Winning Welders

By HOWARD RUCK
Columbian staff writer

U.S. manufacturing jobs may have slumped, but analysts say welders remain in hot demand, especially for infrastructure and energy projects.

On Saturday, Clark College hosted the VICA/Skills USA Regional High School Welding Contest for the 33rd year.

Eleven Southwest Washington students competed for individual honors.

Each completed welding projects and a written exam over several hours.

The top few finishers advance to state finals in the Tacoma Dome, potentially to national finals in Atlanta in November.

Taking first place was Cullen Swatosh of Battle Ground High School; second place, Devan Hawes of Centralia High School; third, Cody Erstaner of Battle Ground High School; fourth, Zach Swary of Evergreen High School; fifth, Steven Hamilton of Centralia High School; and sixth, Daniel Wagner of Battle Ground High School.

Other finishers were Nikita Svetunov and Nicholas Hammertson of Battle Ground High School, Joseph Vartaswell of Evergreen High School, and Skylar Buffum-Campion and Blake Wallin of Mountain View High School.

Clockwise from top left: Cullen Swatosh, 18, a Battle Ground High School senior, completes the MIG welding (gas metal arc welding, using a wire feed) portion of the VICA/Skills USA Regional High School Welding Contest, held Saturday at Clark College. Swatosh won the event and will advance to state finals in Tacoma. Skylar Buffum-Campion, 18, a junior at Mountain View High School, tackles the stick welding portion of the competition. Devan Hawes, 18, a Centralia High School senior, works on the torch cutting portion. His second place finish earned him a trip to state finals. Nikita Svetunov, 17, a junior at Battle Ground High School, completes the TIG welding (tungsten inert gas) portion. Students from four Southwest Washington schools competed in the event.