

Karlee Munro: Welder

by Stu Rhodes

Karlee Munro's first real exposure to welding came when she was about 10 years old.

She always enjoyed being her dad's shadow when he was working around the house, and this included helping out during a renovation when they had to add two more treads and risers to a metal spiral staircase. A few years later, Karlee completed an aptitude test that identified welding as a good career fit for her at around the same time she landed herself in a metal work class at Stelly's Secondary where she really started to develop her interest and skill.

"Welding isn't really that easy you know. It's like an art form that requires special attention to detail," she told me. When in Mr. Hack's metal work class she completed the obligatory projects as quickly as she could so she could sneak into the welding booths and spend hours "burning rods" and perfecting her skills. It became very clear early on that Karlee wanted to advance her welding skills, so she completed all her grade 11 academic requirements in the first semester so she could transition to Camosun and participate in the seven-month Welding Foundation program in the second half of the year, earning her "C" Ticket.

Karlee returned to Stelly's for her Grade 12 year and graduated with buckets of credits, including a Work Experience course she completed as a work study program working on aluminum vessels at Titan Boats, which further inspired her to advance her skills. She has now completed the next level of training at Camosun, earning her "B" Ticket, and is also acquiring certification of her CWB's (a collection of specialized certifications granted by

the Canadian Welding Bureau).

Karlee's passion for welding is not a selfish pursuit: she has returned to Stelly's for a series of Open House showcases where she has shared her experiences with younger students and their families. This year she even hosted a mini welding lesson for curious beginners. Last fall she took time off work to volunteer at a Mind Over Metal Welding Camp hosted

by the Saanichton Individual Learning Centre in partnership with Thompson Rivers University. She was able to share her passion for the craft and help students overcome the difficult techniques involved in vertical and overhead welding.

Part of Karlee's love of the craft is the challenge it presents. "It can be awkward, dirty, and difficult, but I love it! I like the opportunity to not be so girly," she said.

"I gain the respect of my male counterparts on a totally different level when I can pull off a difficult task. Just because it's hard, doesn't mean I can't do it, and just because I don't want to be girly at work, certainly doesn't mean I can't be girly!" Carhartts by day and heels by night!

Karlee is currently working on a few freelance welding projects that are on the artistic side, but she sees herself getting employment with a larger firm, possibly building boats, or maybe even doing structural steel work. She "wouldn't mind trying work in high places."

To other students, she has this to say: "Don't be a spectator watching others take on the challenge. Own it yourself! Learning to weld has been an awesome experience!" This young woman is certainly one to watch and definitely one that local employers should try to add to their roster.

Contact Stu Rhodes at 250-415-9211 for more information on how to get involved as a student apprentice, or as an employer sponsor in this, or any other career program in Saanich School District. View the promotional YouTube video, "Jump Start Your Career" at <http://www.youtube.com/user/saanichcareers>.

