

CALEDONIA – Please excuse Wyatt Enger if he doesn't consider himself to be a celebrity.

But it's hard to deny that the 18-year-old who completed three years in welding at the Lowndes County School District's Career Technology Center (CTC) has built a name for himself in a short amount of time. In doing so, Enger just so happened to land a full-time job at Mississippi Steel Processing (MSP) *before* he graduated from Caledonia High School in May.

"When my Caledonia first-years come in, they all know Wyatt's name," said Jordan Hawkins, Enger's welding instructor at the CTC. "They all know his picture and know he competed at nationals. They say, 'Man, he is cool.' "

Enger, who was born in Steamboat, Colorado, just smiles at the suggestion he is a celebrity. Instead, he prefers to follow a positive message espoused by his late father: "Today is a great day, and there isn't anything I can't do."

That mind-set drives Enger toward new goals every morning. In addition to his full-time work at MSP, he is pursuing an associate's degree at East Mississippi Community College. Enger also is going to compete again in SkillsUSA events in hopes of returning to the national competition. In June, Enger, who finished first in welding in a district event and third at the state meet, placed 13<sup>th</sup> out of nearly 50 competitors at the national event in Atlanta, Georgia.

As a junior at Caledonia High, Enger finished second in welding at a district event at East Central C.C. in Decatur and went on to finish seventh at the state competition in Jackson. He said he doesn't want people to place him on a pedestal because of what he has

accomplished or the notoriety he has achieved. Enger uses those things to motivate him to keep getting better.

“It drives me to inspire people more,” said Enger, who moved with his family in 2010 to Caledonia. He spent summers with his father in Wyoming, and worked at his father’s granite business. “I love teaching. I love to show people how to do things the right way.”

Hawkins said Enger was a “standout student” in his first day as a sophomore in Welding 1. He said he watched Enger develop into someone who often was mistaken for his “assistant.” Hawkins said Enger’s maturity came through in more ways than just his willingness to help his classmates, to clean up the shop or to work at MSP after he went to school during the day.

“He competed in many sports (football, powerlifting, track and field) at Caledonia High School,” Hawkins said. “He always said he wanted to win a state championship before he graduated.”

Enger still has designs on winning a championship at a SkillsUSA event. SkillsUSA is a partnership of students, teachers and industry working together to ensure America has a skilled workforce. He may have an edge on his peers in that he recently converted a garage at his family’s home in Steens into a shop where he polishes his skills, does repair work and creates collectibles under the name of “Weld-Done Fabrication”.

“It’s not just in welding. It is in everything,” said Enger, who was a four-year member of the CHS varsity football team and captain as a senior. “I am a perfectionist. If something is broken, I have to fix it.”

Enger has received support and guidance from so many people to get to this point. He credits his mother, Toni, for believing in and encouraging him. Enger also mentions Miss Betsy Ellis, his fifth-grade

teacher at Caledonia Elementary School, for helping spark an interest in school; Dr. David Curtis, an optometrist in Columbus, for giving him several pieces of equipment and switching the electricity in the garage so he can grow as a welder; and Mrs. Carmen Machen, the career coach at CHS, who set up the job interview at MSP.

Enger also looks to his father, Scott, for motivation. Scott died Jan. 25, 2023 – the day Wyatt interviewed for the job at MSP. Wyatt acknowledges that day was difficult but that he found a way to compartmentalize his emotions because that is what his father would have wanted him to do.

Another thing Scott would have wanted Wyatt to do is to keep learning. Wyatt said “you have to learn how to learn,” which is something you wouldn’t expect an 18-year-old to say. But Wyatt Enger is wiser and more mature than his age. It comes through in his interactions with his peers and teachers. It also shows in how he talks about his future.

To understand where Enger is going, you only need to look back to Dec. 18, 2022, the day he bought a Jon Boat for duck hunting. The boat had a few holes, so Enger knew he needed to learn how to weld aluminum to fix it. He said the repairs went easier than he expected, which motivated him even more to pursue welding as a career.

Now Enger is forging a future where positivity will drive him to accomplish anything.

“I am a very confident person,” Enger said. “I have always known I am going to be successful, going to find a way to be successful. I had no idea it was going to happen the way it happened, but I knew somehow, somehow whatever I wanted to make happen I was going to find a way to make happen.”