

Top Welder in the Country

USU Eastern Magazine

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A USU Eastern Student - Named Top Welder in the Country; Fifth in the World



Instructors Winters and Welch worked daily with Vincent.

A USU Eastern welding student has done what no other welder in the 80-year history of the school has done before, nor any other Utah welding competitor for that matter. . . . Chandler Vincent was named the top welding competitor in the United States and the fifth best in the world at the WorldSkills competition.

The jet-lagged 19-year-old was back on the Utah State University Eastern campus a day after returning from his 17-hour flight. After competing in six categories on four-straight days at the 44th WorldSkills competition in Abu Dhabi of the United Arab Emirates, Vincent finished in fifth place and returned with a medallion of excellence. He was also awarded a medallion for "Best of Nation" during the closing ceremonies for scoring higher than any other United State's competitor in their respective competitions.

At the opening ceremonies, Vincent served as the U.S. flag bearer representing TeamUSA. With only 11 members, USA had the second smallest team at the competition. He was one of the 1,300 students from 59-WorldSkills-member countries and regions showcasing their talent across 51-skills competitions. This was the first

time the competition was held in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Instructors Lon Youngberg, Mason Winters, Austin Welch, plus classmates, kept tabs on Vincent as they streamed the classmates, kept tabs on Vincent as they streamed the WorldSkills ceremonies live in the welding classroom for everyone to watch. "It's tough mentally to adjust to the time difference and high level of competition," Vincent said. "Knowing that everyone who helped me get there was watching me throughout the week was cool."

"When one competes on the world's stage, it is a great motivational factor. It takes an insane amount of welding to round me into the welder that I have become. It's almost unrealistic how much I have learned so fast to be well-prepared for the levels of competitions this past year."

Throughout the week of competition he averaged five and a half hours of welding each day, but said he never felt stress. Vincent scored more points than he has ever scored in nearly every category.

Out of the 800 points possible, there was a nine-point spread between first and fifth place. A student from China placed first, Korea second, Japan third, Taiwan fourth and the U.S. fifth. The Chinese competitor who placed first has been welding since he was 8, Vincent said.

The always humble Vincent loved the way everyone was treated at the competition and believed the best part was learning from all the competitors. "I got to weld with the best welders in the world and gave them a run for their money...It's crazy how good everyone was and the high level of competition."

Youngberg is ecstatic over each of Vincent's accomplishments. In an all-campus email, he wrote, "He's a fine young man and wonderful representative for USU and USA." He thanked everyone who supported Vincent. "It is a lot of work to engage at this level (but worth it), much of that work fell to Mason [Winters], who has the skill, experience and willingness to make a difference."

Winters added, "I feel incredibly fortunate to have been able to work with such a dedicated and talented young man that was so willing to put everything aside and strive for the pinnacle of excellence. This is such an and strive for the pinnacle of excellence. This is such an incredible achievement that Chandler will be extremely proud of and reflect upon for the rest of his life. This was truly the

experience of a lifetime that helped to advance his career in ways that will be unknown for years to come.”

In Vincent’s hometown of Roosevelt, Utah, he is a rock star who everyone in the community knows. He is remembered at Union High School as the kid who only wanted to hunt, fish and stay outdoors. He detested school and every class he took. When he explained to his mother that he was dropping out of school, she begged him to go to school and take just one class he loved. At 15 years old, he registered for a welding class at the Uintah Basin Applied Technology Center and the rest is history.

It’s been four years since that pivotal moment, and since then he was named the best welder in the U.S. in February 2017 and fifth best in the world in October 2017 . . . quite an accomplishment for a guy who hated school.

He said he’s not done with classes at USU Eastern until graduation in April 2018. In his final semester, he wants to learn more about the science and theory behind welding, take a machine shop class to help with fabrication, plus an accounting class to help his business.

He also wants to become a certified welding inspector by passing the six-hour certification test. With his education and experience, he plans to reopen his welding business in May 2018, a business he put on hold after high school to attend USU Eastern.

He’s received a number of job offers, but chooses to be his own boss and live where he can hunt, fish and be outdoors.

“I realize I’m still 19, but my body feels like its 40. The stress and discipline of preparing for national and world competitions has taken a toll on me,” Vincent said. For the past year and a half, he often practiced 10 or more hours a day, seven days a week. “As grueling as my training schedule has been, I received a lot of help along the way and have a lot of thank you notes to complete. Industry and community support has been awesome.”

In June, he traveled to Australia with two of his instructors to compete with other national welding competitors in preparation for the world competition. He has traveled to Lincoln Electric’s headquarters in Cleveland to work with their specialists. He was in Washington D.C. with other TeamUSA competitors and met with the Undersecretary of Education. Possibly his favorite practice sessions were in St. Louis Missouri with Ray Connolly, the TeamUSA welding expert and former WorldSkills gold medalist.

Reflecting upon USUE’s program, Vincent said, “I think welders coming out of this program are way above average on the knowledge and welding techniques. There are definitely top grade welders coming out of Eastern.”

Philosophically, he is wise beyond his years. He advises students to, “Push yourself to the limits and soon you will find you have none. I had no purpose for math, no purpose for anything. I was a kid who didn’t want to do anything but go hunting every day of my life. I didn’t care about the future until I found welding and then I was like, holy crap I am going to need this now.”

Vincent cannot say enough good about the welding department at USU Eastern and its instructors. “The biggest thing that I have learned from this program, is learning how to learn... I learn from my own mistakes and better myself from the things that I have screwed up. I thought I was pretty good at welding and thought I knew everything. I came into here and it was a big awakening for me.

“They [the instructors] opened up this huge world on the theory side and now I understand what is going on in the metal and how the machines get the power.

“These instructors definitely teach a one-of-a-kind program. The things students learn will last them a lifetime. I have seen a lot of people in the industry think they know what is going on and there are a lot of problems that can be solved coming out of this program. Besides making great welders, the instructors develop character here.”

His advice to students, “Find your passion. If you find your passion and work hard towards your goals, there is nothing that is impossible.

“I want to let everyone know that there is nothing that you can’t achieve with hard work. There are no limits.”

What’s next for this talented 19-year-old? He wants to give back to the welding community. “I’ve already volunteered to help train the US competitors for the next WorldSkills competition,” he said. Russia hosts the next WorldSkills competition in two years, and Vincent plans to help make sure the U.S. welders prove they are the best on the world’s stage.

Editor’s note: In January 2018, Vincent’s photo was on the cover of *Welding Journal*, published by the “American Welding Society” to advance the science, technology and

application of welding and allied joining and cutting processes worldwide.

Chancellor Joe Peterson likened Vincent's cover photo on the largest welding magazine in the United States to a musician making the cover of "Rolling Stone."

Vincent was quoted in the magazine about how surprised he was to find out competitors from other countries, especially Asian countries, outperformed the United States. "They are winning everything," he said.

A reason for staying in school was why Vincent started welding. "It gave me a reason to stay and push myself," he said in the magazine.

He said welding let him know that his skills were worth something. Lon Youngberg, one of Vincent's instructors at USUE, was quoted in the magazine, "WorldSkills helps promote workforce development amongst the younger generation by getting them involved in meaningful activities."

~ Susan Polster