

BTC's Welding Center 'Top-notch'

College hosts conference to show off facility

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THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM — Welding instructors and students were considered some of the luckiest people on the Bellingham Technical College campus Thursday.

The college was hosting the Washington Welding Instructors Association fall conference to showcase its newly opened Morse Center Welding & Auto Collision Building. Instructors from other parts of the state walked around the nearly 50,000-square-foot facility slightly wide-eyed, saying "top-notch" and "state of the art." The conference ends today.

"Now we have a great facility and can train to do whatever we need to do," said Don Anderson, one of BTC's welding instructors. "We're in a good position to be the leader in welding education."

The two-story building has 50 welding stations, space for aluminum work, an auto-body shop, space for painting cars and several classrooms and computer labs. The expanded space also attracted more new students to the welding technology program this fall than instructors expected — 80 new students compared to the usual 24, said Jeré Donnelly, another BTC welding instructor.

"We were hoping for 48," she said.

The Morse Center, which officially opened for classes last month, also will allow instructors to bring in new technology, such as robotic welders shown at the conference by Lincoln Electric, Anderson said.

Marshall Judy, with Central Welding Supply, said having the latest technology at BTC will help attract and retain young trade workers in Whatcom County. It's known in the trades that there will be a worker shortage soon as baby boomers start retiring because for years high school students were pushed to go to four-year colleges and enter academic and electronic fields, Judy said.

"There was a stigma to going to a two-year trade school," he said. "This facility will help fill that gap."



DANNY GAWLOWSKI THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Robyn Westphal, center, a Lincoln Electric sales representative, demonstrates the safety features of the e Cell Robotic Welding System to Gordon Belka, left, and Marshall Judy at Bellingham Technical College's Morse Center Welding & Auto Collision Building on Oct. 18. The center has been serving students enrolled in BTC's welding and auto collision repair programs since May. Both programs are currently at full student capacity. The e Cell Robotic Welding System will be on display for students and local businesses at the center for a few weeks.