

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PBCC and U.S. Sugar join forces to meet high demand for skilled welders in the Glades

When the United States Sugar Corporation found it difficult to replace skilled welders, mostly due to attrition and retirement, "We knew we needed to do something fast," said Fred Dyess, Jr., Human Resources manager for the company. Dyess called Palm Beach Community College, and together, the company and the college arranged to have the welding program offered on-site at the Clewiston facility.

"The program offers workers an opportunity to obtain advanced skills for future career advancement," said Larry Worth, vice president of Agricultural Services for the company. "U.S. Sugar is always going to need good, qualified welders."

Due to work schedules and the distance from Clewiston, most U.S. Sugar employees are unable to attend regular welding classes PBCC offers at West Technical Education Center in Belle Glade. The initial group of 15 students at U.S. Sugar attends classes three nights a week and all day Friday from July 16 to Oct. 11 this year. Classes will resume in May 2003 with a second program start also planned.

PBCC's welding curriculum incorporates national skill standards for welders through the American Welding Society's program S.E.N.S.E. (Schools Excelling through National Skills Education). When welding students complete the program, they will receive a state-recognized postsecondary adult vocational certificate from PBCC, which should fully prepare them for U.S. Sugar's internal welding test. The program teaches basic welding, shielded metal arc welding, gas metal arc welding, flux cored arc welding, gas tungsten arc welding and pipe welding.

"We foresee a heavy increase in the need for skilled welders in Palm Beach and Hendry counties, and without acting now, this demand will not be met," said Mike Calloway, program coordinator for PBCC. "This program not only teaches hands-on welding methods but the blueprint, symbol reading and math skills associated with the welding industry."

The program is open to U.S. Sugar employees only; participants work at their own paces. If there's enough interest, the company will offer a welding program at its Eastern Agricultural Equipment Shop in Canal Point, Worth said.

“Historically, it’s been difficult to find qualified welders,” he said. “We hope it’s successful and that we’ll be doing this for years to come.”

Robert Miller, President of Lake Local Lodge No. 57 of the International Association of Machinist and Aerospace Workers said, “This program is good for our members and good for the company. We hope it can be expanded in the future.”

“The welding program at U.S. Sugar is a wonderful opportunity for employees of U.S. Sugar and the community,” said Pat Richie, associate dean of Career and Technical Education at PBCC. “As a comprehensive community college we should be assisting local industry to meet their employment needs.”