

**Announcer:** Welcome to Hancock Conversations, an Allan Hancock College podcast. Join President Dr. Kevin G. Walthers and members of the Hancock community, as they explore the stories behind the people and places that make Allan Hancock College the unique hub for learning that it is today. You're sure to learn something new, and even have a little fun along the way.

**Kevin Walthers:** Good afternoon, I'm Kevin Walthers. This is the Allan Hancock College Hancock Conversations podcast. It's a new program and we're honored today to have one of our emeritus faculty members, Ray Snowden. Ray started at Hancock as a welding instructor in 1982. Over 29 years, he played a key role in helping build the college's welding technology program and guiding countless students into careers in the welding industry. Ray learned welding and other valuable life skills in the Navy. Before coming to Hancock, he earned a bachelor's degree from Fresno State in vocational education, and a master's degree in educational administration from Cal Poly. In 2009, he received the California Community College Association for Occupational Education Excellence in Teaching Award. Ray retired from Hancock in 2011. I'm going to assume that's because you heard I was coming. But he's faculty, he still teaches with us sometimes and it is good to see Ray around town. And Ray, I can tell you, you made a huge impact on this community. When I got here they 'Ray Snowden, Ray Snowden, Ray Snowden.' So welcome.

**Ray Snowden:** Thank you.

**KW:** So, tell us. So, you started off in the Navy, from Oklahoma. So, tell us about going into the Navy?

**RS:** Well, I came out here when I was 15. So, I did the high school and working in the fields and stuff. I kind of got behind, and I got out of high school, I realized I didn't know much. And my options were not that great. So, I thought military would be a place where I could go and kind of catch up. So, I went to the Navy, and it was a good experience for me. I started my education, I think, in the Navy. And that's where I started welding and learning to supervise people, and all the things that military teaches you.

**KW:** So how long did you serve?

**RS:** I was in active duty for almost five years. Yep. Right at five years. And then a one-year inactive duty.

**KW:** Great. Yeah. So yeah, there's a lot to be learned in the Navy. And so that leads you to Hancock, and let's start about your bachelor's degree. So, you get out of the Navy, you want to do your bachelor's degree, and you think a little bit of maturity helps you get through that program?

**RS:** Well, I'm positive. I know I went to community college first, I went to the College of Sequoias for a couple of years. The funny thing was that, I wanted to go because the VA would give me \$75 for taking two classes, and I needed the money. So, I thought I'd go to school until the money ran out, then I would quit. I never had any intention to get a degree. And once I got started, you know, my instructor, welding instructor who really inspired me, started to push me to do more, and more, and more and, and so I finally did get my AS degree. And then he thought that I should go after my bachelor's degree. I didn't think I could do it, but he kept pushing me until I went, and I got it. Working in the fields, in the oil fields, during that time as a welder, and I hurt myself pretty bad in my back, and it was hard for me to work in the industry. And I almost had my bachelor's degree and a teaching position came open, and so he suggested that I should try for it, and I started off teaching in those schools in Tulare, and Fresno, and Clovis. And then this job opened up a few years later, and I applied for it, and came over here. It's been a good move for me.

**KW:** What was that? What was the facility like when you got here?

**RS:** Well, it was big, but it was not very organized. And we had the plumbers and pipefitters union practice in our lab. They had a lot of really nice stuff in there, but I think the program was designed for one person's convenience. They had one class that he taught that was 20 hours a week. That's his whole load, and so he only taught that one group of students. And I thought, first of all, they couldn't learn that much that fast. And secondly, I needed to teach more than one class. So, I broke it down and started modularizing it and so that we get a number of classes of that then link with each other. And so, the students could make pretty even progress until they came out at the end with hopefully what they wanted.

**KW:** So now, Gabriel Marquez comes in behind you and he gets this big fancy facility that you designed. You ever give him a hard time about that?

**RS:** No, yeah, I talked to him into applying for my position. He was my student about 40 years ago, and I said, "If you get the job, I'll stick around and help you," and that's why I'm still here. But I just tell him that, you know, "I've never promised you this was gonna be easy, I just told you, you're gonna enjoy it." And so, he does. I feel like it's hard work, but it's good work.

**KW:** He's a great faculty.

**RS:** Yeah, I don't think the school could have done better by replacing me, than they did with Gabriel.

**KW:** And but he's got that big fancy place. It's twice as big as what you had. He's got plasma cutters, and laser arms, and robots. And, yeah, he's got it made, doesn't he?

**RS:** It seems like that's the way it was with me. You know, when I went to Fresno State, when I left Fresno, they built this huge stadium. And it was the year after I left, they opened it. And then when I went to Cal Poly, they built this big auditorium over there. And it was the year after I left there, that they opened it up. And so, I thought when I came here, they'd open up the welding facility, the year after that. I thought well, maybe I should leave sooner, then some of the stuff will happen faster, you know.

**KW:** Then we can bring you back and that'll make the fine arts go faster that we're building. Talk about the importance of career education for students?

**RS:** Well, you know, I'm a witness that a lot of us, probably most of us, are not going to be white collar workers. We're not going to be doctors, lawyers, and financiers or things like that. But fortunately for us, there's a great need for the things that we do. I tell my students all the time, "Nothing will work in this world that we live in, if you take welding out of it." Everything it touches, doesn't mean no toilet paper made, there'll be no broccoli cut, there'd be no nuts picked. I mean, we interchange with everything and everywhere. It's a great take with you kind of a career because if you decide you want to go to Oklahoma, take it with you. You want to go to Washington, they need welders there too. And it's a great way for you to earn a living, nobody's gonna get rich mostly. But you can have a real good middle class life with the site earnings that you can get from it.

**KW:** What's the most important thing a welding student needs to know?

**RS:** Well, he needs to know that what he does is important, and that everything that he does has to be done like it's a, it's the most important thing in the world, because people's lives depend on the quality

of the work that he produces. We have the wealth amount of tools out there that says you know, 'it doesn't look good, but it'll hold,' and we don't subscribe to that. Just because it's buried doesn't mean it's not gonna blow up. So, it has to be the best work you can always do, ever, and we don't ever short-change that. I'll tell them, "You know that your safety depends on you following the rules. If you walk across Broadway on red light, you get hit by a car. Stay on the green light, you're probably safe." We have to not learn not just how to weld, but when the weld, and where to weld, and why we weld, and how to interact with others. Because welding is just a small piece of the necessary tools that we need. We can teach them welding. One thing that an employer is willing to teach them actually is welding. What he can't teach them is how to be timely, and how to be dependable, how to be congenial, how to work with others. If you have that he's willing to try to teach you how to weld. But if you're missing that and welding, you don't have much of a chance.

**KW:** So, did you try to build some of those skills into your classes?

**RS:** Always. In fact, I would just talk to my classes, I have to apologize to them all the time, because I preach to them quite a lot. Because this is not just about learning how to burn rod. This is about how to live in this world with, with other people, and how to bring your family along where they can be comfortable and have a good life. To do that, you have to be able to work with other people, you have to be able to, to coordinate what you do with what everybody else needs. And that's the one reason I started welding. Because I grew up in a time where segregation was a big issue. And we couldn't get jobs. I couldn't even get a job when I got out of high school, you know, hauling garbage. So, I thought, I need to get something so that I'm gonna be good enough at it that they'll hire me, even if they don't like me, just because they need me. And that's why I started welding, and I actually got pretty good at it because I knew that unless I was pretty good at it, I wasn't gonna be able to use it when I got out.

**KW:** So what year did you graduate from high school?

**RS:** '63.

**KW:** '63, So you saw a lot of stuff going on. Now you left Oklahoma by then, but there was a lot of ...

**RS:** Yeah, I left Oklahoma in '58.

**KW:** What part of Oklahoma are you from?

**RS:** Oklahoma City. It was, it was quite an eye opener before me, you know, because just to give you an idea of it, I'm the first one. I have nine kids in my family, I'm the first one in my family that I know of who ever bought a new car, ever bought a home, ever went to college, ever. I'm the first of all, but since then, half of my siblings have done the same thing. So, it teaches you to, to depend on yourself and not other people doing things for you. And that, if what you have is not good enough to earn you a salary, then you don't have a lot.

**KW:** So, I'm fascinated by, you know, the late '60s and early '70s. And the things that were going on, and this week they had the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the of the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. What were you thinking when you saw that back in the day?

**RS:** Well, it was kinda how it was in the day, you know? I mean, what I think I remember mostly, you know, is that when we were little children, we had to say, 'Yes, ma'am,' and 'No, ma'am,' to little two-year-olds, you know what I mean? But we were very subservient. One thing that tickles me today, and

every time I go to the movies, because when I was a kid, we could go to the movie, but everybody had to sit in the balcony. And now, a balcony is premium seating. You know, nobody was to sit down below, I mean, everybody's up high. But when I was a kid, that was we were forced to sit there, we were forced to eat in certain places. And though we could only go in certain places, it was pretty hard. California was a lot different when I got here, but it was a lot the same as well. And so, over the years, I've watched it change. And you know, my son told me one time, he said, 'You know, you older people are so passive and you just don't fight for things.' I'll say, 'Well, if you saw where we came from, we think we've made pretty good progress.'

**KW:** You know, I think one of the things that gets lost in that story is that, I think it's safe to say the folks in the South are just more honest, right? In California, you face some of the same things. The movie, "The Green Book," was written about New England, right? So that was that was a national scar.

**RS:** And in California, they will call you 'mister,' but they wouldn't give you a job. In Oklahoma, they call you other names, but they would let you work at least, you know. At least you could work.

**KW:** We might have to have you back and talk about some of those days. I wrote my dissertation about those times. I saw John Lewis, show up with pancreatic cancer walk across the bridge again this weekend. That's pretty powerful stuff.

**RS:** Yeah, but it was the time. You know, the thing is, I think like this, the reason that the windshield in your car is so big and the rearview mirror is so small, is we don't spend a lot of time looking back. We already made the past that everything we want and need is out in front of us. That's where we need to go. And unfortunately, we have too many people spending too much time looking back and trying to fix what already happened. But we have a lot of stuff in front of us that we can do.

**KW:** And you see, what we do here at Hancock. I mean, I think that's a huge part of making that change and making sure that, you know, every kid that comes to school here has a chance to be successful.

**RS:** You know, all of my kids, I have six kids, and every one of them went to Hancock. Most of them have at least one degree, and they all have professions, and they're all working. Hancock has been a good place to get a start. And, I know that in high school, my daughter told me one time, one of her teachers told me, "You had to be a fool to go to Hancock", and I tell her, "Smarter people than you want to Hancock." And you know, this is a great place for you to go and get a start, and I forced her to come. And now she's ever so happy that she did. She went off to Fullerton and got a bachelor's degree, and she's been in the industry working and she's doing well. So, Hancock has helped a lot of young people, and there's a lot that need help. And that's one of the things I would love to be able to be involved in.

**KW:** You're involved right up to your eyeballs. I mean, when we look at those students working in industrial technology, it's just, you know, I love to go over there because there's always something fun going on. And I can look at every one of those kids and be like, you're getting a job, and you're getting a job, and everyone's getting a job because they know what they're doing. You were talking about those soft skills and yet, I really do a lot of presentations at Rotary clubs. And every single time somebody says, "Well, how come you guys don't teach soft skills?" And I said, "If you think we don't teach soft skills, you haven't taken a class at Hancock. If you show up late that's on your grade, you don't do your work, it's on your grades.

**RS:** We teach more than what we teach.

**KW:** Yeah. So, alright. So we're gonna do something fun to wrap this up.

**RS:** Okay.

**KW:** We hope it's fun.

**RS:** I'll let you know.

**KW:** Lauren writes down five questions for us, gotta make sure, gotta edit them, sometimes. And then we talk about it a little bit. Scale of one to 10, how good of a driver are you?

**RS:** I would say, eight.

**KW:** I'm like a six. I'm terrible.

**RS:** I'm pretty good because I'm scared to go fast. Cautious about other people, you know.

**KW:** Cautious about me, and that's smart. Where's the place you'd still like to travel to?

**RS:** Well, there's so many places I haven't gone. I don't have aspiration to go out of the country. I haven't even been to Hearst Castle. And I've been here for, so I got plenty to see over here. I'd love to go back to Washington, D.C., I've been. I want to go to New York. I've never been to New York, I almost got there one time. All the places that I think I want to see are right here in this country, and there's plenty of that I have not seen.

**KW:** Where did you go when you were in the Navy?

**RS:** I went to China, I went to Japan, Philippines, Vietnam, and made that loop back and forth. We saw, we started off in Hawaii, and then we went. I made, I think three tours over there. I was on an aircraft carrier, so we were constantly going. And it was a great experience for me. I think all the young men and women should be in the military, not in the war, but I think that just the discipline and camaraderie that we learn in there is suddenly missing from this generation.

**KW:** Yeah, that shared experience, my dad was in the Air Force. I grew up as an Air Force kid, I had no desire to follow in his footsteps. I'd seen how much he moved around. And my generation doesn't have that shared experience of service that almost everybody that age does.

**RS:** You know, there's a camaraderie that you know, I haven't seen any of those guys that I served with, since I got out. But I feel them all the time. I mean, you know, it takes me a whole second or two to realize if somebody's been in the military or not, right. It's just something that you get out of there and it serves you, serves us well.

**KW:** I think you're right. I think you're right. Alright, something a little lighter. What's something you could eat for a week straight?

**RS:** My goodness, there's lots of things I can eat for a week straight. Probably chicken, I like oatmeal, cabbage, collard greens. Maybe a good steak.

**KW:** Good steak. I can eat steak every night for a week.

**RS:** For a week and then that's probably gonna get old. But yeah, I could do that.

**KW:** I'm kind of, on the tacos. I think they think I eat tacos, or I might eat tacos every day. What's your favorite car?

**RS:** Well, that's a moving target for me. I like the Lincoln, and I think the Lincoln is kind of like good clothes. I mean, if you have a pair of Florsheim shoes or a Stetson hat, it never gets old. I mean, it always look good. And Lincoln is like that. It's you know, it's one of those staples. But on the other hand, for safety wise, I used to have the Sequoia and it was big. My wife and my daughter got hit in it, and they were spared I think because the car was so big and heavy. But if I were to buy a new car, it would probably be between the Lincoln and the Sequoia. Depends on how safe I feel at the time.

**KW:** I was in with a friend that had a Lincoln. It's like driving your living room around. Yeah, it was so nice. What a great car.

**RS:** They have some beautiful cars and they are comfortable. And one of these days, maybe I'll have one.

**KW:** Well, good. Well, Ray, I want to tell you, the impact you've had on this college is phenomenal. And I'm so glad you're still teaching for us part time after you've retired and it's no joke, when I go around the community people ask me, "Is Ray Snowden still teaching over there?" and I'm like, "He's still teaching over there." So many students who took ornamental welding or some kind of class, came in and took your class, and we talked about changing the odds for our community, you're one of the people who changed the odds for this community.

**RS:** Well, this college has changed the odds for me. And you give me the opportunity, and the desire, to give back as much as I can.

**KW:** Thanks for being here.

**RS:** Thank you.

**KW:** This has been Hancock Conversations, we've been talking to Ray Snowden. Our next podcast will be released shortly. Thanks.