

9 Women Enrolled in Welding in Only 4 Weeks

How Milwaukee Area Technical College Finally Moved the Needle on Women in Welding

SUMMARY

Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) Welding Program rarely had more than 1 or 2 female students, even though both the Department Chair and Dean had, themselves, worked as women welders and actively tried to recruit female students. In July 2018, MATC had zero female students in the Welding Technical Diploma program. After a WomenTech Educators Online Bootcamp in August 2018; however, MATC successfully recruited 9 female students to the Welding Technical Diploma and AAS programs in only 4 weeks—30% of whom were Underrepresented Minorities (URMS). All but one of those women completed successfully. In Fall 2019, MATC enrolled 16 female students in either the Diploma or AAS Degree and 10 female students in their onsite high school program.

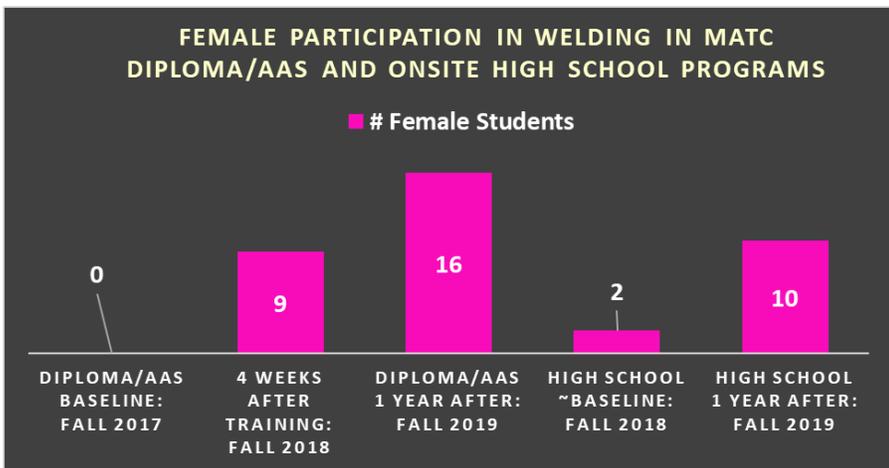


MILWAUKEE AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Urban Area)
Welding Technology

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION RESULTS

- ☑ Female enrollment went from 0 to 9 women in Welding Technical Diploma and AAS programs in 4 weeks
- ☑ 8 of the 9 women successfully completed the program—89% retention rate
- ☑ Female enrollment increased to 16 women in Diploma and AAS programs in 1 year
- ☑ Female enrollment in MATC’s high school Welding program rose to 10 women— from no more than 3 in prior years



KEY ACTIVITIES:

- ☑ Creation of a detailed Recruitment Plan by MATC team facilitated by WomenTech Trainer, Donna Milgram
- ☑ Women Can Weld Too Meet and Greet
- ☑ Recruitment strategies included multiple touches—female student “leads” received a series of emails and personal follow ups via phone calls and texts



“We recruited 9 new women to Welding in only 4 weeks after participating in a WomenTech Educators Training. Before the training, if we had 3 women in

Welding it was like hitting a homerun. I tried some things like offering a Welding art class, but the women that came were not interested in our program. It was very frustrating; I realize now I didn’t have a plan.

It was the decisive work plan we developed as a team with Donna’s facilitation during the training that I believe made the biggest difference. Our plan included recruitment strategies that I would never have thought of myself. These strategies worked because they were so specific. The training made us look at everything differently, especially how the existing program brochures and other materials all featured men, and nothing featured any women.”

~ Sue Silverstein, Welding Instructor, School of Technical & Applied Sciences, Milwaukee Area Technical College, Oak Creek, WI

CHALLENGES

Sue Silverstein, who has been a community college Welding instructor for 20 years, wanted to increase the number of women in Welding before retiring, but this legacy felt out of reach after years of trying recruitment strategies that didn't work. "In 20 years of teaching, I've never had more than 1 to 3 women in Welding. This is the first year we've had more."

Sue had tried different strategies to recruit more women, but they were never successful. She had held a Welding art class that she hoped would act as a feeder class into the Welding program, but none of the students continued on. She did outreach to domestic violence shelters, but that did not yield any female Welding students.

Another of the challenges the MATC team had to overcome was that all the Welding program brochures and other outreach materials only featured men. At the time of the WomenTech Bootcamp, the team only had 3 weeks before the start of the Fall 2018 term to recruit female students, and one additional week during the drop/add period.

ACTIONS THAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE FOR MATC

- ☑ **WomenTech Educators Online Training: Bootcamp Version**
- ☑ **Bringing a TEAM together**
- ☑ **Developing a Recruitment and Retention Plan**

Everything changed in the summer of 2018, when Sue brought a team from her college to a WomenTech Educators Online Training Bootcamp led by Donna Milgram, Executive Director of the National Institute for Women in Trades, Technology & Science (IWITTS). Sue and her team developed a step-by-step Recruitment Plan—facilitated by Donna—and began implementing it immediately with only 3 weeks to go until the start of the fall semester.

The Bootcamp required MATC to participate as a team of 6-10 key stakeholders related to the Welding career pathway. According to Sue, **"One of the most beneficial things was having a team and a WomenTech Recruitment Plan, it made it easier to assign different people specific tasks. I think the other very important aspect was that everyone brought different areas of expertise to the table. Our Associate Dean brought her management experience; our recruiter knew how recruitment had worked in the past and had his own connections; our counselors brought their perspective; and others had more in-depth knowledge of other programs like pre-college and ESL. I think having people that represented other areas of expertise was really important because, as an instructor, I look at things as an instructor and they're able to bring their input to the whole process."** **The team came together to develop a plan, create new outreach materials featuring female role models, and put on a Women in Welding Meet and Greet recruitment event all in only 3 weeks.**

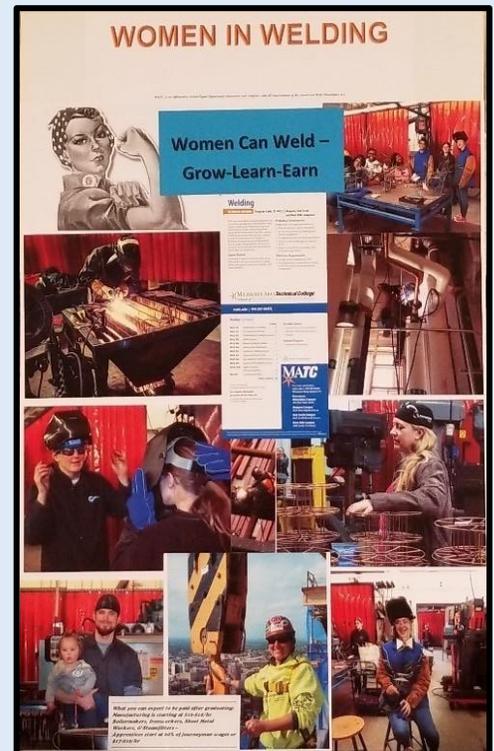


Figure 1. MATC Women in Welding Recruitment Poster

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT: WOMEN IN WELDING LEADERSHIP TEAM

Participating in teams ensures that all the key stakeholders are represented and invested. Here are the job titles of the 11 Leadership Team members:

- **Key Leader** = Sue Silverstein, Welding Instructor and Female Role Model
- Dorothy Walker, Dean, Technical & Applied Sciences (*Retired*)
- Mona Gauthier, Associate Dean, Technical & Applied Sciences
- Bill Peterson, Welding Instructor
- Coordinator, Vocational Education Projects
- 3 Student Services Specialists, Enrollment Services
- 2 Guidance Counselors
- 2 Academic Support Specialists

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

In their Recruitment Plan, MATC chose to focus on a target audience of female students already enrolled at the college who were unsure of their major, but there was some external outreach to women in the community and high school students. The following methods were used to recruit them to the welding program in the 3 weeks prior to the start of classes—and during the one-week drop/add period after the semester started:

- ☑ Female-centric Outreach Materials
- ☑ Email Campaign
- ☑ Women Can Weld Too Meet and Greet
- ☑ External Presentations

What was the first recruitment strategy MATC started with?

- ☑ Female-centric Outreach Materials

The team needed to move quickly to create outreach materials that featured female role models—which they did using templates from the Women in Technology Outreach Kit—part of the WomenTech Training. Sue reached out to her past female students for action shots of them at work. She used these new photos of female role models to create the flyer and poster (see Figures 1 and 2). The other Welding instructor on the team (male) created the Eventbrite online registration page for the Women Can Weld Too Meet and Greet.

The recruitment flyer and emails followed recommendations from the WomenTech Educators Training and included salary information, quotes by female alumni on “Why Welding,” and a call to action to sign up on Eventbrite to attend the MATC Women Can Weld Too Meet and Greet. One of the biggest changes to how MATC went about recruitment was this new emphasis on female role models. According to Sue, **“I think highlighting female role models, showing that women can weld, and having pictures of women was really instrumental.”**

- ☑ Email Campaign

Sue wrote a series of 6 recruitment emails in which she acted as a female role model herself, sharing her story and the stories and quotes of former female Welding students. These emails were sent to female MATC students who the team had identified as likely to be unsure of their career pathway (see Figure 4 on next page for 2 sample emails).

- ☑ Women Can Weld Too Meet and Greet

MATC held a “Women Can Weld Too” Meet and Greet that featured:

- Female role models
- Female student panel
- Hands-on lab demonstration by Sue
- Career information and registration.

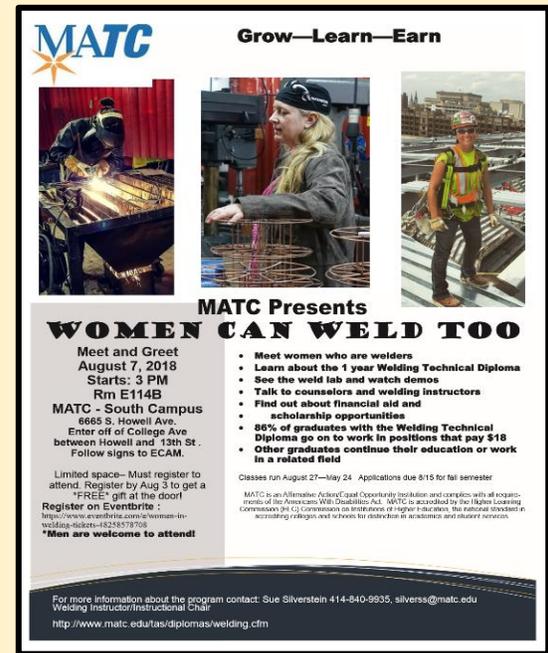


Figure 2. “Women can Weld Too” Meet and Greet Flyer

Female Welding Student Interviews



Figure 3. MATC Welding Recruitment Video Featuring 4 Female Students in Program ([Click to watch 10-minute video](#))

SAMPLE MATC EMAIL BLAST #1

Did you know that graduates of the MATC Welding Technical Diploma start at \$18/hr?

“My name is Sue Silverstein and I am a welding instructor at Milwaukee Area Technical College. I originally wanted to be a ballet dancer, but that did not work out. After working a few dead-end jobs, I attended MATC and with the skills I learned I was hired as a Sheet Metal apprentice.

As a welder, tradesperson, and now welding instructor, I have financial security. The world of welding is always changing and growing; I have never become bored with it. As an instructor, I love that I can teach others my trade secrets that helped me to be successful.”

We are reaching out to you with this email as you may find welding to be a good career path for you. Like Sue, you too can find success as a welder!

Come learn about the welding program at MATC-South on Aug 7, 2018 at 3 PM. See the attached flyer and Register on Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/women-in-welding-tickets-48258578708>

Say good bye to low pay and dead-end jobs.

SAMPLE MATC EMAIL BLAST #2

86% of graduates with the Welding Technical Diploma get jobs right away.

Rachel Nelson is a graduate of the Welding Technical Diploma at the South Campus. Rachel got a steamfitter apprenticeship.

This is what she has to say, “Why welding? Because it empowers me and sets an amazing example for my daughter to go out and chase what she loves.”

See the attached flyer to attend the **Women Can Weld Too - Meet and Greet**. You will have an opportunity to meet women who weld, instructors, and counselors. Be sure to register on Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/women-in-welding-tickets-48258578708>

Figure 4. Sample Emails from MATC Welding Email Campaign

☑ Women Can Weld Too Meet and Greet

20 women attended the Meet and Greet, and 2 women enrolled in Welding on the spot. The keynote speaker for the event was Dorothy Walker, the Dean of Technical and Applied Sciences at MATC, who was the first female welding instructor in the Wisconsin Technical College System. The female students on the panel had diverse backgrounds. One was a Veteran who completed the Welding Technical Diploma and is now a Steamfitter Apprentice, another completed the diploma straight out of high school and is now working for a small fabricator, and the third came back to school after finishing a four-year degree and being dissatisfied (she also found a job Welding while at MATC). The Meet and Greet went from the conceptual planning phase to being held, in less than 3 weeks. An Eventbrite web page was created for it so that the team could gauge attendance before the event and send automatic reminders to participants.

Sue treated prospective female students as “leads”, systematically following up by email, phone, and text until they enrolled in the welding program.

Research shows marketing and recruitment takes multiple touches and MATC put this into action.

☑ External Presentations

MATC was scheduled to have a welding simulation at the Milwaukee Air Show 2 days after the WomenTech Bootcamp. Sue and team went into action creating the outreach materials literally overnight.

According to Sue, “When I was at the Milwaukee Air Show at the Welding simulation, women would look at my Women in Welding poster and flyers with all these images of female students welding and I’d explain that my past female and male students were the ones helping people do the Welding simulation.” Sue handed out 150 flyers during this 2-day local event and at least one of the 9 women that enrolled in Welding heard about the program from the Air Show.

FEMALE STUDENT SURVEY

Sue has gotten some information about how her female students heard about the Welding programs by interviewing and surveying them. The data—although partial—gives some important insights into what worked and what motivated the women to enroll in Welding (see Figure 6).

2018 Welding Class: 9 Women

- **2 Women: Women Can Weld Too Meet and Greet**
- **1 Milwaukee Air Show**
- **1 High School Presentation**
- **1 Peer Recruitment, Encouraged by Female Friend**



Figure 5. Dorothy Walker, MATC Dean of Technical & Applied Sciences, WomenTech Leadership Team Member, and Role Model (Retired)

[\(Click to Read MATC’s Profile of Dorothy Walker\)](#)

What Made You Decide to Pursue Welding?

(N= 11 out of 35 from Female Survey)

- ☑ “My passion for creating (2)”
- ☑ “Desire not to work desk jobs anymore.”
- ☑ “My dad taught me a little at home and I enjoyed it.”
- ☑ “I am a weld shop manager looking for more education to pursue my CWS and CWI while learning to weld.”
- ☑ “I wanted to be able to talk to my son about welding – led me to my current career and MATC for welding technology.”
- ☑ “Career opportunities in the trades, and ability to apply new skills in a job that will provide a decent wage.”
- ☑ Personal Enrichment
- ☑ “I was looking for a career that was hands on and would support my family and I in the future.”
- ☑ “Ability to create artwork using materials.”
- ☑ “Was introduced to it at Briggs and Stratton but was let go because I didn’t know much about it and settings of amperage.”

Is there anything you would like to share that would help us to recruit more women?

- ☑ “Great career choice. You can still be feminine and be a welder. I was a former beauty pageant girl and a model and now I’m welding...it’s really creative and challenging.”
- ☑ “Welding is a great creative outlet. Great people in the field and program.”
- ☑ “It’s the best thing I’ve done in my life, I wish I knew about it sooner.”
- ☑ “MATC welding program is a very positive place for beginners, and provides the opportunity to learn the trades hands on from day one.”
- ☑ “I am a woman myself in the welding program at the West Allis campus and I can confidently say I feel very comfortable and capable to do the program even though it is predominately male.”
- ☑ “Never be afraid to try things that are out of the norm. You may actually like it and choose to pursue a career in welding like I am doing.”
- ☑ “Make class times and schedules more flexible for off-shift employees.”

Figure 6. Hear from the Women Themselves: Excerpt from Results of MATC Welding Female Student Survey

RECRUITMENT ADVICE FOR OTHER EDUCATORS

Sue’s biggest piece of advice when it comes to recruiting more women to STEM and CTE programs is to bring a team to a WomenTech Educators Training, “So you can really figure out what works and what doesn’t. Instead of trying to reinvent the wheel, you might as well go with something that has already worked for other schools—I believe that made the biggest difference for us. Otherwise, we could have gotten ten people together and sat in a room, but I am not sure we would have come out with the same outcomes or the same strategies that we did.”

ABOUT IWITTS: CREATOR OF WOMENTECH EDUCATORS TRAINING

The Institute for Women in Trades, Technology & Science has been helping educators nationwide close the gender gap for women and girls in technology since 1994. IWITTS provides tools, resources, and professional development for educators to help them broaden female participation in STEM and CTE programs where they are underrepresented.

To discuss what type of professional development would be the best fit for your school, region, or state please [Contact Us](#). Visit our website at: www.iwitts.org

“You are always learning and that’s what I love about it. There is so much to explore and I like the challenge of welding pipe.”

How did you get interested in Welding and what has your journey been like so far? What is your background?

After high school, I joined the military reserves for 6 years—the Marine Corps—and worked at Starbucks and other customer service jobs. When it came to backing down and deciding on a career, I remembered the exploratory tech class I had taken in high school and how I had enjoyed the Welding classes and decided to pursue that. So, I signed up for MATC’s one-year Welding program. I am a single mom with a 5-year-old daughter—living with my parents right now for that extra support.

Why did you decide to become a Steamfitter Apprentice?

After graduating from MATC, I worked for a company doing MIG Welding and production Welding wasn’t satisfying at all to me. I first learned about Steamfitting at MATC but found out more about it at the Union Hall. It was something I was really interested in because there are so many different aspects of the trade, you will never learn everything! I took the test for it and was accepted as a Pre-Apprentice with a contractor and eventually got indentured. The contractor has a maximum of 13 months to decide to indenture a Pre-Apprentice. Luckily, I was indentured after a few months.

What do you love about your field?

You are always learning and that’s what I love about it. There is so much to explore and I like the challenge of welding pipe.

What advice do you have for other women considering this career?

I would say just go for it; you are going to have so much support. The men are very supportive, which is very refreshing.

CAREER QUICK LOOK

Years in Field: 2 years

City/State: Kenosha County, WI

LinkedIn Profile: None

Video Clip: [Watch on YouTube](#)

Ethnicity: Caucasian

School: Milwaukee Area Technical College

Degree: Welding Technical Diploma, Structural Welding Certification

Career Pathway: Steamfitter Journey Worker

Personal Time: Time with 5-year old daughter, Music

Other: Marine Veteran

Figure 7. Role Model Profile of Rachel Nelson, MATC Welding Graduate [\(Click to Access Program Graduate Profile\)](#)



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