

Green Bay educator honored for program that introduces young girls to welding

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GREEN BAY, Wis. (WBAY) -- A Green Bay educator is honored Wednesday for her efforts in introducing young girls to trade careers.



We often hear about the skilled workers shortage where there just aren't enough people with the right skill set to fill thousands of open manufacturing jobs, but Lisa Johnson is doing her part to fill that gap by empowering young girls.

At the '6th Annual Excellence in Manufacturing' event, Lisa Johnson received a 'Career Pathmaker' award in honor of her 'This Girl Can' program for young school girls to learn about welding careers.

"It's a time when they are trying to explore who they are and to think outside the box of something they didn't think they could do and give it a try because you never know until you try something," said Johnson, a coordinator of summer school and extended learning with the Green Bay Area School district.

It's a mindset Northeast Wisconsin Technical College has taken on too by hosting yearly events that invite local middle school girls to campus to take part in hands-on activities involving certain trades.

"At first I think they are not sure if they really want to do it, but after a while they are on it and have a lot of fun," said Wayia Thao, a student support specialist at NWTC. "They enjoy it very much."

Maya Ihrcke said those types of fieldtrips at a young age would have made an impact in her life.

"It would have made me start a little earlier thinking about welding," said Ihrcke.

Ihrcke wasn't exposed to welding until her senior year of college and that's when she fell in love with the career.

Twenty-one-year-old Jamey Woodbeck didn't consider welding until her mom brought it up about a year ago.

"I am very artistic, I have a great knack for math and welding is kind of a combination of the two," said Woodbeck.

Ihrcke and Woodbeck are just a few of the women currently in the welding program at NWTC.

"People are always shocked when they ask, 'What are you going to school for?' and I say, 'Welding,' and you can see the reaction on their face," said Ihrcke.

That reaction is something welding instructor Jon Russell ran into early in his teaching career 20 years ago at NWTC

"Very very few, in fact my first day of teaching I had one female," said Russell.

But Russell said the numbers have grown and he hopes more women enter into trade careers, especially as the demand for skilled workers increases every year.

“It’s expected to be about 420,000 jobs in welding by 2018,” said Russell. “As some people view this as a man jobs historically, it is conducive to anybody, man or woman and we find women do quite well with welding.”

“We know we have lots of different career pathways here in northeastern Wisconsin that we need to expose our students to,” said Johnson.