

PROJECT MFG MARITIME WELDING COMPETITION & CAREER DISCOVERY DAY HELD AT MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Students from Across the Mississippi Gulf Coast Put Welding Skills to the Test While Connecting with Maritime Manufacturing Career Opportunities

GAUTIER, MS, UNITED STATES, March 4, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On Friday, February 27, 2026, more than 45 students gathered at [Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College's Jackson County Campus](#) to participate in the [Project MFG Maritime Welding Competition](#) and Career Discovery Day. The event brought together 33 high school students representing eight schools, along with 12 collegiate competitors from four Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College campuses.



High school welding competitors gather outside their booths ahead of the start of the competition.

Project MFG partnered with Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College to raise awareness of the U.S. Navy's growing demand for skilled trades professionals, inviting local schools to experience firsthand the opportunities available in maritime welding and advanced manufacturing careers.

Dr. Cedric Bradley, Vice President of the MGCCC Jackson County Campus, addressed students during the morning session and underscored both the value of competition-based learning and the national reach of Project MFG. "Project MFG competitions are held across the country, not just in the South, and that tells you how significant this opportunity truly is," Bradley said. "When you step into an arena like this, you are measuring your skills against the very best. Competition pushes you to raise your standards, refine your craft, and prove to yourself that you can perform on a national stage."

Bradley also emphasized the substantial investment required to sustain high-quality, hands-on

programs, especially in welding and advanced manufacturing. "I review the invoices for welding, and I can tell you firsthand that it is not an inexpensive program," he said. "For Project MFG to come here and invest in equipment, prizes, meals, and the overall experience demonstrates a real commitment to you and your future. Opportunities like this do not come along often. When an organization is willing to invest at this level to help you build in-demand skills, you take it seriously and make the most of it."

The competition project was designed to rigorously test each contestant's welding proficiency, requiring participants to follow detailed instructions while demonstrating proper safety practices, equipment handling, and technical expertise. During the two-hour challenge, competitors fabricated a model Manta Ray unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV), showcasing skills such as material preparation, MIG welding, blueprint reading, precision layout, and accurate measurement.

A panel of expert welders and industry professionals evaluated each project, assessing weld quality, dimensional accuracy, craftsmanship, and adherence to safety protocols. The Maritime Welding Competition not only showcased student talent, but also underscored the critical role of career and technical education in meeting the demands of today's manufacturing workforce.

Following the competition, students gathered to hear from special guest speakers, including Brian Blanchette, President of HII Ingalls Shipbuilding. Blanchette praised the students' work, stating, "Great work today, everyone. I saw some of the projects, and they look pretty impressive—on par with some of the work I see out in the shipyard when I'm walking through."



Dr. Cedric Bradley, Vice President of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, sharing opening remarks to the competitors and instructors before kicking off the event



A student works inside a welding booth, carefully fusing metal pieces together as bright sparks fly during the fabrication process.

Students also heard from Stephanie Murray, Workforce Development Manager for Bollinger Shipyards, who spoke about workforce pathways and career opportunities within the maritime industry.

At the conclusion of the event, awards were presented to the top competitors. The top three collegiate winners received tool bags, while the top three high school winners were awarded tool bags and earned an exclusive invitation to compete at the 2026 National Maritime Welding Championship, to be held in San Diego, California, in the spring.

Collegiate Winners

- First Place: Caleb Chandlee — MGCCC Perkinston
- Second Place: Alex Sepulvado — MGCCC West Harrison Center
- Third Place: Chance Roberts — MGCCC Perkinston

High School Winners

- First Place: Mark Miller — George County High School
- Second Place: Wyatt Spidahl — George County High School
- Third Place: Kyler Rainer — George County High School

About MGCCC: Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC) offers exceptional academic transfer programs and nearly 60 career and technical programs at 11 locations in George, Harrison, Jackson, and Stone counties. Named to the Great College to Work For Honor Roll, MGCCC is the largest community college in Mississippi. The college has been named to the 2025-26 Military Friendly School Honor Roll and is a designated Military Friendly Spouse School. For more information, visit www.mgccc.edu.

ABOUT PROJECT MFG: Project MFG shines a light on the need and opportunities for skilled trades by focusing on the development of new talent to provide a path forward for individuals and our country. As an integrated workforce development and recruitment effort, Project MFG



Collegiate Welding Winners stand side by side holding finished Manta Ray Project.



High School Welding Winners stand side by side holding finished Manta Ray Project.

collaborates across communities, the private sector, and government to expand the U.S. industrial base workforce.

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