

Bellingham Technical College all-women welding team takes on competition

KIRA M. COX - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM - Gold sparks and the sounds of grinding metal filled the air at Bellingham Technical College on Friday, May 21, as teams of amateur welders raced to build the most impressive scrap-metal sculpture.

BTC's Welding Rodeo, which is in its ninth year, attracts professionals and welding students from across northwest Washington. The two-day event features 10 amateur high school and college teams Friday and 10 professional teams Saturday.

This year's theme is the Human Form, with Friday's four-person teams building sculptures ranging from a person kneeling before a fallen soldier's rifle to a large-scale version of wind-up chattering teeth.

A crowd formed Friday morning around the BTC booth, where the first all-female team, Split Endz, was working. To set themselves apart, the four women began the event dressed in red and black ruffled aprons and yellow dish gloves.

"We wanted to show we're all about the fun," said second-year student Andrea Schuman, adding that the costumes got ditched as soon as the welding started.

The team, which also included Sara Thornton, Samantha Shields and Shaunna Stroud, was building a sculpture inspired by the tree yoga pose, with half the sculpture looking like a tree and the other half a person.



PHILIP A. DWYER | THE BELLINGHAM HERALD - Lynden High School student Alex Tromp welds on the school's welding team entry "Wisp in the Wind" at the annual Bellingham Technical Welding Rodeo, Friday, May 21, 2010.

Only Shields, who was on BTC's winning amateur team last year, had competed before. When she and Schuman decided to make an all-female team, there was little hesitation from the others.

"Why wouldn't we?" said Stroud, a first-year student. "I'm learning to be a welder ... and this is the fun art part of it!"