

## A Welding Sculpture Class Introduced Graduate to Hands-on Career

Sebastian Avina, a graduate of Lindsay High School, originally planned to become a firefighter paramedic. But when he unexpectedly discovered welding, his career path changed. With the encouragement of his employers as well as College of the Sequoias (COS) faculty and student support staff, Avina managed to stay in college to earn his Associate of Science in Welding. Now he is working as a welder for Serpa™ Packaging Solutions. “I really enjoy working as a welder with Serpa™,” said Avina. “I like working with my hands in a skilled trade because there is always something different to do and learn every day.”

Avina enrolled in the Fire Technology program at College of the Sequoias with the intent of getting his emergency medical technician (EMT) designation. To complete his degree, he took a welding sculpture course to fulfill a humanities requirement. “I ended up really liking welding,” said Avina. “So even though I graduated with an Associate of Science in Fire Technology and got my EMT, I wanted to pursue welding.”

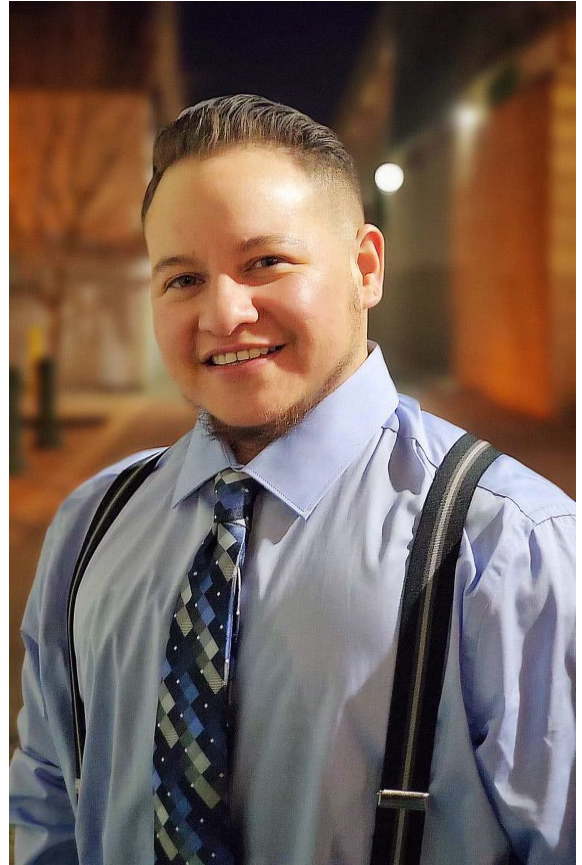
COS offers a one-semester intensive Welding program that is four hours per day, Monday through Friday with the same group of students, to put them on the fast-track to employment. That’s the program Avina enrolled in but it wasn’t easy to stay in school with the financial pressures, according to Avina. “Our welding class went on a tour of Serpa™ and the manager mentioned that they’d be hiring some interns,” said Avina.

Serpa™ designs and manufactures automated packaging equipment for cartons, sleeves, cases, trays and palletizers that can be customized to package customers’ unique products. Over the years, Serpa™ has become a premier full line integrator for Fortune 500 companies and continues to strive in generating new markets. “I applied for the welding internship and got it,” said Avina. “Serpa™ allowed me to work around my school schedule and that really motivated me. It made it so much easier to balance school and work.”



COS offered additional resources that helped him to stay in school. “Everyone at COS is so friendly and helpful,” said Avina. “Lisette Conway with COS CTE Career Services told me about applying for scholarships that really made a difference. My welding instructor, Randy Emery, arranged for us to get student memberships with the American Welding Society (AWS) and encouraged me to network with employers by attending the Agriculture Show and other industry meetings.”

According to Emery, Avina was self-motivated. “Sebastian had an intensity and focus that made him a very successful student,” said Emery. “His work ethic and ability to adapt made him stand out.” Students don’t just learn welding skills in class, Emery incorporates essential skills curriculum. “Employers say that the abilities to adapt, collaborate, communicate and be a team player are just as important as technical welding skills,” said Emery. “So, I tell my students that I’m





offering them a personal development program that prepares them for work. Welding students can have many career options if they know what's expected in today's workplace."

Welders are very well paid, explained Emery. "They can become fabricators of auto parts and agricultural equipment, work in plumbing and piping industries, maintain and repair food processing equipment, or work in construction or for utilities," said Emery. "The COS Welding program takes people with little to no experience and makes them employable in just one semester. Students learn skills that make them much more productive and valued by employers, and it opens up a whole new world for them." Avina confirmed how much he appreciated learning professional as well as welding skills. "Mr. Emery taught us how to be better employees," said Avina. "We

learned how to be friendly and confident in the workplace."

Students don't need experience to enroll in the COS Welding program, explained Avina. "COS prepares students with everything they need to begin a welding career," said Avina. "I started in the program barely knowing how to use a measuring tape. Now, accurate measurements and tolerances down to 1/64 of an inch are essential for my work." Avina worked as an intern with Serpa™ while taking welding classes at COS. "I started at an entry level and enjoy continuing to become more efficient as I learn new skills and tricks of the trade," said Avina. "After the internship, I was hired on full time as a welder. I fit up, weld and grind the frames that hold the components and automated equipment for producing packaging. I really like that I get to do something new every day."

Avina only needed a few more classes after the one semester intensive welding program to earn his Welding Certificate of Achievement and Associate of Science degree in Welding. "I was able to work for Serpa™ while finishing my degree," said Avina. "I actually ended up with two degrees, one in Fire Technology and one in Welding. Now that I have two years of work experience plus my welding degree, I qualify to take the Certified Welding Inspector exam with AWS."

It was by chance that Avina discovered his passion for welding and committed the time, despite financial hardship, to dramatically change his career path. "Don't be intimidated," said Avina. "I had no knowledge or welding skills but COS gave me the opportunity to find out how much I liked hands-on work."

Once Avina decided on welding, COS resources jumpstarted his welding career. "I was introduced to an employer that gave me an internship while I was gaining practical classroom experience," said Avina. "Welding instructor, Chris Huff taught me print reading which is incredibly helpful in my job. Employers regularly gave presentations to help students consider where they might want to work."

Avina highly recommends COS. "College of the Sequoias is a great community college," said Avina. "It doesn't get the credit that it is due. The staff is so friendly and faculty has a plethora of knowledge and wide industry network. In addition, the college offers amazing resources and the facilities are great. I'd encourage students to ask for help, apply for every scholarship and take advantage of every resource."



According to Emery, the COS Career Technical Education facilities are about to get even better. “The new Applied Technology & Trades Complex is currently under construction,” said Emery. “Welding and all the skilled trades will be under one roof. It is a \$42 million state-of-the-art building with equipment and tools to prepare students to fill highly paid, skilled jobs here in the Valley.”