

# Business

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## SPARKING AN INTEREST IN WELDING

■ Program offers on-the-job training

■ **Technology: Kindle Fire HD**  
has better screen resolution, worth  
the upgrade. **3E**





PHOTOS BY DAVID YAMAMOTO/SPECIAL TO THE S

Chris Reno (front) and Tim Tiedge, apprentices in the Tri-Counties Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractor National Association apprenticeship program, practice working on a simulated rooftop during a class at the Ventura facility. The apprenticeship program, which is the only one in the Ventura County area and is one of 15 testing facilities in California, was recently approved by the American Welding Society for an official certification. **TOP:** Todd Patterson (left), practices gas metal arc welding as classmate Josh McMakin watches.

**By Marjorie Hernandez**

mhernandez@vcstar.com

805-437-0263

Tim Tiedge had been working in the construction industry for a few years, but when jobs became scarce, the Thousand Oaks resident decided to go back to class.

In this classroom, however, students learn the proper way to maneuver a rooftop with safety harnesses and basic welding with metal.

"Right now if you stay in construction, it would just be more layoffs," said Tiedge, 30. "I have a 2-year old daughter ... so I need something stable. So I came here so I can get back to work with full benefits."

Tiedge is among about 25 students in the Tri-Counties Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractor National Association's apprentice-

ship program in Ventura.

Last year, Tri-Counties SMACNA was named one of 15 testing facilities accredited by the American Welding Society.

In this program, students not only learn the core skills of a journeyman, or master welder, but are also required to secure work with a company where they get on-the-job training.

While jobs in the industry have declined over the past four or five years, the need for trained journeymen is critical as veterans reach retirement age, said David Maquinalez, Tri-Counties SMACNA training coordinator/instructor.

With more than 80 welding processes recognized by the American Welding Society, those trained in the field perform various types of work, including construc-

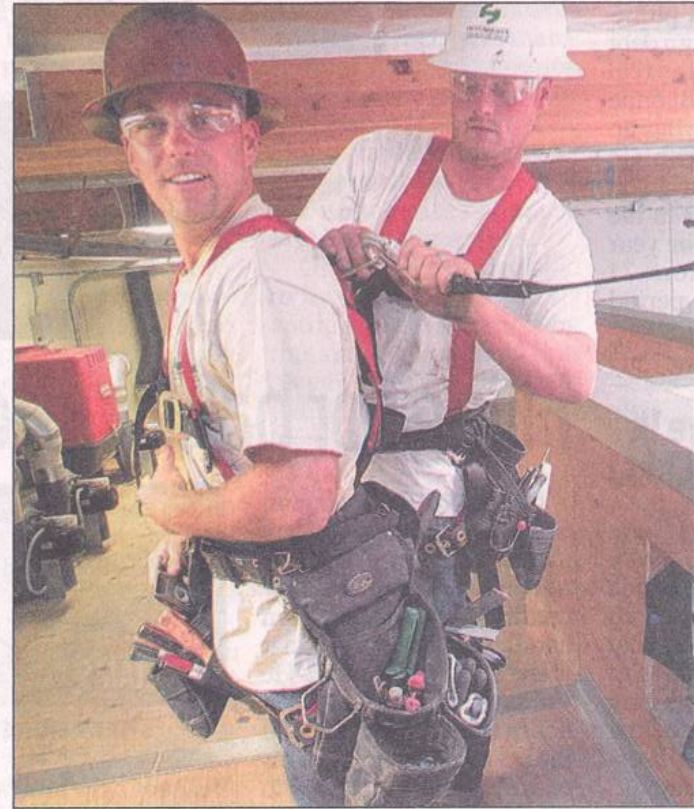
tion of ships, spacecraft parts, buildings, bridges, refineries and underwater welding.

As the construction and manufacturing sectors begin to pick up, there will be a need for skilled journeymen, Maquinalez said.

"There are baby boomers who retiring and there is no skilled worker to fill that void, but there will be jobs eventually ... and that's when we will be scrambling," Maquinalez said.

The welding industry has taken some hits over the past few years. When the housing market and the construction industry began to tank, jobs for welders, cutters, solderers and braziers also dropped. The manufacturing sector, which also has seen a decline in the United States, employs most welders.

**See APPRENTICESHIP, 6E**



Reno (left) and Tiedge secure each other into harnesses before practicing working on a simulated roof while secured by safety lines.

## APPRENTICESHIP from IE

In 2011, there were 420 welders, cutters, solderers and braziers in Ventura County, compared with 540 in 2007, said David Kong, statistician with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

SMACNA is a nonprofit trade association that represents about 300 to 350 in Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties, said Dale Towne, Tri-Counties executive vice president. About 80 of them are unemployed.

In May 24 journeymen graduated from the program and 20 more are taking the courses now. The number of welding apprentices, however, has dropped significantly since the economic downturn.

"We are definitely in tough times right now," Maquinalez said. "Right now we have about 20 students in these seats, but about four and a half years ago, there was probably about 80. If there are no jobs, that really affects local apprenticeships."

Candidates interested in the program must go through a testing and interview process. If they pass, they are placed on a waiting list for a paying job. Once they secure a job, they also participate in eight-hour welding classes twice a month at the Ventura Tri-Counties SMACNA facility.

At the Ventura and Santa Maria SMACNA training facilities, students learn a variety of skills, including welding, drafting, safety, testing and balancing of air and hydronics, sheet metal trade mathematics, sheet metal layout, architecture sheet metal, safety training and proper duct design installation procedures.

About 50 percent of participants in the five-year program have some kind of construction background, but it's not required, Maquinalez said.

By the end of the fifth year and after 800 classroom hours and 8,000 hours at job sites, they will graduate as journeymen. At that point they are trained in metallurgy and can identify the characteristics of various metals and reactions under intense heat.

Although the number of bodies in the classroom has decreased over the past five years, there is a renewed interest in the welding industry because of the op-

portunities and benefits that come with the jobs.

Despite the slow rebound, Josh McMakin of Ventura said he is confident about his decision to become an apprentice.

"I was promised a job in the oil industry and when that didn't work out ... I went to construction, but I'm still doing this apprenticeship," said McMakin, 23. "You can't beat the benefits and there is work out there."

The new crop of journeymen, however, still faces some hurdles as nearly half the construction jobs in the county have disappeared in the past six years, according to a study recently released by the Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy.

According to the CAUSE report, 47 percent of local construction jobs were lost since March 2006.

Most welders work in the manufacturing sector, and it has been declining in Ventura County and California, said Emerson Figueroa, labor marketing consultant for the state Employment Development Department. CAUSE said manufacturing jobs have declined by 11.8 percent

The median wage in 2012 for welders, cutters, solderers and braziers in California is \$37,621 annually, or \$18.09 hourly. The median wage in Ventura County is \$34,893 annually, or \$16.77 hourly, Figueroa said.

About six years ago, John Galvin was living in his car after he moved to Ventura County from Virginia. He decided to apply to the SMACNA program.

While taking classes, he secured an apprenticeship with Anderson Systems, a Goleta company that fabricates duct work and exhaust systems for businesses such as laboratories, schools and hotels.

After graduating in May, Galvin was able to keep his job. With the training and job stability, Galvin now has a home in Santa Paula.

"I have two kids now since starting the program and it helped me that the contractors you work for coordinate with your schooling," Galvin said. "If you were laid off from one company, they will find you another that is looking for an apprentice. It has been a blessed journey to say the least ... because now I am a journeyman."