



Student Spotlight: Will Smart Submitted by Tad MacMillan

In the United States, roughly 9% of our jobs are in manufacturing. Manufacturing jobs include everything from welders to machinists to industrial engineers. Our mission at Foothills is to prepare our students so that they can be successful in many different arenas, whether they are going into college/technical school, enlisting in the military, or going straight into the workforce. Our Weld Ready program focuses on ensuring that our students can be successful in a variety of manufacturing jobs. Will Smart, a former student at Barrow-Sims Foothills, who graduated in December 2023, took advantage of the Weld Ready program while he was at Foothills, and he sees it as being very beneficial to his current situation.

Will currently works for Kubota in Jefferson. Kubota is a multinational corporation that has been around for over 130 years. They make everything from tractors to construction equipment to pumps. Will is a welder at Kubota working on tractor and bulldozer parts. He says that without the Weld Ready program, he would not have been prepared to pass the test that helped him get his current job and that, thanks to the Weld Ready program, he was put on a higher pay scale “right off the bat.”



Message from the Superintendent

According to Bloomberg News, “The US has an important moment ahead of it. After spending decades sending manufacturing jobs overseas, America rather miraculously finds itself at the forefront of a new era in production.”

With that in mind, we are especially excited and proud to hear about our young folks like this month’s Spotlight Student, Will Smart, who is taking great advantage of his Foothills education and programs like Weld Ready to find success working as a welder with Kubota. Beyond the skills the Will has acquired, he has learned perhaps the most important lesson of all—that folks like his Foothills teachers are ready to guide and help, but it is ultimately up to each of our students to make the decision to tackle the challenges they face. —*Sherrie*

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Will says the instructors in the Weld Ready program are very well informed about the different jobs for welders. He says, “They really helped me know what the different opportunities are and they are very committed to both the field and the students.” He says that even though a lot of our instructors are retired, “they have stayed so involved because they want to keep the field alive.” Will admires their commitment.

Currently, Will’s work focuses on MIG welding but who knows what the future holds. Right now, he has a challenging job with both good benefits and good pay, but as he develops his skills, he might consider going back to school to learn about pipe welding or a more specialized type of welding. AND, one of the perks of working at Kubota is they are interested in supporting you if you want additional training.

Will says, “If they notice you are good in an area, they are going to train you to get better. Kubota will train you so that you can continue to improve.” Working for a company that will help you develop your craft is a great perk.

Will credits Foothills for getting him on his current path. He says that initially, the freedom that Foothills gives you was a challenge for him, but that he soon realized that “it comes down to you.” His mentor, Dorothea Pope, sat down with Will and his mother, and helped him realize that you have to set goals and continually work toward those goals. Will then realized that he could work as quickly as he wanted and that it was up to him to come to class and focus on the coursework. He then started knocking out the coursework. Will says that at Barrow-Sims Foothills, every single teacher he had was supportive. He adds, “All the teachers were great.” He loved the way that the staff at Foothills supported him and were always ready just to have a conversation.



When asked if he has advice for current Foothills students, Will says, “The biggest thing is take advantage of what you have. There are not many places like Foothills where you have those options. People can help you and talk to you, but ultimately, it is up to you. It is just something you have to do.” Will’s message is important to all of us: Others can help you, but in life, sometimes it is just up to you. You have to decide whether you are going to put in the work to reach a goal or overcome a challenge. We wish Will the best of luck in his new found career and are proud that Foothills played a supportive role in his journey.



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The Foothills Vision

Foothills Regional High School strives to be an accessible, high-quality high school option that is flexible and responsive to the needs of the People of Georgia and its communities.