

National Youth Safety Essay Scholarship Contest Winner

Tim Borawski

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My name is Tim and I am a senior at Lindenbergh High School for half of the day, and the other half I attend South Tech High School. South Tech is a school within the St. Louis Special School District that teaches technical skills to juniors and seniors from the surrounding schools in the area. Originally, my interest in South Tech came from a need I had in my lawn care business to maintain the lawn mowers, trimmers, blowers, truck and trailer I've purchased throughout the last few summers. My first visit to South Tech was an open house where I spent my time learning about the small engine or auto body programs. Next, I shadowed fire fighting and welding for the day to experience the atmosphere of the building and talk to some of the staff. Eventually, I applied for the welding program and the instructor, Mr. Adam Holt, offered me one of the fifteen positions in the class.

The first big assignment in the welding program is to earn the OSHA 10-Hour General Industry wallet card, to which I jumped right in. It is a training program provided by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration from the U.S. Department of Labor. There is a wide variety of lessons from the OSHA training, but the overall purpose is to teach students to recognize the safety risks that occur in common workplace settings so that we can avoid hurting ourselves or one another. By reducing and preventing many hazards, we can create a safe work environment. Mr. Holt tells us that earning this wallet card is a good thing for our resume and demonstrates to potential employers that we have the credentials for safety in the workplace.

At first I was overwhelmed with the OSHA assignment, which I started after school for homework. I was worried that ten hours of watching safety videos would be a hazard to my own health, but Mr. Holt convinced us that if it wasn't difficult to do, then it probably wasn't worth doing. He said that this investment, in time, would pay off, and would help protect our limbs, eyes, and good health throughout our career. There had been an injury in the welding classroom the year before, so Mr. Holt insisted that we pay great attention to OSHA's instruction.

Another one of Mr. Holt's pieces of advice has to do with reaction to a danger. He says, "You can't teach reaction." Meaning, if things go bad in the workplace, you have to have a plan for how you're going to respond. The OSHA training taught me the steps for how to build my own reaction plan. For example, if a spark were to ignite a co-worker's clothing and engulf them in flames, I am aware of the location of the fire blanket, the eye-wash and shower station, the hose, the quench tank and our nearby bathroom facilities. I'm also committed to keeping the atmosphere in the workshop calm and ordered during a hazardous event.

Once I completed my training and my OSHA 10 card, I started to notice dangers throughout my average daily activities. It has given me a crazy "spidey sense" ability to recognize my surroundings. I see trouble in unattended power tools, stairwells in need of foundation repair, and risks of using a grinder without a face shield. Like Mr. Holt always says, "measure twice, cut once," "Put your safety glasses on!" and "Take pride in a clean work booth." Like Mr. Holt I promote safety and health in the workplace for myself and others, which makes me more responsible in my everyday activities. I will follow all the safety procedure throughout my career so that I can retire all in one piece with a healthy mind and back.

Over the past year and a half, Mr. Holt has taught me how to be safe, how to weld and how to develop the ability to "read the puddle" for my stick, mig and tig welding. He has also been my mentor, and in many ways, has encouraged me to be a better person and a safer welding professional.