

With a total of three women currently enrolled in the Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center, Southside Virginia Community College's Arc Welding I class, intergenerational learning and nontraditional are not simply "buzzwords." SVCC instructor John Evans' class at Lake Country Knowledge Center in South Hill notes that two of the women weld in booths side by side, but, in age, they are 50 years apart.

These women enjoy learning together and supporting the efforts of one another. And, it goes without saying that women enrolled in a welding class are not the norm. Typically, one thinks of men as welders; and, women in this field are the minority. But wearing their protective clothing of a cap, helmet, coat, gloves and boots, they fit right in.

Diane Boaz and Heather McComb are both from Lunenburg County. Another interesting thing about Diane and Heather is that they are grandmother and granddaughter "by choice." They found each other when Heather and her family moved across the road from Diane several years ago. From the beginning the two were of the same mind. Heather said, with emotion, that she wouldn't be where she is today if it weren't for Diane and her husband, David.

The Boaz's have a farm where Diane has been actively working for some years. Heather has helped with the cows and the farm duties. For both of them, welding is something they can use to keep the equipment working and in good shape. Heather will be graduating from high school in May and hopes to find work that offers a great deal of variety. She knows she doesn't want to sit behind a desk and really enjoys working outdoors. Ultimately her goal is to farm full-time. Her thinking is that welding skills will give her an employment edge.

A great deal of variety is what Diane has in her work history and a significant amount has been in work that is nontraditional for women. She once applied for a position as fire fighter for the City of Charlotte, North Carolina. Unfortunately, she was an inch too short to qualify, but she was the first woman to ever apply. While her employment in a hospital operating room was more traditional, she was again in the minority as a Pinkerton Security Guard in Charlotte and as a member of a field surveying team in Mecklenburg County.

Diane began welding in 2015 in two classes also at Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center. She heard about the offering through Heather's uncle and took the classes with him. Heather came to observe. By January 2018 Heather was enrolled as well and Diane signed up to hone her skills.

Both women have high praises for Evans, "He is a wonderful, patient, kind person and a great instructor."

For Diane Boaz, welding is more than just a skill to be used to maintain the tillage tools and other farm equipment. "It means being more self-reliant and self-sufficient as a woman." And it certainly isn't every woman who receives a Lincoln Stick Welder and a welding table as Christmas gifts from her husband!

Thanks to our own Judy Shepherd, who came out of retirement to interview some SVCC students for this article!!