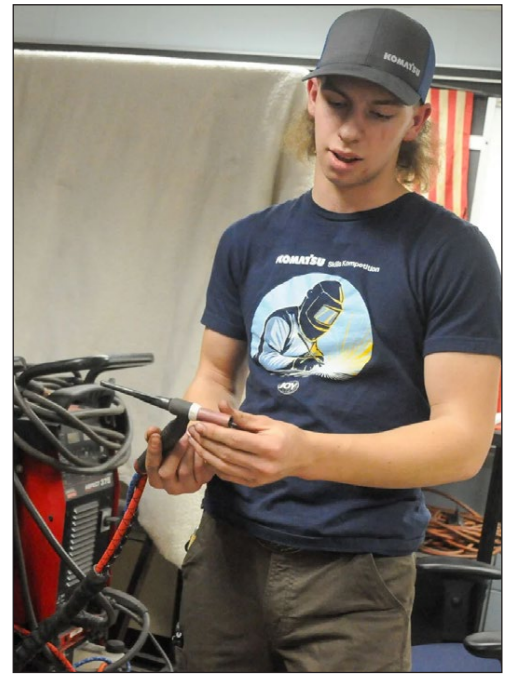


Putting their SKILLS to the TEST



Crawford Tech welding students light up state competition

By Mike Crowley
MEADVILLE TRIBUNE

Two stackable metal crates, three Crawford Tech students, six hours, and more than enough welding to fill the time.

The setting was the welding shop at Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport as 11 teams from across the state waged a battle of welding skills to determine the gold medal winners in the welding fabrication event for the 2025 SkillsUSA Pennsylvania Leadership and Skills Conference

“They were running out of time — that was how the project was designed, to basically not get it finished,” said Crawford Tech welding teacher Brad Custead, who attended the competition along Evan Moutosos, the school’s other welding teacher. “They actually looked ahead at the rubric and saw what was worth more points. ... It just tells you what they were thinking out there, and they had no guidance from us because we weren’t allowed to talk to them for seven hours.”

“They were thinking on their feet, so that was good,” Moutosos agreed as the two welding instructors paused during their afternoon class last week to talk about the team made up of three



Crawford Tech students Dylan Dewey (from left), Kayden Joliet and Bailey Hyden add to a project during class recently. ABOVE: Joliet holds a tungsten inert gas welder as he explains his part in building a material crate during the 2025 SkillsUSA Pennsylvania Leadership and Skills Conference.

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of their top students: Maplewood Junior-Senior high junior Dylan Dewey and Saegertown Junior-Senior High seniors Cayden Joliet and Bailey Hyden.

The trio’s talent for welding under pressure earned them a first-place finish, the gold medals that came with it, and the chance to compete against the best high school welders in the nation at

the SkillsUSA Championships, which take place in Atlanta in late June.

The team becomes the third group of Crawford Tech welders to win top honors in the state over the past 15 years, according to Custead.

To do it, they had to focus on teamwork and disregard the stressful nature of the environ-

ment. The camaraderie among the classmates was clear to see as they interrupted and finished each other’s sentences, recalling their state of mind during the competition.

“Other people are welding, other people are assembling their stuff all around you,” Hyden said

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as the team members ducked out of the shop, where classmates were welding and two generators located just outside were roaring, to a nearby equipment room. “Judges are walking around, telling us how much time we have left periodically because there’s no clocks and no phones allowed. So you’re just left to time manage by yourself until the judge comes back around and tells you how much time you’ve got — ‘90 minutes left,’ ‘30 minutes left.’”

“The biggest thing was keeping focused on what we had to do,” said Dewey, the youngest member of the team, who followed up the win by starting his cooperative education position with Apple Shamrock Dairy Farm in Townville last week.

While their goal in fabricating the two material storage baskets was to ensure the various welds held the assembly



Students (from left) Kayden Joliet, a senior at Saegertown High School; Bailey Hyden, a senior at Saegertown High School; and Dylan Dewey, a junior at Maplewood High School, are members of the first-place Crawford Tech welding team that won at the 2025 SkillsUSA Pennsylvania Leadership and Skills Conference.

together tightly, the team’s secret in dealing with the stress was keeping things loose.

“We like to joke around a lot,” said Joliet, who works at Switch-N-Go in Saegertown through the school’s co-op program.

It also helped that other groups were in the same situation.

“Especially when the teams around you struggle, it can almost lighten the mood because it lets you know that you’re doing well by not ar-

guing with your team or nothing like that,” Hyden said.

The project was designed to test a variety of welding skills and required the team members to perform both shielded metal and gas metal welds, along with oxy-fuel cuts, plasma cuts, layout skills, drill holes, and use of a portable band saw.

Particularly tedious were the extensive tungsten inert gas welds required to assemble the crates. Joliet took



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lead on the TIG welds, having taken first place and the \$2,500 worth of tools that came with it last month at the Komatsu Manufacturing Skills Kompetition at Venango Technology Center.

In preparing for the SkillsUSA event, Dewey, Hyden and Joliet received plans for the crates they would be building about three weeks before the March 11 event, allowing them time to practice the work needed to create

3-by-3-by-2-foot containers. To keep them on their feet, final instructions, with additional details and even some changes, were provided on the day of the competition.

Originally scheduled for five and a half hours, the contest was extended to allow teams time to complete their projects. As the time warnings grew smaller and smaller, the team started to gain a bit of confidence.

“When the judges came

around, they told us we were doing a great job,” Dewey recalled. “He said we were putting on a clinic. It kind of got us —”

“Hyped,” Hyden said. “— excited,” Dewey concluded.

There was still time to sweat when the winners were revealed, however. The top three teams were called up and then made to wait as third place was announced first in what Dewey described as perhaps the most nerve wracking moment of the event.

The winner soon became clear, however.

“Once they didn’t call us for second — and we knew what second’s project looked like,” Hyden added, “and then they called us in first.”

“Once they said our name,” Dewey said, “it was like —”

“Hallelujah,” Hyden said.

“— a big relief,” Dewey finished.

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