I once got a sneak peek of a ginormous scrap pile that was to be utilized by teams who’d be taking part in that year’s “Welding Rodeo” at Bellingham Technical College (BTC). And although I had a difficult time imagining the various works of art that would emerge from creatively wrangling the numerous mountains of metal, I had no doubt the teams who were taking on the challenge of turning scrap into sculpture were up to the task.

Part of the reason I was so confident in their abilities was that the event already had a proven track record. Although the Welding Rodeo started small 15 years ago as a one-day affair with five teams and a budget of around $400, in the time since BTC welding instructors Jere Donnelly and Don Anderson conceived of hosting the event as a way to bring attention to the college's two-year welding program and the field in general, it has grown by leaps and bounds.

These days, the Welding Rodeo encompasses two days—the first one featuring amateur and student teams, the second being reserved for the pros—and the entire campus gets involved (more on that in a minute).

For those not already in the know, students and professionals follow the same blueprint. They show up before 8am in order to suss out the pile par-