

Dept. of Corrections: Inmates complete Gas Metal Arc Welding Program

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FOR DOC: DOC Communications, 608-240-5060
DOCMedia@wisconsin.gov

FOR WITC: Jena Vogtman, 715-394-6677, ext. 6936
Jena.Vogtman@witc.edu

SUPERIOR – Department leaders joined Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (WITC) Campus Administrator Bonny Copenhaver, family, and friends to congratulate fourteen Gordon Correctional Center inmates graduating from WITC's Gas Metal Arc Welding program.

The program is a 5-week, 8-credit program which provides fundamental instruction in welding safety and basic arc welding techniques. With this credential, inmates are qualified to work as welders, fitters, operators, production welders, or welder helpers. The median wage for WITC graduates from the Gas Metal Arc Welding program is \$18.37 per hour.

The inmates, who are in minimum-security status, represent part of the Department's efforts to train inmates nearing release for in-demand careers in the community. Over the last two years, the Department has devoted significant resources to increasing educational and vocational opportunities for inmates, which includes hosting short-term intensive academies across the state of Wisconsin in concert with local technical colleges in carpentry, welding, CNC machining, industrial maintenance, and animal husbandry.

These academies result in industry-recognized credentials inmates can utilize to find family-sustaining jobs in the community in an effort to reduce recidivism. The Department has also purchased a mobile lab which provides instruction in CNC machining and received funds in the 2017 - 2019 biennial budget to purchase additional mobile labs which will provide instruction in welding and industrial maintenance.

DOC Secretary Cathy Jess said: “As a Department, we believe it’s critical to prepare inmates for success in the community. This program is one way inmates can learn valuable skills which will translate into employment in the community and enable them to live crime-free lives. We will continue to expand these opportunities, as we believe that a good, family-sustaining job is a great deterrent to recidivism.”

“The success of this welding program shows how organizations can work together to provide unique opportunities for incarcerated residents to build their skillset, gain confidence and realize a new future for themselves upon release,” explains, Bonny Copenhaver, WITC-Superior Campus Administrator and Vice President of Academic Affairs.