

## Welding equipment expanded at KHS

Welding jobs continue to be in high demand.

According to American Welding Society (AWS) estimates, by 2023 there will be a shortage of more than 375,000 welders nationwide. While this is an industry challenge, the shortage also presents an opportunity.

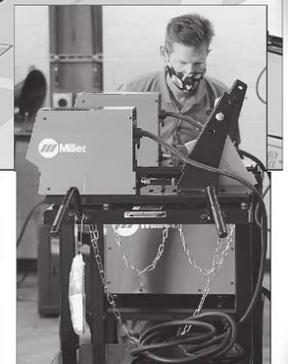
As a result, Kiel High School (KHS), Lakeshore Technical College (LTC), Miller Electric and Amerequip have joined together to develop a program rarely if ever seen in a rural school district. It includes state-of-the-art welders, a high-tech lab environment, a variety of classes, technical college credits, and paid apprenticeship opportunities.

“The lack of welders is a big challenge for local manufacturers,” said Amerequip President/CEO Mike VanderZanden. “We need welders to expand and grow our business, and we know high school is when many young people are thinking about jobs and careers. If they aren’t exposed to welding at that point, they might not think about it at all. This private-public collaboration changes the dynamic.”

Kiel Public Schools Superintendent Brad Ebert added, “While Kiel High School traditionally offers a welding program, it has been small in size with only five welding stations, which limited our ability to teach this in-demand skill. Now, thanks to this collaboration, we are expanding the program to better serve students and our community employers.”

Highlights of the program include:

- 13 additional, new, state-of-the-art welding bays and equipment from Miller Electric, bringing the total number of welders to 18;
- expanded class offerings at KHS, with dual credits earned at the high school and LTC. Participating students will be on an accelerated path to a technical college welding certification.
- paid apprenticeship offerings through Amerequip to program students, providing real-life manufacturing experience while they learn the trade. Amerequip will then fund 100 percent of all costs to continue their education, while paying full-time wages and benefits to students who elect to continue their education after high school.



Kiel High School and Miller Electric personnel unload, unpack, and set up welding equipment Monday morning at the school. Below, Lakeshore Technical College CEO Paul Carlsen addresses the media on the college's part in the partnership which brought the new equipment to the school.

*Mark Sherry photos*



“Miller Electric has always seen the value in partnering with educators to help build and educate the next generation of skilled workers,” said Dave Lambert, vice president of North American Sales, Miller Electric. “We are happy to be a partner in this unique relationship as this program goes beyond offering a single class on welding.

By expanding the class offerings, it introduces more students to the career opportunities in the field and teaches them the skills they need to be successful. The dual credits with Lakeshore Tech, and the apprenticeship opportunities at Amerequip, make this incredibly comprehensive.”

LTC welding instructor Dave Saunders said, “The students who enroll in this program will be earning LTC credits while in high school and will have a tremendous opportunity to jumpstart their careers. This 10-credit program will give the high school student an opportunity to either attend LTC post-graduation and complete the remaining 17 credits for their Welding-Industrial technical degree in under a year or directly enter the welding and fabrication manufacturing fields.”

The expanded welding program starts in September at Kiel High School. Classes will be held in the new tech hall. “We’re already hearing from students who can’t wait to take the classes,” said Kiel High School technical education teacher Ted Bonde. “We look forward to getting things under way.”

Ron Schneider, welding instructor at KHS, said the school already had a mix of welding equipment but that Monday’s delivery will allow students to work at all skill levels. “This is bringing us up to date,” said Schneider, adding that he would like to see a one-to-one ratio of welding equipment to students.

Schneider said there are five companies in Kiel alone which do a lot of welding and more than a half dozen others throughout the area, so this program stands to benefit multiple companies. He added that he is looking forward to seeing the reaction of student when they return to school in a few weeks. “We’ve always had a big interest, but it’s kind of leveled off,” Schneider said. “It’s always good to see them excited.”

VanderZanden added that one of the reasons Amerequip wanted to be part of this program is that the youths of the community are important to the company. He also said Amerequip employs over 75 welders, and that the profession has often been a bottleneck to the company’s work flow and growth. He said just 18 months ago the company was using 28 welders employed by other companies throughout the Midwest because Amerequip could not find enough of its own welders. He said they would like to do all their own welding and have hired eight welders in just the past two weeks.”

“It’s truly exciting and rewarding,” VanderZanden said of the program. “This is the same equipment we use in our shop.” He also said plans are to update the equipment at KHS every three years.

Paul Carlsen, CEO of Lakeshore Technical College, said LTC wants to make sure high school students are being introduced to technical education as soon as possible as they will be 20 percent more likely to enroll at a technical college if they have had that experience in high school.