

## Returning Home to NLC

Ken McKen says he has returned “home”. After seven years away, he is back with Northern Lakes College (NLC), to assume the role of Chair, Trades & Resource Technology and Continuing Education & Corporate Training. Ken has an extensive background in the trades industry and a sincere passion to mentor anyone wishing to pursue a career in trades. Growing up on a farm in Saskatchewan, Ken was raised with a strong work ethic and an appreciation for the importance of education, as his mother was an elementary school teacher.



Today, Ken is a Red Seal Journeyman welder and has artfully melded his practical experiences on the farm and his regard for education into a 40+ year career in welding and trades education.

Ken’s welding career started at the age of 14, while working on his family’s fourth-generation farm. Ken was always intrigued by the welding repairs his father performed on their agricultural machinery.

Curiosity led Ken to sneak into the weld shop while his father and grandfather were busy in the field, taking the initiative to learn the art of welding by himself. Many projects came out of that old welding shop and ultimately led to Ken taking a keen interest in the trade. Although Ken’s high school principal encouraged him to consider mechanical engineering, Ken followed his heart and registered for formal welder training immediately after graduation.

After achieving his Journeyman certificate, he worked as a foreman at an agricultural research and development / fabrication shop for ten years, attaining countless hours of experience. In 1995, Ken started his teaching career, moving to Alberta to establish a fully-accredited welding apprenticeship program and custom fabrication shop within a federal penitentiary.

Ken’s dedication to welder training led to his being awarded the Golden Jubilee Medal in 2002, “for making a significant contribution to Canada, to his community and to fellow Canadians.” His excellence in teaching was recognized when he was awarded “Instructor of the Year” in 2003 by Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training.

In 2006, Ken joined the Northern Lakes College team to lead the welding program. He brought to the job his passion for teaching and mentoring young entrepreneurs. In his classroom and in the lab, he endeavoured to instill pride and self-esteem in his students, and to forge an environment of respect and empathy. His innovative thinking was instrumental in the establishment of the High Prairie Regional Development Centre.



This multi-partner project made trades training available to high school students through Dual Credit programming. To this day, NLC continues to provide Dual Credit programming options to high school students for a significant portion of the College's programs.

An opportunity to work with the Canadian Welding Bureau (CWB) Association in 2013 saw Ken depart NLC. As the manager of the CWB Association, Ken travelled nationwide, showcasing the welding trade to assist with improving the trades system across Canada. The role provided Ken with the opportunity to work with many key industry stakeholders in the welding and joining industry specifically, and the trades in general. These stakeholders included K-12 and post-secondary schools, welding professionals and major industries, provincial and federal governments, and regulatory bodies. Ken also worked with the CWB Welding Foundation, providing funding and training opportunities for minority groups including at-risk youth, Indigenous learners, women in trades, offenders in corrections, and accredited jurisdictional welding programs.

In 2020, Ken took the opportunity to return "home" and rejoin the Northern Lakes College family, bringing to the College his vast experience, knowledge and contacts from the industry. Ken enjoys the college culture and knows that NLC programming makes a difference in the lives of students and in the communities served. As the Chair of Trades & Resource Technology and Continuing Education & Corporate Training, Ken would like to influence the mentoring and delivery aspects of trades training in the province. Ken is confident in the NLC Supported Distance Learning (SDL) model, which allows students to access the theory portion of their trades program from anywhere. He firmly believes that this delivery model increases accessibility to the training.

Ken would like to see more youth going into the trades, noting that the average age of tradespeople means the sector will see a significant wave of retirements in the next number of years. Ken's enthusiasm is contagious as he encourages youth with the following thoughts, "Northern Lakes College provides unlimited opportunities for our future leaders to prepare for Industry 5.0 and beyond. We are entering into a certain crisis, experiencing a large shortage of skilled labour, largely due to our retiring baby-boomers. Now is the time to train! Be prepared, open your horizons, and reap the opportunities before you. The only limitation you have is your imagination!"