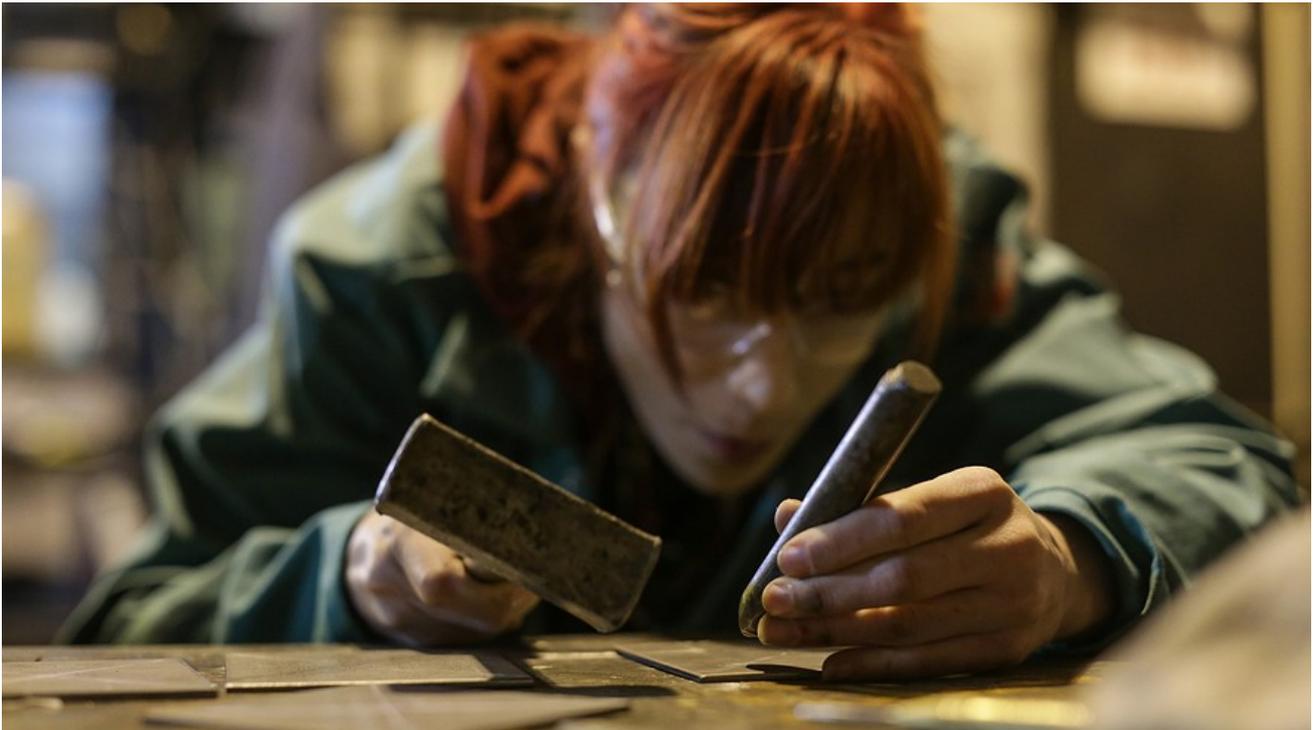


More women taking on the challenges of male-dominated welding field

By Detroit Free Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.16.16

Word Count **912**



Sandra DeBoard lines up a plate to make marks for drill holes in a piece of steel being used to build a lamp during the Women Who Weld course at the Addison Iron Fabricators in Detroit, Michigan, March 31, 2016. Photo: Ryan Garza/Detroit Free Press/TNS

DETROIT, Mich. — A half-dozen women recently sat around a table at a Detroit studio. They leaned in as instructor Ralph Taylor taught them how to weld.

“It’s all right if you try and mess up. Everyone messes up,” Taylor told his students, trying to put them at ease and push them to take risks at the same time. “You don’t have to become a welder when you finish this program. It might be a springboard to something else.”

The women in the welding class are working with a new nonprofit group, Women Who Weld, which teaches welding skills. Many of the students are single mothers and living in temporary shelters. The nonprofit group hopes to increase the number of women in the welding trade. According to the U.S. labor department, more than 95 percent of welding workers are men.

Same Work, Respect, Pay

Taylor said women who weld deserve the same respect — and pay — as men in the trade.

As the economy recovers, it demands more skilled workers. The struggle to add more women to the workforce in certain male-dominated fields has picked up as more women fill top executive positions in business and government.

“It is not an easy trade, but it’s not impossible,” said Samantha Farr, who founded Women Who Weld while attending the University of Michigan. “In the end, my goal is not just to teach women to weld, but find them jobs that are welding-related.”

Women have been fighting to enter all sorts of jobs for decades. Along the way, they are battling sexism and inequality.

Millions of women took jobs in American factories during World War II while men were on the front lines, giving rise to the term and image of Rosie the Riveter.

Rosie — which, in a promotional film was played by a Rose Monroe, a real-life riveter in the Detroit area — became a cultural icon, a symbol of the benefits and potential of American women entering the workforce, helping pave the way for future generations.

“There’s a new mindset in women in that they don’t have to stick with traditional roles,” said Jane Owen, a certified executive coach and president of executive group Vistage Michigan.

Role Models Stepping It Up

In January, General Motors board named Mary Barra, the first female CEO of a major global automaker, as chairman. She has become a role model for other women seeking top corporate jobs.

In March, five members of the U.S. women’s national soccer team — champions at the Olympics and World Cup — filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The players made the case that despite their superior performance on the field, they are paid far less than males performing the same job.

“You talk about women welders — that’s an area that, obviously, many women aren’t in,” said Tanya Allen, the president of the Detroit chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners. “But, you’d be surprised the other areas that other women aren’t in, too.”

Allen heads an organization dedicated to helping women in business as well as a company that sells feminine-hygiene products. She said that even in businesses like hers — those that market and sell products specifically for women — men dominate the leadership ranks.

Welding In Her Genes

Farr, a 29-year-old city planner, said she became a welder in graduate school. Her great-grandfather was a welder. She said she was drawn to welding when she watched male University of Michigan students work on projects in the fabrication lab.

She thought she might benefit from learning the skill, so she took a class.

“I loved it,” she said. “It felt natural, relaxing.”

She took an independent study course to learn more, and then, she decided to teach other women how to weld. She created a nonprofit group and applied for grants to pay instructors and purchase equipment.

Welding jobs, she said, are in demand.

A Shift In Attitude And Perception

Welding has long been considered a dirty job, with smoke-filled air and sparks flying, which may be one reason why it has been seen as a man’s job, said Cindy Weihl, a senior manager of public relations at the American Welding Society.

But Weihl said there are many types of welding jobs, and some are quite different from the stereotypical image. The trade group is working to change the belief that it is a man’s job, and recruit women.

“Women,” Weihl said, “tend to be better welders. They tend to pay more attention to detail and are patient.”

Taylor, who has been welding for more than 30 years and is a former Detroit Public Schools instructor, said he believes that if there are going to be more women in the industry, the attitudes of women — and men — must change.

More women, he said, need the confidence to do the job; and more men need to accept women in the industry.

Taylor’s students said they are eager to take on the challenge of welding.

“When you think welding, you think it’s a man’s job,” said Brittany Shepherd, 26. “You don’t think about women doing it.”

Daniela Hagen, who also is taking the class, said she wants to try to make a career of welding.

“Now, anybody can do anything,” Hagen, 23, said. “Any girl can do construction. Any girl can do plumbing. And any girl can do welding. It’s not just for men. Women can do exactly what men can do. We just need to not be scared to try.”

Quiz

- 1 Which of the following statements BEST represents the approach of Women Who Weld toward increasing the number of women welders?
- (A) The organization is helping women cope with the challenges of welding.
 - (B) The organization is increasing the types of welding jobs available to women.
 - (C) The organization is working to shift people's perception of welding as a job for men.
 - (D) The organization is helping women develop the proper attitude to be successful welders.
- 2 How does the article develop the idea that women's fight for equality is an ongoing struggle?
- (A) by emphasizing the recent gains that women have made in the workforce
 - (B) by providing examples of how women are bringing visibility to issues of inequality
 - (C) by explaining why certain jobs are still perceived as inappropriate for women
 - (D) by highlighting the different ways men and women approach certain jobs
- 3 Which of the following sentences from the article BEST develops a central idea?
- (A) The players made the case that despite their superior performance on the field, they are paid far less than males performing the same job.
 - (B) She said that even in businesses like hers — those that market and sell products specifically for women — men dominate the leadership ranks.
 - (C) But Weihl said there are many types of welding jobs, and some are quite different from the stereotypical image.
 - (D) More women, he said, need the confidence to do the job; and more men need to accept women in the industry.

4 Which answer choice provides an accurate, objective summary of the article?

- (A) An organization called Women Who Weld is working to recruit more women into the profession. Increasing equality for women will require a shift in people's beliefs.
- (B) Samantha Farr started the organization Women Who Weld. Her organization is working to increase the number of women in various traditionally male jobs.
- (C) Women's fight for equality persists even today. Now, women are exploring job opportunities in fields that are usually dominated by men.
- (D) Many people are working to increase awareness of gender inequality in the workplace. The American Welding Society has suggested that women are often better welders than men.