

Rocky Forge News

Volume 6, issue 2 – February, 2007

The Theme for this issue is “the next generation of Smiths”. This comes of the combination of the hobbyist and the professional. DEC

Meetings:

January 2007

We had over twenty attendees, including four or five new faces, for Ted's instruction on making scrolls and jigs for making scrolls. Unfortunately, only one of us actually made a jig. Ted was disappointed in the level of doing instead of just watching. At least at the business meeting we had some agreement about future doings. A plan for our new building at the Illiana showgrounds was agreed upon.

February 2007

The February 10th meeting will be at Ted's heated shop and will start at 9:00 A.M. Our agenda will be to approve a design for a sign or banner and to start the construction of that sign. Two criteria should be executed if at all possible for the design of this sign. We should have as many individuals as possible contribute to a portion of the sign and secondly we should include the many interests of our members. Member interests could be blacksmithing, tinsmithing and repousse'. We might even want to include a horseshoe for Jim and Shane. Come to the meeting to get your input into the final design.

Don't forget to bring some iron or other items for the iron in the hat drawing. Come prepared to work and socialize, whichever you prefer.

Let us try the sack lunch deal again, everyone seemed to enjoy that.

How about someone calling me to volunteer to get 2 dozen doughnuts?

See you on the 10th.

Ted

State Fair 2007

I have received a few responses for scheduling of State Fair Demonstrations. I need some structure for people to build around.

Forgemasters need to find out what dates their Group can oversee, so that members that want to meet and work with some of our more impressive demonstrators will know when these people will be at the Fair. The Vernon group wants to demonstrate Wed., Thur, & Fri and they did not care if beginning or end of the Fair. I have heard that Fort Wayne may do a day but I have not heard when. Bring the subject up at your next meeting.

A related but completely separate project, the idea of resurrecting the 4-H blacksmithing projects has come up. John Steppe, Blacksmith of the Year 2006, has single handedly gotten the Blacksmithing project in Vigo county 4-H started, but Vigo county is the only county in Indiana. The IBA would be well served in creating young smiths and the 4-H has a state wide organization that would ease the start-up and outreach to Indiana's young people. The State Fair 4-H building should have a section of blacksmithing projects. But if we do not do our part it will not happen. If you would like be involved in teaching young people blacksmithing contact Ted or myself.

David Childress

Smithing for Cash

By David Childress

I have Mark Thomas, who recently told us about his trip to Africa and demonstrated in the afternoon, who gives his answers to some of the questions I supplied about making a living Smithing. This is followed by some advice from Robert Ehrenberger about how to find places to sell that came too late for inclusion last month.

Mark Thomas
MT Forge

How you make enough product? (and get it sold)?

Work, work, work. I asked Mel Tucker how he made enough money at blacksmithing. He said you need to make enough product to sell. So I figured I had to come up with ways to make a quality product in large quantities. Having worked in factories most of my working career I used what I had seen and done and transferred it to blacksmithing. This includes buying or making the equipment you need. I keep a notebook on the products I make with cut length for stock, set up info, step by step procedures and digital pictures of product being made. This keeps the product consistent. I have a set of bar racks in the shop and buy my stock uncut from Midwest Pipe and Steel in Fort Wayne. I have a car hauler so I can pick up the stock uncut. Last fall I picked up over \$3000 worth to keep me over the winter. I have a 24' x 24' add-on to my shop. This allows me to make product during the winter or other slow times and store it on racks.

How do you determine price?

As much as I can get. I look at other sources (catalogs, web pages, hands on at shows) to get an idea what the going rate is. I also have a shop rate for retail prices and wholesale prices. I make a prototype to see if I can make an item for my shop rate.

What tools are important to do your work and sales?

I use a gas forge 95+% of the time and a coal forge the other time. I have a #2 Di-Acro bender and use this a lot. I have a 25# Little Giant but use it rarely. I use my hydraulic press 5 times as much. I avoid

drilling holes as much as possible using instead a Roper Whitney #20 to punch holes. I use a horizontal bandsaw (and make my own blades from bulk stock using silver solder) but prefer to use either a rod parter (shear) or flat bar shear when possible.

How do you find customers?

I started going to rendezvous 10 years ago and sold as I could. I've picked up more shows and this year will probably do about 20. I (my wife) started up our web page, sell on Ebay, have a booth at a local antique/craft mall and made my own catalog to hand out.

How do you handle bookkeeping?

I started out using Quickbooks with my wife doing the work. I have one of my daughters now doing the work and have switched over to MYOB (much better for manufacturing). We also print out a ledger to take to the shows with all of our items listed with their prices. When we sell something we mark it down in the ledger and then input it into the computer when we get back. This allows us to track what we sell at all our shows.

"See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work." Isaiah 54:16

From: "Bob Ehrenberger"

Subject: Re: One last thought, Smiths earning a living Smithing.

Date: Tue, 9 Jan 2007 16:55:45 -0600

As far as locating events, resist the publications that list all the regional craft shows. We have never gotten a decent show from these magazines. They are good for knitting, or bird houses, or scented candles, but are a waste of time for iron work.

If you want to do Civil war events get Camp Chase Gazett or The Civil War Historian. If you want to do earlier periods get a copy of Smoke and Fire.

Once you find a type of event that works for you ask the people that are set up there, and they will tell you where all the good events are in that area. Unless you pissed them all off, in which case you may not have the personality for it. I try not to set up at an event that already has a blacksmith unless it

is a huge event, it's not fair to them to cut into their business and you will both have so-so sales.

Robert Ehrenberger
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From: Andrew Vida
Date: Feb 2, 2007 8:33 AM
Subject: [TheForge] Speaking of age...

I was wondering (has this come up before?), how many youngin's are on TheForge? How's about we define that as anyone under 30? I ask because I feel as if I'm one of the younger people here and that got me to wondering about whether there is a new generation to pick up where and when we leave off? I know of only a few young new-ish smiths like Nigel Tudor (met him at Touchstone several years ago. Very talented young guy). Do things look promising for the coming generation or are we heading down another dead end, a la 1970?

Is anyone watching this? Does ABANA hold this as an issue? If not, should they?

Andy

From: Ries Niemi
Date: Feb 2, 2007 10:48 AM
Subject: Re: [TheForge] Speaking of age..

It's true Andy, you are just a pup - speaking from the ripe old age of 51, I can say this. I don't know how many young people are on the forge, but I do know that, out west anyway, we are in no danger of dying out. When we have an NWBA meeting, which we do twice a year, I would guess that a good third of the attendees are in their 30's or younger, including a couple of enthusiastic teenagers.

I think on the east coast, and in the south, this may be more a retiree's hobby, but not out thisaway.

Pratt in Seattle, and the Crucible in Oakland, are both teaching blacksmith classes year round, and both are young, art oriented crowds. Same with the guys I have met from Austin Community College in Texas.

One key thing that brings young people in- JOBS! So in areas like Florida, or California, or here in the Northwest, where there are concentrations of working art blacksmith shops, with employees, you

see young people. I have met a whole crew from Florida, guys in their 20's and early 30's, who are whizzes with forging aluminum, because that's their day job.

Similarly, in Napa and Sonoma, there is a big cluster of working shops, because one winery can take 3 guys a year to do ironwork for. Lots of young people there.

Port Townsend has a big cluster as well - until Russell died, it had 3 of the most accomplished and talented blacksmiths in the world working there- Russ Jaque, Steve Lopes, and Jim Garret, along with Dean Mook, and a bunch of younger guys who work for, or have worked for, one of the four of them at one time or another.

The Metal Building in Seattle is a beehive of art metal activity, with a bunch of shops, and lots of arty young metal kids coming and going. And Louie has been running Black Dog Forge, in Downtown Seattle, for a while, bringing up young smiths all along the way.

ries

From: Dan Crowther
Date: Feb 2, 2007 9:53 AM
Subject: RE: [TheForge] Speaking of age..

My wife and I teach blacksmithing to the younger generation weekly; partly through a program we run at a local art studio and also through a summer program. By the time a year is done we've taught roughly 60-80 "kids" (ages 12-17) basic blacksmithing. As Ron said, some of them keep at and some don't, just like any other "teen interest". We typically see about 25% keep coming back for more and more.

The biggest hindrance to these students (and even for our adult students), is a place to practice. We can teach, say, hammer control for hours, but the student really just needs "hammer time" to practice outside of class. Parents are often not eager to let their child build a forge so they can practice, for a variety of reasons (some of which can be quite legit).

When I hear people talk about blacksmithing being a "dying art", they obviously aren't taking a look around. There are more opportunities to learn

blacksmithing NOW than there has been in the past 50 years!

Dan Crowther

<http://www.oakandacorn.com>

<http://celticclans.oakandacorn.com>

From: Ron Childers

Date: Feb 2, 2007 9:15 AM

Subject: RE: [TheForge] Speaking of age..

Andy,

It's a matter of perspective: To me, anyone under 50 is a "youngun". As for really younguns, there are kids in green coal or beginner classes 10 yrs old who listen, do what you tell 'em, and have good hammer control, and some older one's who think it's fun to try to destroy everything. Yes, things do look promising for the coming generation; we have some really good kids in our group and a bunch of us old buzzards to teach 'em. Some will stick with it and some will lose interest as in every thing else.

Ron C

From: Jim Beard

Date: Feb 2, 2007 11:32 AM

Subject: Re: [TheForge] Speaking of age..

Ohh! I'm a youngun. I turn 28 in a month. I was surprised to find out how many Smiths there are here in Eugene. A good friend of mine holds an open shop once a week. It has a really good turn out. Usually 6+ experienced, older blacksmiths show up, just to shoot the breeze, and 6+ 'junior' or apprentice level wanna be blacksmiths show up. Us younger guys forge and the older guys offer advice, constructive criticism, help, and generally offer support and make themselves a great resource to us beginning folk.

My buddy and I set up a web site in the hopes that we would help some of the more talented blacksmiths sell/market their stuff. We haven't ever finished with the business side of the site, but we did get some of one smiths work up in the gallery. Here is a link:

http://www.nw-arts.com/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=14

Jim

Eugene, OR

The Next Generation of Smiths.

The entirety of the following I hope to have posted on www.rockyforge.org. This is the section that pertains to this month's theme. DEC

“A talk given to the Wabash County Historical Society November 14, 1994 at Manchester College, North Manchester, Indiana by Paul D. Moffett, President of the Indiana Blacksmithing Association, Inc. 1993-1998 Updated December 30, 2006

Being President of the Indiana Blacksmithing Association, let me assure you, does NOT make me a leading blacksmithing expert. It is my personal observation that there are very few blacksmithing "experts" because the craft requires such great breadth of knowledge. The most capable smiths have just learned a bit more than others and may have a natural bent for a particular part of the craft. Never-the-less, I hope I can open your eyes to an ancient craft which still survives today and is growing in the number of people who have shown an interest in learning more. The Indiana Blacksmithing Association tries to satisfy this interest with monthly meetings and a monthly newsletter. We also operate a lending library of books and video tapes and other materials which are available to our members to help them with their specific interests. We also operate a store for difficult to find items for blacksmiths. We provide a weekend conference in June of each year during which we try to present experienced demonstrators of the craft. In December we present a free mini conference usually featuring one demonstrator. All of the events are open to any interested person and I encourage you to attend if you think you might be interested in learning more about the craft“.

“Now let's look at the training of these people called blacksmiths. Two courses have been followed in recent decades. In Europe, especially in Germany, a very strict training regime continues. You must apprentice with a master for a certain number of years. The apprenticeship will include much training in materials and methods. It will also include full business training. At the end of training you are fully tested and prepared to hang out your business sign. In fact you may not hang it out until

you have passed the course successfully. You become a licensed blacksmith and the public can be assured you have certain well defined qualifications. In the United States we have proceeded differently. Much of the training is simply not available in a shop setting. Classes are given in some schools. Apprenticeships are sometimes available, but seldom from what the Germans would call masters. They are led by those having someone more experience. There is no test or license required to hang out your sign and take on business. If you have applied yourself you may succeed, but market forces alone will judge your competence to practice and your success. Obviously the German smith is better trained. The introduction of the European Economic Community has placed certain strains on this system since by law a smith from France or Spain or Italy can now go to Germany and bid on work there. Their training is not as good and the German smiths are concerned that other Germans will not receive the same high quality preparation they expect from a German smith. Time will tell how this gets resolved, but I'll place my bet on the Germans. In the United States meanwhile, beginning smiths are only offered training which is usually catch as catch can in groups like the Indiana Blacksmithing Association, personal instruction in private (usually home) shops, a number of craft schools across the country and personal experimentation. About a dozen craft schools offer short 2 day to 2 week courses. Out of this helter skelter system have come some remarkable craftsmen and women. They have worked hard to learn what they needed to know, and have taken every opportunity to learn from others. A number have gone to Europe for training sometimes lasting a couple of years. They have learned how to do business from such organizations as the National Ornamental Miscellaneous Metals Association (NOMMA). They have learned from other smiths in ABANA and elsewhere. The wide spread availability of the internet has greatly increased the exchange of metalworking information all over the world, but especially in the United States. Discussion forums help both beginning and experienced smiths learn about new materials and the processes needed to deal with these new materials. The ABANA web site <http://www.abana.org/> has many links to

other organizations including the Indiana Blacksmithing Association, Inc. The passage in recent years of increasing government regulations, and the growing liability awards made by juries have further increased the blacksmith's difficulties. These usually apply to large works often placed in public places. Now these regulations are invading private homes. But through it all, the forming of metal into a decorative or useful shape which you know will be around for a while is a most satisfying experience. To know how to form a scroll of beauty and symmetry, one which is pleasing to the eye and far better than any made by machine is worth the effort. To make a difficult railing and have it right and a delight to the eye is an extension of the efforts of the many masters over many centuries to bring forth the best that iron has to offer. To take a piece of waiting iron and put it into a shape and place which is satisfying to others is to add to the fabric of civilization in a very positive way. Yes indeed! I report to you that blacksmithing, which was moribund in the United States just three decades ago, is healthy, growing and active. From the person who just comes to watch - and this too is an ancient custom - to the person working at his own forge for his own relaxation and enjoyment and onward to the forgers of huge sculptures, each is enjoying benefiting from the craft in some way. The history of blacksmithing is still being written. I write a tiny bit of it in our newsletter each month. New people join us all the time to learn a bit more for their own use and enjoyment. Perhaps you would like to join us also. I extend an open invitation to visit."

Smoke & Noise

By David Childress

For those who think we need something applicable:
a piece on diamond files. DEC

From: Andrew Vida
Date: Jan 19, 2007 3:43 PM
Subject: Re: [TheForge] Diamond files?

Harry wrote:

Looking to expand my file inventory. I see files on ebay. Does anyone have experience with them? Are they worth getting? What applications are they used for?

In my experience, diamond files are somewhat limited in their applications. They are definitely not well suited to gross material removal. The key to using diamond abrasives is a light touch. Diamond is a very aggressive cutter and one must constantly fight the urge to push harder than a very light pressure. It is an abrasive and will act as one. It will NOT act as a file acts. They can be used effectively but you have to know where they are appropriate and how to employ them, otherwise you will end up frustrated, possibly with a botched job and probably with a ruined file. In general, I would use diamond files on very hard materials where the area to be worked is small, no more than a few square inches at the most. As I said, light pressure is the key watchword with diamonds. Let them do the work. This becomes especially true when you are going to break a sharp corner. Start with extremely light pressure and increase slowly as the sharp corner breaks down. One pound of pressure on a line of action that is .001" wide (sharp corner or point) can place thousands of psi at the contact area. Therefore, go lightly.

I have a few diamond files, but they see very little use. I would sooner build my inventory of "real" files. I would get one or two diamond files or rifflers just to see how they work and get a feel for using them. They are definitely handy now and again but as I said, they do not act as files. They are more like an abrasive stick that never wears out if used correctly.

Good luck.

-Andy