**South Texas College**

October 2020

**Rare Faculty Honor Sparks Hot Streak for STC Welding Program**

In welding, about the only thing you *can’t* fabricate is experience. So when South Texas College faculty member Richard Ingram received exclusive designation as a Certified Welding Inspector this summer, it was an achievement built on heavy *mettle*.

“It involves several years of experience, months of prep work, and to top it off, three exams that all must be passed,” says STC’s first-ever instructor to achieve the American Welding Society certification. “There are only an estimated 90,000 CWIs across the globe.”

The honor is the latest milestone in a career that has brought Ingram from a journeyman welder at a fabrication shop in Mission into heavy construction and even some of South Texas’s biggest drilling operations. His versatile experience in the field provides his students with a valuable “insider” insight to the real world of industrial welding.

“As a welding instructor, I get to hear success stories from my former students,” says Ingram, who found a bond with the profession as a high school hobbyist. “This once again opened my eyes to the opportunities welders have.”

For Ingram, the CWI designation is more than just a personal accolade. It’s a feather in the cap of the department he serves, and a gold star on the résumé of the students he instructs.

“The certification will make STC students more marketable in the welding industry,” instructor assures.

“Mr. Ingram … has set a great example of the high expectations we have for our faculty and students in the Welding Department,” says Sara Lozano, Dean of Business, Public Safety & Technology at South Texas College.

South Texas College took a massive step in the direction of student marketability last month, becoming one of just six Accredited Testing Facilities (ATF) in the state. The designation, which certifies STC to administer tests qualifying welders for employment, was the result of a successful inspection by AWS auditors in late September. With only 168 AWS-approved testing sites in the entire country — and just one other in the region — the accreditation is a game changer for STC.

“The STC Welding program is training students with skills in several welding processes [with] a vast knowledge of each process,” says Ingram. “Now, with the approval of the ATF and having a CWI, we can have students graduating with active industry certifications.”

This is a “significant accomplishment,” posits Lozano, because it bolsters South Texas College’s status as a destination school for local industry prospects. “By adding the possibility of having the AWS credential, we are just taking the program and our students to the next level.”

In addition to a review of the department’s ATF quality assurance manual, the audit entailed an inspection of STC’s Welding program facilities, as well as a live performance test. And while Ingram admits the visit included some curveballs, he was proud of the department’s responsive performance.

“[It] went a little different than what we anticipated,” says the instructor. “However, we did overcome the unforeseen differences and did very well.”

“He persevered and not only accomplished the goal of passing, but truly excelled,” Lozano says about Ingram’s persistent effort.

The dual certifications come at an opportune time for the surging program, which has found itself at the epicenter of a construction boom in South Texas in recent years. New projects in commercial construction, natural gas, and even space travel are driving demand for welders with high-tech skills, like those learned at South Texas College.

“Newer companies such as SpaceX [and] the RGV LNG plant, among others, are starting construction or maintenance of existing structures,” explains Ingram. “The welding industry is growing rapidly in South Texas.”

Salaries are growing right alongside demand. According to employment data aggregator O-Net Online, welders are commanding an average salary of $44,160 in Texas, with manufacturing and green construction continuing to hold strong.

“A large amount of the new building construction is being done with steel,” says Ingram. “All of this drives the demand for a skilled welder higher.”

Even amid the health crisis, Ingram expects opportunities in the industry to remain available. By offering a versatile, demand-driven curriculum, he believes the South Texas College program is in prime position to identify skills gaps and prepare new graduates for whatever comes next.

“I realized when one industry slows down, welders are still in demand in another,” says the instructor. “For example, if the oil field starts slowing down, aerospace work might be picking up demand.”

Ingram hopes that his CWI certification, coupled with the prestigious AWS approval, will spark new interest in the STC program and the industry in general. Already, the department has laid the groundwork for South Texas College’s first cohort of AWS-certified graduates.

“[We’ll] certify students in several welding processes starting this semester,” beams the decorated instructor, who considers the opportunity to mentor future professionals his biggest professional accolade. “I am proud to be able to serve STC students and represent South Texas College on a professional level.”

*Testing is set to begin at the end of November. Contact XXXX at XXX-XXX-XXXX for testing information. South Texas College offers an associate degree and two career certificates in Welding. Learn more about welding, and other high-demand career education pathways, at* ***bt.southtexascollege.edu***

**Employment Outlook: Welders, Cutters & Welder Fitters**

Avg. Wage in Texas: **$44,160\***

Projected Growth (Texas): ***18%\****

(approx. *five times* the national average for all jobs)

[*\*Source: O-Net Online*](https://www.onetonline.org/link/localtrends/51-4121.06?st=TX&g=Go)