

BREAKING THE MOLD

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Part 8

NORTHERN MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE RECOGNIZES STUDENTS IN NON-TRADITIONAL PROGRAMS

For Eliza Clark, entering the automotive collision repair (ACR) program at Northern Maine Community College was a smooth transition from high school. Prior to attending NMCC, Eliza was a student at the Region 8, Mid-Coast School of Technology in Rockland, Maine, where she studied auto collision repair and welding for three years. Eliza originally considered pursuing automotive technology, but after learning more about the program, she realized that ACR was a better fit for her. While attending the program, Eliza knew that she wanted to pursue a career in the field. "I couldn't see myself doing anything else."

Eliza comes from a family of trade workers. Her great-grandfather and grandfather owned a welding shop, where Eliza spent much of her childhood and learned how to weld. Her father and brother are also skilled welders. Eliza has a brother who studied automotive technology and diesel hydraulics, and another who learned carpentry and later went on to become a mechanic in the military.

Eliza grew up with four older brothers and four male cousins. As a child, she spent a large amount of time with her brothers and participated in any activity they were doing, whether it was riding bikes or playing with toy trucks. Eliza states that she is thankful that her brothers included her and didn't treat her differently because she was a girl. Growing up with brothers made Eliza the person she is today.

When discussing her experiences in the program, Eliza reports that the male students are respectful and will help her, if needed. However, Eliza is self-sufficient. Rather than asking for help, she likes to try to solve the problem on her own. "I get creative with how to do things. If I'm not strong enough to do something, I find other ways to do it." On the contrary, Eliza feels that her size is a strength. "Being small helps because I am able to fit into smaller places." Eliza is also attentive to detail, a skill that she has found to be very useful in this field.

Because of her background and past experiences, Eliza reports that much of her time spent in the ACR program has

been fine-tuning her current skills. Seeing the finished product after all the work is done is what Eliza enjoys most about ACR. "There are a lot of steps to take, but it's worth it in the end."



Photo: Eliza in the Automotive Collision Repair shop at NMCC

Because female employees in this industry are not a common occurrence, Eliza feels that the incoming freshmen in the program are not used to seeing girls in the shop. "When they see me, they look confused, like I shouldn't be there. Some will ask me if I need help." Eliza truly believes that women can be successful in this trade and offers advice to men who may see a woman in the field. "Don't underestimate girls. If you do, you may underestimate the wrong girl, and it won't be good!"

While attending the Region 8, Mid-Coast School of Technology, Danica Wooster was Eliza's ACR instructor. Out of eighteen students in the program, there were only two female students; therefore, having a female instructor was beneficial to Eliza. According to Eliza, Danica was a mentor to her. Eliza states that she taught her how to be strong and to not let stereotypical comments bother her. "People will say what they want to say, but it really doesn't matter."

Eliza is a role model to other young girls. In high school and at NMCC, Eliza volunteered at Totally Trades, a yearly conference that exposes young females to careers in the trades. At the conference, Eliza assisted with coordinating the workshops, which included showing students how to weld and use a spray gun to paint vehicles. For Eliza, participating in the

conference was a good experience. “The girls were really young, so it was like working with a clean slate. Most of them had never been exposed to anything like this before.”

Eliza chose NMCC because it is the only college in northern New England that has an ACR program. Given her welding background, Eliza decided to dual major this year and earn a certificate in structural welding, a new program at NMCC. Eliza feels that having the certification, in addition to an associate in applied science degree in ACR, will make her more desirable to potential employers. When Eliza graduates next May, she plans to move back to Appleton, Maine, to be closer to her family. Initially, she would like to work in a body shop to gain more experience and later find employment working as an instructor at a vocational school.



Photo: Eliza in the Structural Welding lab at NMCC

Eliza offers tips for success. “Do your homework and have your priorities straight. You can have fun, but you still need to go to class.” Eliza also makes the connection between classroom performance and the world of work. “Employers will look at your attendance, and if you don’t go to class, then they will know you won’t go to work.”

Eliza offers advice for females considering a non-traditional career. “Don’t be discouraged by comments or looks that you may get from others. You can’t let things bother you or get emotional because you won’t do good work.” Eliza encourages females to be confident. “Strive to be the best that you can be. If you don’t, then you won’t stand out. You don’t want to blend in. What’s the fun in that?”

**Quick Facts:
Automotive Body Repairers**

Job Duties: Review repair cost estimates and plan work to be performed, sand body areas to be painted, fit and weld replacement parts into place, and prime and paint repaired surfaces using paint spray guns and motorized sanders.

Skills Needed: Repairing, operation and control, complex problem solving, and active listening.

2013 National Average Pay: \$18.68/hour;
\$38,850/year

Job Outlook: Projected to grow 13% between 2012-2022

Percentage of NMCC 2013 ACR Graduates Employed in the Field: 55%

Source: O’NET Online (2014)

**Quick Facts:
Welders, Cutters, and Welder Fitters**

Job Duties: Weld components in flat, vertical, or overhead positions, operate safety equipment and use safe work habits, recognize, set up, and operate hand and power tools common to the welding trade, such as shielded metal arc and gas metal arc welding equipment.

Skills Needed: Reading comprehension, operation and control, and critical thinking.

2013 National Average Pay: \$17.66/hour;
\$36,720/year

Job Outlook: Projected to grow 3% to 7% between 2012-2022

Source: O’NET Online (2014)

For more information about non-traditional programs available at NMCC, please contact Lori Smith, Student Support Career Specialist at 768-2793 or nlosmith@nmcc.edu



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