

AWS Detroit Section Celebrates 100 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

Can you recall what was happening back in 1925? After all, that was 100 years ago. Indeed, it was a year of significant historical events. To provide context for both the present and the future, it is helpful to take a brief look back at the past.

In 1925, the global population was approximately two billion people, compared to over eight billion today. The year also marked several significant events, including the publication of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the founding of Chrysler Corp. by Walter P. Chrysler, and the dedication of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Notably, 1925 also saw the AWS Detroit Section chartered.

The year 2025 marks the 100th anniversary of the AWS Detroit Section. With this milestone in mind, we thought it would be fitting to reflect on its origins and highlight some of the significant events along the way. But to do that, we must first go back to where it all started.

How It All Started

The following is based on a record of events compiled by past Detroit Section Chair Bernie Bastian and published in 1995. It has been further edited by the author to emphasize the initial formation of the Detroit Section.

On January 14, 1924, AWS Vice President William A. Slack wrote a letter to Harold M. Gould, an engineer with the Detroit Department of Street Railways, regarding the establishment of an AWS Section in Detroit. At the time, the nearest active section was in Cleveland, which was too far for regular attendance at meetings.

On February 26, 1924, Gould sent letters to a number of individuals, inviting them to a meeting at the Aviation Club on Washington Boulevard in Detroit on February 28, 1924, at 12:30 p.m. to discuss forming an AWS Section in Detroit. According to the meeting minutes, 14 people were in attendance, and Gould was elected chair. C. L. Finch was



1951 Board members



1967 Board members



1981 Ladies Night



1990 Sheet Metal Welding Conference Vendor Night



1996 Board members

appointed secretary and treasurer, and he was instructed to contact the National Headquarters for a list of all AWS members in Michigan. This was to be the nucleus for the new Detroit Section.

The meeting proved to be fruitful, as on March 28, 1924, prospective members of the proposed Detroit Section convened to further pursue the formation of the Section. The Section was formally chartered about a year later, on February 3, 1925.

Significant Events

From an austere and humble beginning, the AWS Detroit Section has evolved into the prominent organization we know today. As a cornerstone of the Metro Detroit region for 100 years, the Section has grown to be a strong

voice within the welding community. This growth has been made possible by the never-ending efforts of our volunteers. With a mission to advance the science, technology, and application of welding, the Section utilizes multiple ways to encourage participation in this important industry. Below are significant milestones that have shaped this journey.

1941 — The Section held its inaugural Ladies Night, a charity event that has since become a formal gathering of the Detroit welding community. Held annually since its inception, the event has attracted over 2500 attendees at past editions and

has grown in prestige, so much so that we have hosted AWS presidents and national board members.

1946 — The inaugural Quiz the Experts event saw various District 11 Sections get together and test their welding knowledge. It continued to be an annual event until 2016.



2011 Ladies Night

2024 Student Night awardees



2024 Sheet Metal Welding Conference



1973 — The Section held its first High School Welding Contest. The event, which has now surpassed the 50-year mark, has become one of the premier welding events for schools across the state. The 2024 iteration had over 60 contestants competing for more than \$9000 in scholarships, along with a variety of donated prizes.

1974 — The Section's scholarship program was established. From initial funding that allowed for the awarding of \$2000, the program has grown significantly, now distributing over \$90,000 annually in scholarships and grants at the Section, District, and National levels.

1983 — The Detroit Brazing and Soldering Division was approved by the National Board in 1983. It continued to operate until 2004, at which time its funds were used to establish the AWS Foundation's Robert L. Peaslee — Detroit Brazing and Soldering Division Scholarship.

1984 — The first Sheet Metal Welding Conference (SMWC) was held. The Section's SMWC is the premier technical conference focused on bringing together experts to discuss state-of-the-art welding and joining technologies for the automotive, transportation, and light manufacturing industries. Held every two years since its inception, SMWC XX took place in October 2024.

2005 — The Detroit Section was awarded the WEMCO Image of Welding Award, the predecessor of the WEMCO Excellence in Welding Award.

2009 — The Detroit Section became AWS's first International Section when its boundaries were expanded to include the counties of Essex, Chatham-Kent, and Sarnia-Lambton in the Province of Ontario.

2012 — The Section's scholarship program partnered with the AWS Foundation, enabling matching funds to be added to the Section's donations.

2018 — The Section, in collaboration with the AWS Foundation, established an annual Workforce Grant. This \$15,000 award is available to any training program or institution within the Detroit Section's boundaries and can be used for all related expenses (from welding rods to gloves and beyond) involved in running a welding training program. The award recipient is selected by the AWS Foundation Grants Committee.

In addition to the achievements mentioned, the past 100 years have seen Section members presenting innumerable technical meetings, hosting many fundraising events, and participating on AWS National committees. All of this was accomplished while many members held full-time jobs and managed the demands of their personal lives. Not bad for a group of volunteers committed to nothing more than being passionate advocates for their industry.

Closing Remarks

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the AWS Detroit Section. We will celebrate this achievement at our annual Ladies Night event on April 12. For more information about this momentous occasion, please visit our website at awssection.com/detroit.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of the AWS Detroit Section who contributed their time and effort in providing information for this article. Their insights, drawn from historical records and personal recollections, were invaluable. **WJ**

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