

# Matching Skills with Knowledge, Obra Horn Celebrates 40 Years in Welding Education

*A welding instructor recounts his path to the industry, navigating technology advancements, and giving back to the trade*

When Obra Horn was introduced to the welding industry in the 1970s, there was a high demand for skilled American workers, such as welders, much like today. Technology was advancing, as were welding applications. Upon the advice of a guidance counselor at Marion Harding High School, Marion, Ohio, Horn ventured into a welding career spanning more than 40 years — Fig. 1. This is his story.

## The Backstory

“One could say that I have come full circle,” Horn began. “For me, it started in 1972, and I started down the welding path in high school based on a recommendation from my high school guidance counselor Mr. Rudy. [The school] had just opened up a new vocational welding program, and he thought I somehow would do good.”

Horn enrolled in the program and developed a passion for welding. He learned shielded metal arc welding, flux cored arc welding (FCAW), oxyfuel welding, and oxyacetylene cutting. He excelled with the help from Junior Instructor Franklin Dyer and Senior Instructor Herman Myers.

“I would report to Marion Harding in the a.m. for academics and then report to the welding lab, located north of the school about five miles away,” he recalled.

While attending school, Horn got his first welding job at

Huber Corp., where he made machines that built and repaired roads.

“We made a machine called a road grader that moved the dirt to build roads,” Horn said. “In April of my senior year in 1973 [Fig. 2], I started working the second shift as a welder trainee as a co-op student and continued to work there until the plant closed down in 1979. After that, I worked for another company called Peabody Galion, where we developed the side load garbage truck.”

At a young age, Horn was transitioning into an industry with many different career paths and additional benefits, such as job security and great pay. However, a car accident derailed his plans.

“We were critically hurt in a truck/car accident in Delaware in November 1976,” Horn’s wife, Elaine, explained. “He broke his neck, and after two surgeries in a year, the doctor recommended that he not weld anymore due to the welding helmet and flipping his shield.”

Although a setback, it did not deter Horn from continuing in the industry he had so much passion for. With the knowledge he gained as a welder and advice from Elaine who was a math instructor at Tri-Rivers Career Center, Marion, Ohio, Horn pursued a career in education.

“She suggested that I apply and interview for the welding instructor position [at Tri-Rivers], and she thought it would



Fig. 1 — Obra Horn’s career as a welding instructor has spanned 40 years, and he has no plans of slowing down.



Fig. 2 — Horn’s senior picture (back row, third from left) in 1973.



Fig. 3 — (Left) Horn and a former welding instructor in the old welding lab; (right) the current welding lab, which serves 75 students.

be a good way for me to give back to the trade," he said. "I applied and was hired in the late summer of 1980."

The welding program had two welding labs and four welding instructors as well as a full-time adult evening program that fed into a local manufacturer, the Marion Power Shovel Co. There are now three instructors and approximately 75 students enrolled in the program — Fig. 3.

### Technology Advancements Inspire Learning

Over the four decades Horn has taught welding, the industry has evolved with advanced technologies and new processes. Most of these processes have become fully automated and computer controlled. Gas metal arc welding and FCAW are much more widely used for production than they used to be. Many more materials and applications now exist than 40 years ago. Welding technology and equipment has also evolved dramatically due to the use of robots. As technology changed the appearance and capability of welding equipment and more, Horn embraced the many changes and continuously learned.

"When I first started teaching, I learned more than my students in the first few years," he said. "I had to learn different welding processes and techniques because they were new to me. If you want your students to excel, then we have to stay up to date as much as possible with the new processes and technologies."

Horn acknowledges the school administration for allowing and encouraging welding instructors to attend conferences and trade shows, such as FABTECH, to learn more about the industry.

Horn helps his students stay up to date with the equipment and processes used in industry through friendly competition. He has been an active organizer for SkillsUSA ([skillsusa.org](http://skillsusa.org)), a student-led career technical organization, and was a SkillsUSA advisor while teaching for many years. He also ran the SkillsUSA opening and closing competitions at the state level and sent his high school welders to compete each year — Fig. 4. Paying it forward, Horn's affiliation with SkillsUSA began when he was in high school, where he became a SkillsUSA member through the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America.

"Welding is forever changing. If we want our students to

get the best jobs, we have to stay up with what is going on in the industry and do that with our local advisory committee members made up of representatives from the local industry," Horn said.

### The Family that Welds Together

The Tri-Rivers welding program has created a family culture that attracts students.

"Students want to be members of the Tri-Rivers welding family because of the people they will meet and the opportunities they will experience during their two years," explained Horn. "The best part of the welding family is the job opportunities available to hardworking and dedicated welders at the end of their senior year."

He works to build a positive, hardworking learning environment where students come to learn a lifelong skill that will support them and their families. He leads by example and teaches his students to always pay it forward and give back, which they do.



Fig. 4 — Horn judges a SkillsUSA competition.

"Pre-COVID-19, on any given school day, you could see former students, some who work a third shift, in here giving back, teaching a new welding technique, or just confirming what this trade has done for them," Horn said. "Students don't care what we know until they know that we care."

He is dedicated to passing on his skills to his students and filling the surrounding counties' needs for welders.

"I always say that I have the master's in education, but he is the better teacher due to his compassion and commitment to his trade," Elaine said.

## Conclusion

Horn is proud of his 40-year work as a welding instructor,

but his accomplishments are rooted in his students and fellow colleagues.

"In our welding family, we have a culture that has allowed us to develop young men and women into becoming not only good welders but good people and productive members of our society," he affirmed. "It gives me great joy knowing that the skills they learned in our program have allowed them to go out into this world to do just that." [WJ](#)

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# Five Things to Know about Obra Horn



Obra Horn (right) lists mentoring welding instructors, including Levi Retterer (left), as a highlight of his 40-year career.

1. Something interesting about yourself: My son, Kyle, and my grandson, Karson, drag race. I love to tournament bass fish.

2. Three words that describe your personality: professional, grateful, and kind.

3. Your favorite quote: "Give a student a fish, and you feed them for a day. Teach a student to weld, and you feed that student for a lifetime."

4. Your teaching philosophy: If you like using your hands, don't mind getting dirty, like to feel a sense of accomplishment after a hard day's work, and like lots of money, the welding program is for you . . . Good welders will always be in high demand in our economy.

5. Highlights of your career: 1) Mentoring our current welding instructors, Levi Retterer and Dakota Crum. 2) Watching many of my welders buy a home for their family. 3) Having welding family members return to the lab to give back to the younger students. I stress giving back to the trade to all of my students.

