

## She Has An Eye for Steel

Knowing what she was looking for has allowed Jennifer Jernigan to capture some of her favorite photos.

**FOR SOME IT'S A CHALLENGE** to remember what they learned in high school, but not for Jennifer Jernigan. Now a seasoned steel estimator with Hirschfeld Industries, San Angelo, Texas—she has been at it since her 2001 graduation—Jernigan joined her high school yearbook team as a freshman and her love of photography took root.

“We’d take pictures at events during the year,” Jernigan said, “then go back to the dark room to develop the film—it was all black and white—and print the pictures. That was really interesting. I had always wanted to learn how to do that.”

In those pre-digital days, Jernigan learned a lot about what it takes to make a good photo. “You’d think that you had the perfect shot, but then you’d have to go back and develop and print it. After school I’d go straight to the darkroom. I’d already have my negatives developed the day before, and I’d sit there and work on just one shot for about two hours, just getting the lighting right.”

Jernigan found that she liked processes, and didn’t mind if they took awhile. She also discovered she was following in her father’s footsteps. “My dad took pictures, just as a hobby, but I didn’t know that until I started taking photography classes,” Jernigan said. “He had an expensive camera that he bought right out of high school, with this camera bag full of old equipment. When I was still shooting film I would take his lenses, or his flashes, and see what it would do with my camera, just to see what kind of effects I could get. It was fun to compare, and he would tell me about different techniques and point out things that I could do.”

After graduating from high school in 2001, Jernigan began doing volunteer work for Texas Stampede in Dallas, which holds events to raise money for children’s charities in North Texas. Their big event at that time was a rodeo held at the American Airlines Center in Dallas. Knowing of Jernigan’s interest in photography, they invited her to help. “Their main photographers got to down on the dirt for the pictures of the bull riders and stuff. But I got

to go through the concourse and take pictures of the fans and the performers backstage. Photographing the rodeo was probably one of my favorite times.”

Later that year she started working as a steel estimator and began taking college classes, so she couldn’t spend all her time at the rodeos. “But they would have performers play at the end of the night, and would let me go down on the dirt, right in front of the stage, and take pictures of the performers.” Soon she was getting passes to take pictures at other events, including the fabled Willie Nelson Fourth of July picnic and the George Strait Team Roping Classic. And that’s when word started to get around at Hirschfeld.

“I’d come back and show them pictures I’d taken. Then when they decided they wanted to update their web page, somebody said, ‘Hey! You can take pictures!’” Today many of Jernigan’s photos of Hirschfeld facilities are on the company’s website as well as being used in brochures and advertising. “They heard what I was doing in my free time and asked me to do it for them on work time,” Jernigan said. “It was the best of both worlds.”

All the while Jernigan continued as a student at Northlake College, and in May 2010 received her associate’s degree.

Although she has done family portraits and taken wedding pictures for friends, Jernigan says that’s not her preference. “I enjoy going on a road trip and taking photos,” she said. “I think that’s what is most fun for me, getting to walk around and just look at everything a little differently. What’s an interesting way to look at this besides just the way everybody sees it when they walk by?”

“I’m a very visual person. I look at a set of drawings and have to imagine what that steel connection looks like, and what they’re going to have to do in the shop and to erect it. So when I’m taking a picture of something, it’s not very difficult for me to imagine what a cool view would be and figure out where I need to be to get that view.”

MSC



▲ Jennifer Jernigan counts photographing rodeos among her favorite experiences. In recent years she has photographed a number of Hirschfeld facilities and projects for use on the company website and in other informational materials. To see more of her work, go to [www.modernsteel.com/photos](http://www.modernsteel.com/photos).