

# Another workplace shortage on the horizon \_ welders

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Published on Wednesday Feb 13, 2008

Add welders to the list \_ nurses, teachers and others \_ of workers who could be in short supply in just a few years.

A Cincinnati company, the OKI Bering Co., is so concerned that it has donated \$100,000 to develop a Web site to help jobseekers apply online for jobs. It also plans to donate up to \$1 million in surplus supplies over the next five years to welding schools across the country.

Of course, the company has an interest in welding jobs \_ it's a wholesaler of welding supplies with 10 distribution centers in the U.S., two in Canada and one in Dubai.

The Miami-based American Welding Society says the nation could have a shortage of 200,000 trained welders by 2010. The society has raised about a quarter of the \$10 million it wants for its welder work force development campaign.

"The real problem is that the average age of welders is in the mid 50s," said Adrienne Zalkind, spokeswoman for the American Welding Society. "Many of them will be retiring in the next few years, and there's a reluctance today for people to enter the industry. People are not aware of the many opportunities a career offers.

"Some feel it's not a very pleasant environment to work in, and that's just not true. It's a very interesting and solid career, and it's long-term."

One selling point, it seems clear, is job security. U.S. Labor Department figures show the number of welders employed in 2005 was 576,000 \_ down from 594,000 in 2000.

But that was not because of fewer jobs. And industry already has felt the crunch of worker shortages.

"There already are bottlenecks in production lines," Zalkind said. "We hear about it every day."

The Hobart Institute of Welding Technology in Troy is one of the nation's oldest training schools for welders, dating to 1930.

It can accommodate about 160 students at a time, and enrollment is full.

"Our classes are filled through February and March, and we're booking into April," said spokeswoman Marty Baker.

She said graduating welders can expect starting wages of \$12 to \$15 an hour, and sometimes up to the mid \$20s, depending on skill level and location. Top-level experienced welders can make more than \$100,000 a year.

"Welding jobs are much more desirable than they used to be," she said. "The pay is better and the workplace is cleaner. Some places are paying premiums."

Getting into the profession isn't exactly cheap, but sometimes financial help is available. Hobart's five-month structural welding program costs \$8,070 plus books, Baker said. The more comprehensive nine-month program costs \$13,795.

"We could be compared to a junior college of welding," Baker said.

Training also is available at some vocational schools.

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On the Net:

Hobart Institute: <http://www.welding.org>

American Welding Society: <http://www.aws.org>