

# Career Opportunities

## Forging a Path: Women Welders

(NAPS)—“It is not for the faint of heart,” Erica Bridges said.

Bridges is a Welding Technology student at Texas State Technical College (TSTC). She was referring to her field of study and to welding in general.

“I encourage it, though,” she added. “This is a really good money-making (career). The people that you will meet, they’re just one-of-a-kind people.”

In the heavily male-dominated industry of welding, only 5.1% of the workers are female, according to a 2022 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report. In the fall 2023 semester, TSTC had a total of 94 women and 970 men enrolled in Welding Technology.

### What To Know

To help others understand, some female welding students, instructors and alumni from TSTC recently spoke of their experiences in welding and their love for it. They also talked about some of its challenges.

TSTC welding instructor Samara Flener has seen positive changes in her 20-plus years of working in the industry, but said preconceived notions about female welders still remain.

“That climate has improved, (but) some days you have to put on your Teflon suit, go out there, get the job done, and let it slide off,” she said.

TSTC Welding Technology alumna Tatum McFarland echoed Flener’s mentality about being among the few females in the industry.

“It hasn’t been easy,” McFarland said. “And you just kind of got to grow a backbone, more or less, to be able to work with (men).”

Haylee Phillips, a first-semester TSTC Welding Technology student, said that before beginning the welding program, she was worried about how she would be perceived by the male students.

“I was intimidated at first,” she said. “Especially a few weeks before school, I was like, ‘They’re going to treat me all weird because I’m a girl.’ But if you shut it off and go to learn, you’ll succeed.”

Another TSTC Welding Technology student, Alondra Ramos, is pursuing welding despite a lack of encouragement from her parents.

“I didn’t have a lot of support coming into the welding industry and doing this,” she said. “I’m here to prove them wrong in a lot of stuff. I always got pushed down, but I’ve always tried my hardest to come out on top and to prove everybody wrong.”

### What It’s Like

Flener acknowledged the fact that being a welder can be grueling.

“Welding is not for everybody,” she said. “Some aspects of welding can be



**Six of the 94 female welding students at Texas State Technical College who are about to enter the primarily male-dominated industry of welding. (Photo courtesy of TSTC.)**

extremely physically demanding, and you have to be able to work in that environment.”

Phillips feels the same way but said the effort is worth it.

“It’s hard,” she said. “I mean, it’s hot all the time. I’m sweating from the minute I walk into the shop in the morning until I leave in the evening. You’re lifting heavy stuff, your arms get super tired, and you’re in uncomfortable positions. I think there are a lot of women who just aren’t interested in that type of lifestyle for a career path. But me, I mean, I know the money that comes with it, so I’m willing to suffer a little bit.”

### Why They Do It

Despite the challenges, each woman spoke to a love of welding that outweighs any obstacles.

“It’s like an escape from the world; it’s like you’re at peace,” Ramos said. “Most of my stress goes away when I’m under the (welding) hood. I love it.”

Phillips said, for her, it is the satisfaction of being able to look at something that she has had a hand in building.

“It’d be cool to see a rocket that I welded something on go up into space and be like, ‘I was a part of that,’” she said. “I get to look at my work and see what it’s for, and see that I helped. That’s pretty cool.”

Flener encouraged those with a love for welding to pursue it despite any roadblocks that may come their way.

“Regardless of who you are, if you love it, seek out those opportunities that will allow you to be in an environment that works for you,” she said. “Don’t be afraid to try out a job, and if it doesn’t work out, move on to the next thing. Don’t call it failing. It’s figuring out where you fit.”

### Where To Learn More

For further information, go to [tstc.edu](http://tstc.edu).

• *With 10 campuses across the state, Texas State Technical College helps to strengthen the Texas workforce with highly skilled, technically competent graduates. Operating on a unique funding model based on student employment outcomes, the college celebrated 55 years of service to the state of Texas in 2020.*