

# Rocky Forge News

Volume 6, issue 1 – January, 2007

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## The Blacksmith's Christmas Gift

*by Mike Hriczisce December 23, 2001*

Twas the night before deadline  
And all through the shop  
I could hear clinkers tinkling...  
Another weld that's a flop.  
Undaunted, I clean out  
my firepot with care  
In hopes that a forge-welded  
heart would appear.  
Dead cans of Miller  
are ringing the floor  
Darn it! Too late  
to get back to the store.  
My Carhartts' on fire,  
My white cap's turned to black  
I couldn't be happier  
Bang, bang, tap, tap, tap.  
Just six more to make  
I can't go to bed  
The sulphury smoke's  
playing tricks with my head.  
Behind my left shoulder  
I hear a strange thud:  
My four inch Bosch grinder  
Just fell in the slack tub!  
Dawn is approaching  
Not a moment to waste!  
The family is coming  
I must wash my face.  
Beeswax is applied  
to the iron with care  
It sticks to my fingers  
and gets in my nose hair.  
I get out of the shower  
And dry off in time  
to see Little Jonny awake,  
His five-year-old eyes sure do shine.  
The family arrives  
Presents are flowing,  
I'm tired, but sit there  
Contentedly knowing  
That for five bucks in coal  
and a dollar in steel,  
Everyone got a handmade gift  
We all know how that feels.  
MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!

Sorry I am a month late with this but I just received it. DEC

## Meetings:

### January 2007

Ted has decided to be the demonstrator and educator at the next meeting. The demonstration will be on making scrolls. We will look at the different types of scrolls, the tools to make them and actually make some scrolls. Any member interested in making scrolls should bring some flat or square stock. If anyone wants to make a scrolling jig bring a piece of 3/8" to 1/2" by 1" to 1 1/4" about 4 feet long. Also, measure the size of the hardy hole in your anvil to fit the scrolling jig.

After Ted demonstrates some of the basics, it will be a hands-on meeting, so come prepared. There will be the indoor coal forge and one or more gas forges available. If the spring weather persists (such luck), then we could even fire up outside.

Bring a sack lunch and we can eat in the shop to save time and expense of going to West Point. See all of you on January 13th at 9:00 in Ted's shop.

Ted

### December 2006

Rocky Forge did not have a meeting in December. But Ted, I and several other members attended the IBA meeting at Chaz Kizer's shop in Batesville. Butch Sheely of Northern Ohio demonstrated making a tomahawk. His 'hawk was a fine piece of work and his demonstration was professional. But he honestly had a hard time competing with Chaz.

Chaz is an Artist Blacksmith, earning his living as such. Chaz does amazing work. There may have been better smiths in the room, like Clifford Ralph, but there are few more talented artist in the country. He has a beautiful underground home that he built himself and a nice professional shop. I truly envy his life and accomplishments. He is the inspiration for a new project. I am going to gather and publish a series of articles by people who are making a living, or at least a regular income, as blacksmiths. "Smithing for Cash" premiers in this issue.

## Smithing for Cash

*By David Childress*

This is a new endeavor for me, not that I have not made the world think I was crazy before, but I have never used this form. I wanted something for you, the readers, which was different and maybe will encourage you to take the chance and try making a go of blacksmithing for a living. I will be publishing as many articles by people who are or have at least tried to earn a living or steady extra income as blacksmiths. As Chaz Kizer was the inspiration to start this, he should have been the first, but I have not gotten through to him and I am out of time. Maybe next month.

I consider this article a beta test. It could, and will be, improved. But I am not sure what you would want included. Questions, suggestions, and names of additional blacksmiths who might consider submissions are welcome.

For this month's installment, I posted an Email on the Blacksmith Editor list and Bob Ehrenberger was the first respondent. I am including my original post and any help or suggestions for improvement will be entertained.

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From: "decanvils" <decanvils@yahoo.com>  
Subject: Smiths earning a living Smithing.

Recently I have met several Blacksmiths who are earning a living practicing their art. I would like to put together a series of articles telling how anyone got started and manages to earn a living in the business. Even someone who tried and failed and knows why would be welcome. This is for The Rocky Forge News, in Central Ind. I am trying for some original content for our ~75 members. If this works I am certainly willing to share with other groups. I plan to have a basic format available soon. I hope to find out if there is interest from both artisan writers and readers.

David Childress

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Robert Ehrenberger Shelbyville, Mo.

First response: I've been full time for seven years, hard to believe. We almost didn't survive the first year, but it has gotten better. Things are lean, but we are doing fine. I'll write more off list later.

More Later: When I quit my day job, I had a big commission to make a set of gates for a local cemetery. Of course, that was done about October and nothing came on after it until January. That first summer we went to a few craft shows but didn't sell much because I was so busy with the gates I didn't have much to sell, and I didn't have a clue what would sell.

The next couple years we signed up for every craft show within a hundred miles of our farm/shop. At one point we were doing 26 events a year. What I have found works for me is if I'm not demonstrating we don't sell half as much. So we have cut out all the sales only events. I have also gravitated toward historical/traditional craft events and Civil War reenactments. I find that the people that participate and attend these events appreciate hand made ironwork. I sell a lot of camping related stuff, tripods, trammel hooks, and cooking utensils. I also sell a fair amount of household items, candle holders, plant hangers, coat racks, pot racks, fire place tools and lots of small hooks of all kinds. When someone asks me to make something special, I try to decide if it would have a wider appeal and make a few extras to sell to the public. If they sell, I add them to the product line, if they don't, I forget them. We are currently doing about 14 events each summer.

Up until this year I would usually get a couple of big commissions each year. But I decided I didn't like the stress involved in such projects, so now I pass on them.

For three years I worked in a locker in the winter to supplement our income, but now I produce wholesale iron work for someone that takes it out East and sells it to home interior stores. It doesn't pay as well as selling retail, but it fills a need and helps us get through the winter.

Of course, none of this would be possible if I hadn't gotten out of debt first and had acquired all the equipment that I needed to open a blacksmith shop. We have developed a system where we save money during the good times to pay the bills in the slow times. We have an envelope for each: taxes, insurance, utilities, medical, truck repair, home repair, and truck replacement. My wife milks goats;

we raise a couple calves, keep chickens, have a large garden, and burn wood for heat.

I hope this helps, it works for me. Everyone has their own style and temperament and there are lots of guys that prefer the commission work. Note: When I say demonstrate, I don't mean just showing up with a forge and anvil as props. I mean lighting the forge and pounding iron as long as there is someone there to watch. Plus, making inventory even when no one is there to watch.

Robert Ehrenberger Shelbyville, Mo.

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I hope that this is only the beginning of a long running series of articles that will improve with refinement. Once I am a little better at asking I plan to ask individuals to contribute. I will maybe even eventually putting together a booklet as an inspiration and how-to guide for those who want to devote their time to the Craft of Blacksmithing. So far I have a few commitments and should be able to have something every month until spring.

DEC

## State Fair Blacksmith Demonstrations: 2007

It is time to get things for the next year scheduled. The Indiana State Fair is Aug. 8-19. The IBA will be demonstrating at the Pioneer Village. Anyone who wishes to see the Fair or help the IBA to gain exposure and new members should make room in his schedule to come and help demonstrate. If you can be at the fairground for even 1 hr. on one day, get in touch with me, David Childress, or your Forgemaster, to get on the schedule. All you "have" to bring is you. If you are on the schedule you get free entrance and parking passes. We want all members to have the chance to participate. Last year the IBA gained at least a few new members, the demonstrators that desired got to sell some of their products, and many thousand fairgoers got to see blacksmiths at their trade. For some it was the first time they had ever seen a blacksmith. All of the demonstrators that I have talked with enjoyed themselves. The Fair Board even appreciated us. The 2006 Indiana State Fair was a success for us. Now it is time to prepare for 2007.

We are going to make this an even better event this year and you need to ensure your place in the enjoyment. Do your scheduling, let us know when you can be there and we will do the coordinating as soon as we hear from you.

David Childress

IBA State Fair Coordinator

Trollkeep@gmail.com, 765/492-4904

## Smoke & Noise

*By David Childress*

The last little piece that I have for you is something on testing unknown "steels".

Hochewa@aol.com <Hochewa@aol.com>

Re: [TheForge] Re: Steel question OT  
(Wrought Iron)

Back to wrought iron:

Byers went out of production in 1971. They were the last producer of wrought iron on an industrial scale in the world. Their last Bessemer Converter is on display at Station Square in Pittsburgh.

Wrought iron is fibrous because of the silicate fiber in it. It is what makes wrought iron wrought iron. When it corrodes or breaks (in a ductile manner) it looks just like wood. If you don't strike while the iron is hot, it will break up into fibers just like wood. Wrought iron can be brittle at room temperature, hot short or hardenable. Not all wrought iron is the same.

When using found materials, it would be wise to do a few simple tests to see what you got.

1. Take several representative samples up to yellow heat; let one air cool, quench one in oil, quench another in water or brine. Take a file to them. This will give you an idea if the material is hardenable.
2. Make a square and twist it hot. If the edges break up, it may be leaded. Good for machining but lousy for forging.
3. Take a 1/2" round or square and chisel half way through. Bend it. The nature of the break will tell you if it is steel or wrought iron.

Anybody have other tests?

Regards, Hochewa