

## He's the best of the best



Photo Credit: *CHRISTOPHER CHUNG/THE PRESS DEMOCRAT*

Tom Gutsch, right, works with E.J. Carreon in the beginning manufacturing class at Santa Rosa High School on Monday. Gutsch was awarded the Outstanding Program of the Year for the school's manufacturing program by the California Industrial and Technology Education Association foundation.



*Photo Credit: CHRISTOPHER CHUNG/PD*

## **Santa Rosa High School's Tom Gutsch**

Tom Gutsch, right, laughs with Lili Sparling as he instructs her to hold a hand saw as if she were holding her small dog, during the beginning manufacturing class at Santa Rosa High School on Monday, March 22, 2010.

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### **Tom Gutsch is so old school, he's cutting edge.**

The Santa Rosa High School metal shop teacher teaches his beginning manufacturing students to measure with rulers, file steel by hand and set angles with a combination square.

Noting that power tools exist do those jobs automatically, Gutsch laughed: "Some people might call me a dinosaur."

Or they might call him instructor of the finest high school metal shop program in California.

"I have looked at every welding shop I can think of from Santa Barbara to the Oregon border and going across the state — I have never seen anything quite like it," said John Chocholak, senior board member of the California Industrial and Technology Education Association Foundation.

The foundation, which represents nearly 1,200 shop teachers who provide instruction on wood, metal, auto, drafting and production skills, named Gutsch's manufacturing courses the best shop operation in California.

"There are some years we don't give the award out because we can't find a program that we like," Chocholak said. "We are very picky."

So, it seems, is Gutsch.

Students say he presses them for precision while giving them room to make mistakes.

"It's a really nice way," said Hunter Delattre, a sophomore in Gutsch's beginning metal shop class. "He is not really supervising everything you are doing, you can self-learn. But he still does a really good job of demonstrating."

Strict?

"He is when he needs to be," said Austin Silva, a junior. "He can be a really cool teacher but if you mess with him, he can control that."

Sophomore Marina Lecoeuche, who took journalism as an elective last year before opting for metal shop this year, said she has no plans to go into welding or metal work as a career, but has come away with solid skills in Gutsch's class.

“I respect him because he's realistic with us,” she said. “A lot of teachers just want to get through the lesson. He makes sure we understand what we're doing. He doesn't tolerate anything wrong going on.”

“There is so much you can take away and apply to life — getting things done right, with precision,” she said.

Gutsch, who comes from a long line of teachers, is credited with maintaining industry connections he made while working at Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico and for Thermal Technology Inc. locally, before he returned to the family business: teaching.

“He came from the industry so he understands what industry folks want when students leave,” said Nancy Miller, career pathways director for Santa Rosa City Schools. “He tries to impart to the students that there is an art and there is a craft, but there is also a business end to this. It's kind of a ‘think smart while you do it.’”

Gutsch, who has been at Santa Rosa High for seven years, has shepherded his self-described old-school program through a period marked by more kids having to drop his class in order double up on math and English to pass exit exams, and by woeful budget conditions in a class where equipment can cost thousands of dollars.

Career Technical Education has also moved toward a wider selection of courses such as hospitality, culinary and health and human services. Many school don't even offer metal shop anymore, he said.

The California Industrial and Technology Education Association Foundation once represented 5,000 teachers throughout the state. Now there are fewer than 1,200, Chocholak said.

“It's a very difficult time,” he said.

Gutsch said no matter the political or educational trends, there always will be a place for craftsmanship and work ethic. And he has a place in his heart for the kid who grinds through math just so he can take metal shop.

“If we got to the point that kids don't have the opportunity to take my class, in my opinion we are going to see the drop-out rate skyrocket,” he said.

“Some of these kids will come to school, suffer through their English or math class or whatever class that they hate the most — they'll suffer through it to get to my class,” he said. “If my class wasn't there for them, why are they doing to show up for school?”