmons. "For instance, I decided to take AutoCAD (Computer Aided Design) and shop drawing classes."

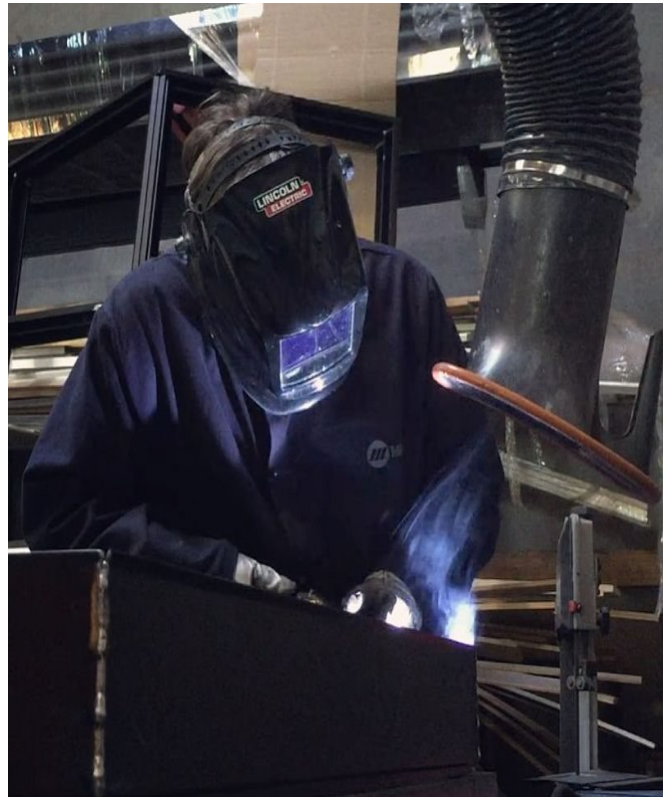
Just recently, Simmons was selected for a coveted apprenticeship with the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union. "The COS welding program set me up for success," said Simmons. "Welding made it possible to secure a variety of jobs in different industries where I could gain new technical skills. At this stage of life, the union is a great way to go for me. I can supplement my skills with excellent training, earn great pay and benefits, and enjoy a feeling of belonging."

Emery indicated that he has stayed in touch with Simmons and followed his career. "I was in the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union for over 24 years and was excited when Walter let me know he was accepted as an apprentice," said Emery. "I'm convinced that Walter will deliver high value to any union project he works on."

The training, career support and mentorship provided by the COS welding program have served Simmons in his successful

upward career trajectory. "What I learned at COS helped me a lot in my career," said Simmons. "I found that if you can prove that you know how to weld, it creates opportunities. But the training doesn't end with the welding courses; you have to continue to learn and work hard. Welding can lead you to a very satisfying and well paid career."

According to Emery, COS is dedicated to addressing employers' need for qualified workers and preparing students for lucrative careers in the trades. "COS is building a \$40 million training center where students can develop the skills to fill the need for qualified welders and other trades," said Emery. "A technical career is definitely a path worth taking and COS provides experiences to help students decide if a skilled trade is right for them."



Walter Simmons (left) and Fred Logan (right) at  
**US Farm Systems Internship**