

## **CACC graduate named top welder in the nation**

An Alexander City native recently became the first woman in history to take top honors in welding at the Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc. National Craft Championship.

Holley Thomas placed first in the welding category of the 60th anniversary of the competition held Feb. 4 and 5 in San Diego.

Now a certified structural welder working in Louisiana, the 25-year-old trained for the competition two to three hours a day, four days a week for more than 26 weeks.

“To this day she is still in training,” said DJ James, Thomas’ former welding instructor at Central Alabama Community College. “She was competing against people who had been training eight hours a day and she completely blew their doors off.”

A Benjamin Russell High School graduate, Thomas earned a degree in robotics from CACC in 2007. While obtaining her degree, she was required to take a stick welding class in order to better understand what the robots were doing.

Her interest in welding soon sparked, and Thomas continued her training after obtaining her robotics degree in order to attain a welding certificate.

James said the daughter of Glenn and Betty Thomas was an excellent student during her time at CACC.

“She liked to be hands-on and play with fire,” James said. “She’s very creative and loved every aspect of it. Anything you could have asked for in a student—that was her.”

Mike Mann, technology division chairman at CACC, agreed with James.

“I think that if she puts her mind to it, she can accomplish anything,” Mann said.

Thomas said her greatest career goal is to be part of an orbital welding team.

“I think this would be a good marriage between my two skills of robotics and the welding skills,” she said.

Thomas’ parents said they are extremely proud of their daughter.

“As a parent, I’m especially proud and pleased with Holley’s performance,” her father Glenn Thomas said. “As a citizen of Alexander City, I’m extremely proud and pleased with the training going on at Central Alabama Community College.”

“Holley’s accomplishment is recognition of the hard work the college is doing to prepare students,” he added. “I think this can give a boost to the college and let other kids in the area see the high quality of the technical education available there.”

Thomas, who is employed with the engineering and construction company KBR and is currently working on a project in Coshatta, La., said she wants to get involved in recruiting more women and young people for the skilled crafts.

“I think for younger people, especially young women watching the competition, my involvement could have a huge influence on the industry,” Thomas said.

“I have the privilege of sending an important message to those watching that no matter who you are, you can do whatever you put your mind to,” she continued. “It doesn’t matter if you are young, male or female; if you have the desire and you are willing to train, you can be successful at anything you undertake.”