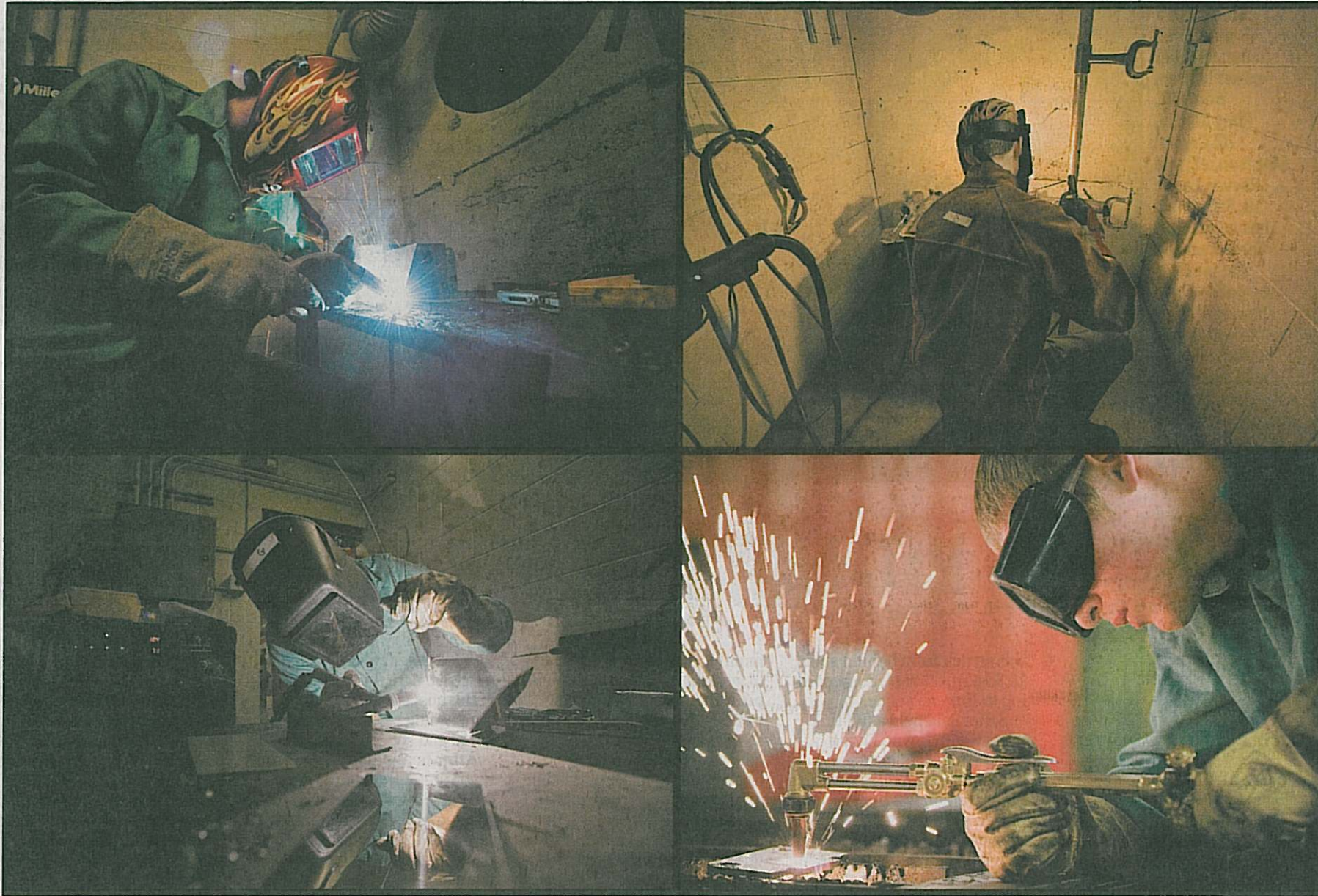


WINNING WELDERS



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, 16, 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 Svistunov, 17, a junior at Battle Ground High School, completes the TIG welding (tungsten intergas) portion. Students from four Southwest Washington schools competed in the event.

By **HOWARD BUCK**
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

Photos by
Steven Lane
of The Columbian

hours. The top few finishers Saturday 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 Erstamer of Battle Ground High School; fourth, Zach Searcy of Evergreen High School; fifth, Steven Hamilton of Centralia High School; and sixth, Daniel Wagner of Battle Ground High School.

Other finishers were Nikita Svistunov and Nicholas Hammerstrom of Battle Ground High School, Joseph VanTassell of Evergreen High School, and Skylar Buffum-Campion and Blake Walling of Mountain View High School.