

# Otter Valley works to bring welding course to students

11-09-2021, Rutland Herald, by Jim Sabatase

BRANDON — Otter Valley Union High School is hoping sparks will soon be flying in its new welding shop.

Technology Education instructor Devon Karpak is spearheading an effort to launch an on-campus welding program that will offer students the opportunity to explore welding as a potential career path.

Since arriving at OVUHS three years ago, Karpak has been working to expand Tech Ed's offerings, which currently include woodworking, pre-building trades and a history of tech ed course, as well as a small engines class, which is in the works for next year.

Karpak also teaches a middle school-level Tech Ed class that gives students an overview of a number of areas, such as woodworking, 3D printing, computer-aided design, and the history of technology and product design.

Related Tech Ed extra-curricular activities include a middle school robotics club and a twice-weekly after-school makerspace.

Karpak described the classes as a "jumping off point" for students that allows them to explore different areas regardless of what their eventual career path may be.

"It's meant to be an opportunity for everyone so that they have more information about their future," he said.

The classes, he said, are designed to complement, not compete with, programs offered at local career and technical centers.

He said what's being offered at OVUHS makes these sorts of programs more accessible to students who may not want to fully commit to the tech center experience.

"I'm always looking at how our courses interface with what Stafford (Technical Center) and Hanford Career Center offer," said Karpak. "A better prepared student, a better informed student is going to be able to get more out of those public offerings and be more prepared for their future and their education overall."

Eleventh-grader Keevon Parks is one student who's eager to try his hand at welding.

Parks said he worked at an auto body shop sorting parts when he was younger and got to observe professional welders at work.

“I really liked it and I wanted more opportunities for it but, sadly, they don’t offer it here at our school,” he said.

While some of his classmates attend Stafford, Parks said he likes being at Otter Valley and would prefer a program closer to home. He thinks other students might feel the same way.

He noted that welding is a skill that can open the door to a variety of careers, and offering a program at OVUHS may make the school more attractive to students looking to explore that path.

“Personally, I know a lot of people that work in construction businesses — and they own a lot of them — and they have a lot of welding opportunities,” he said.

In order to get the new welding shop off the ground, Karpak said he is pursuing grants from multiple sources, including a \$14,000 grant from the American Welding Society that would provide baseline equipment and materials for the shop, like a welder, plasma arc welder, a cutting setup and augmented reality setup that would allow students to experiment with welding virtually.

The grant application also recommends a matching contribution, Karpak said, but instead of requesting monetary contributions, he is hoping for in-kind donations in the form of sweat equity.

To that end, he’s asking the community for help cleaning out the space that will eventually become the welding shop during a work day scheduled for Dec. 4 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Anyone interested in volunteering may contact Karpak by emailing [dkarpak@nesu.org](mailto:dkarpak@nesu.org) or calling (802) 989-1796.

Karpak said he also hopes to partner with the Brandon Recreation Department to hold open shop times for community members beginning sometime in the spring. The revenue generated from community use, he noted, could be another way to sustain the program for students.

Principal Jim Avery said in a written statement that he is excited to see the school’s Tech Ed program growing and expanding once again.

“Not only has it been a way to engage students, but it is also a tangible way to change their lives and help them find their future direction,” he wrote.

He added, “Students are excited to experience learning that has meaning and there is no greater way to do this than by having them create something with their own two hands. It doesn’t matter the medium or form this

takes, because each student is different, but the unique thing about welding is that it can draw so many in around one common practice.”

Avery noted securing grant funding to launch the program would be “transformative.”

“It would help us enable our school to become a hub of creation, career exploration and innovation,” he stated.

Karpak said that projects such as this show students that the community supports them and their learning.

“I operate on the Lorax philosophy of education,” Karpak said, referencing the Dr. Seuss story. ““Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, it’s not going to get better. It’s not.””