

Rocky Forge News

Volume 6, issue 3 – March, 2007

This month I am looking for some feedback on a number of subjects, some of which you may not even be aware of yet.

For those who may be concerned I, your humble editor, will start a new job before the March meeting and hope to lower the stress level in my life. DEC

Meetings:

March 2007

The meeting will be March 10th, 9:00 A.M. in Ted's shop. Since we have a goal of getting our sign completed for the June Conference let's work on the sign at the next meeting. Bring your squares and any work you have done. If no work has been done, then bring them anyway and let's get something going. With the help of each other we can surely come up with some ideas and actually start working. If things get slow, I or someone will demonstrate some blacksmithing techniques for you.

Let's do the brown bag thing again, it seems all of you enjoy that time. Carol said she would fix a pot of something to add to our brown bag lunch. As a result I have decided not to trade her in for a new Tom Clark anvil.

Come to next meeting and enjoy the blacksmithing. Bring some good stuff for the iron in the hat, maybe some unusual hammers and anvil or two or maybe some nice long pieces of S-7."

Ted

March 2007 IBA Meeting

March business meeting (note change of location)
Riley Conservation Club
6301 E. Gross Drive

From Riley (southeast of Terre Haute): go north on 46 from Riley. Turn left on Lama Road. Go one mile to the T. The Conservation Club is in front of you.

From Terre Haute: go to exit 11 on I-70 and turn south on Indiana 46. Go to Lama Road and turn

right. Go one mile to the T. The Conservation Club is in front of you.

We will be electing 2 new directors for the board. See ballot on page 9 of the Forge Fire. Send your ballot to Harold Wineinger before March 15 (to be in his hand before march 15). Your vote is important to the IBA.

Searching for Direction

By David Childress

Right now, maybe by coincidence, is a time of change for this newsletter, maybe Rocky Forge, the Indiana Blacksmithing Association, and ABANA. These organizations are the support network for us as blacksmiths and the overall craft of Blacksmithing. We are being asked what we want these organizations to support and how we want it done. Here I will present what little I know and what the questions that come to me are on each of these levels.

What do you want from this newsletter?

I have presented what interested me with little feedback, yah or nay, as to content. I see it as "news" and amusement. This is not the way it has to be. I could have projects, how-tos', more close to home news. What has been included is what has been easy for me. I do intend to continue with articles on people earning a living smithing, which somehow did not happen this month unless you want to include Mark Thomas's piece on how to improve our newsletter. Is this the direction I should go? What do you want to read?

How can Rocky Forge Improve?

Ted wants to see an improvement in the smithing abilities of the membership. Very few of us are any better smiths than we were when Rocky Forge started five years ago. I may have some ideas, but I do not know how to motivate us to into becoming better craftsmen. What activities do we need to plan? How do we get more done than just socializing? Do we want to get more done?

The direction of the IBA.

At the March IBA Business meeting two new directors will be elected. I am running for one of the seats. I would like for everyone to take the time and vote. I know all of the board members and can assure you that the direction of the IBA will be profoundly affected by the departure of John Zile and Harold Wineinger. I do not know if the change will be for the better or the worse. I hope to part of the change and want the membership to speak on what the new direction will be.

ABANA seeking input

The 2006 ABANA Conference at Seattle did not break even and the proposed 2008 conference in New Paltz, NY has been cancelled because organizers could not produce the conference within budget. The ABANA conferences are very important to the survival of the organization. At one time they were profitable and helped support other activities. The ABANA is trying to determine what they have been doing wrong and how to improve. Several volunteers have come forward to assist. There will be a questionnaire coming out soon about proposed changes and Tom Clark and his organization has offered to hold the 2008 conference. I do not know much about the ABANA conferences, but the little I have found out sounds to me like ABANA has lost its way or at least has different goals than any of the blacksmiths I know. \$600 gate fees that do not cover expenses for conferences does not sound to me like providing services that the rank and file membership needs and wants.

From ABANA's President

“Whoever said “the more things change, the more they stay the same” doesn't know the plights of non-profit organizations. Because what I want to talk about is this - ABANA must change its focus to be relevant for another 34 years. ABANA has come to that fork in the road - where do we go from here? Or as Yogi Berra would say - "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." We are taking it, grasping it and coming up with some difficult decisions.

ABANA has been producing conferences every other year for decades now. Well, the time has come to reevaluate how we do these events. We,

the ABANA Board, have decided not to have a conference for 2008. This decision did not come overnight. After months of discussions and negotiating a formal motion was made on February 9 “that ABANA not have its biennial conference in 2008”. On February 13, the motion passed by a vote of 14-0.

As painful as this decision was I know it cannot compare to the disappointment of individuals of the Northeast Blacksmith Association (NBA). Since the Fall of 2004 the NBA put a great deal of time and energy into the possibility of having the conference at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Jonathan Nedbor and the Steering Committee of NBA are to be commended for all the work they have done.

So why aren't we having a Conference? What's the deal? Is ABANA going bankrupt? Let me start by answering the last question first - NO. Though I wish the financial situation were stronger, we are not going bankrupt. To put things in a simple nutshell here is a quick summary of the conferences. They have become too expensive. They cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, which is too much! That doesn't even include the thousands of hours from all of the volunteers. For many years ABANA has supplemented its budget by living off the profit from previous Conferences. We can no longer do that. The Seattle Conference was not the financial success of previous Conferences. It probably lost money. We still do not know the final tally, because there is an outstanding invoice from the University of Washington. When we do know the accounting figures, they will be posted on the ABANA website.

So why no Conference

First, there is the Money

The costs to put on a Conference have skyrocketed to somewhere in the vicinity of \$400,000. With those figures the average conference expense including transportation would be in the \$1,000 per person range. The majority of our members cannot afford to pay that. Of course we all agree that costs must be trimmed. We need to look at other locations such as fairgrounds. The college campus

environment has gotten too expensive. The number of demonstrators has gone through the roof.

Second, there is the Conference Chair

Every Conference needs to have someone in charge to do the negotiations, troubleshoot, make decisions, etc. This is a full-time job! Past Chairs who have held this position have burned out - just ask Dave Koenig and Bill Callaway. And did I mention that this job pays nothing?! No one wanted to step up and be Chairman for the 2008 Conference.

Third, there is the Membership

The membership has declined in recent months. A year ago the number totaled 4815. Today it is 4468. Our budget figures are based on a membership of approximately 5000. Without that number there would be practically no funds to pay for seed money or pre-conference expenses. Another factor to consider regarding membership is the number of attendees to our biennial Conferences. Seattle had 575 paid attendees, which equates to less than 14% of our membership. This has been a consistent percentage over the last several Conferences. That low figure is another indication that we are definitely not meeting the needs of our members.

Fourth, there is the Central Office.

LeeAnn Mitchell performed many duties on the three previous conferences - La Crosse, Richmond, and Seattle. She worked tirelessly at each of these events putting in many hours of "volunteer" work. Much was asked of her and she did it - beautifully. There is now a Central Office Administrator, Heather Hutton, of Knoxville, TN. She has many strengths and will be a valuable asset to ABANA, but her experience in working with large conferences has not been tested. Without a Conference Chair this would be an impossible task for the new Central Office.

So where do we go from here? This is a question that I asked in my message to the affiliates. I know that many of you like me look forward to getting together with old friends. For that reason alone the idea of not having the Conference will be a great disappointment.

The first ABANA Conference I attended was Birmingham in 1988 - Sloss Furnace. The sharing and camaraderie alone won me over. There will be other Conferences, but we need a new model. I want to continue this dialog in future letters. Please let me know your thoughts. ALL suggestions are germane. There are no stupid ideas.

The more things change - the more we need to change

Clare Yellin, President of ABANA

Volunteer for 2008 ABANA Conference

Tom Clark (from the Internet)

From: Ozark School of Blacksmithing
Date: February 23, 2007 6:30:40 PM EST
Subject: 2008 conference

Clare,

I am sorry to not have addressed this issue earlier but I am just in off of the road and my phone has been ringing off the hook.

I was very sorry to read your release about not having a 2008 conference. I will be right up front and say, I can only describe that as a death wish for ABANA.

Let me bring you up to date with my situation with regard to keeping track of the problems in confirming a date for the 2008 conference with the New York group. When I first heard in Seattle that this may not happen, by my nature I put some of my energy into an alternative. My affiliate, BAM was already considering offering to host the 2010 conference and I was pleased with that because we did have a successful conference in 1994 at which time I was president of BAM. It was both well organized and a financially rewarding conference for ABANA. I have been personally involved with every conference since except Wisconsin in 2000 where I also participated as a demonstrating vendor and making several power hammers available for ABANA's demo sites.

When I later heard that there was a second refusal of New York's offer I approached our president, Kirk Sullens to see if we could possibly offer a program if New York was not going to happen.

Kirk called a meeting and even though we realized we would be getting a late start, the group agreed to do it. I put Kirk in touch with Dorothy and with that back up program available it is inconceivable to me that after you made a final refusal with New York you did not even consider BAM as a back up.

As I said earlier my phone has been ringing off the hook and I have had conversations with many people including, Bill Callaway, two time chairman of past ABANA conferences, Michael Bondi, two time chairman, Clay Spencer, past chair of the board's conference committee, Bob Bergman and Toby Hickman, who has had more experience with blacksmithing organizations than the rest of us put together. We all agree that it could possibly do irreparable damage to ABANA if we skipped a conference.

I hold no claim to it but in fact, all of the above mentioned people were active on the ABANA board and conference activities during the largest growth of the ABANA membership. All participated in financially rewarding conferences and other activities for ABANA and will lend their energies to a 2008 conference.

I have again talked to our president Kirk Sullens, and even at this late date Kirk says, BAM will accept the challenge and do a conference in Missouri in 2008.

I am leaving Sunday for a quick trip to Turkey and then I will be driving out to Reno for a show. On that trip I am going to stop at the state fairground where we are planning our future conferences and am going to see what dates would be available in 2008. That facility offers us unlimited camping at very low rates, unlimited RV hookups, and every type of hotel and motel for lodging. Everyone can choose their own budget level and type of housing needed for the conference. The site also offers a wide range of vendors that can more than meet our needs for food. People can choose what they want to eat and all we will need to do is arrange for one meal at our membership and awards meeting.

Further, I have put together a program that will utilize as few as 12-16 demonstrators and provide meaningful demonstrations that will all be repeated so that more people can see more of the conference.

We can promote a financially successful conference with little or no financial risk for ABANA. We need to call on our friends and get ABANA back on track.

Time is short so I must speak frankly, which is my nature anyway. If ABANA is not going to host a conference in 2008 I will spend all of my energy supporting an effort to promote an international conference in 2008 to keep the momentum alive.

Tom Clark

Volunteer for Direction Questionnaire

Philippa Alderton (from the Internet)

I think the issue of relevance is at the heart of ABANA's difficulties. ABANA does two things that the membership sees - puts out a couple magazines, and runs a conference every couple years - and they've just decided to cut half of that.

ABANA Board members, I'm going to ask you a favor. I want you to sit down, and write down what the benefits are that YOU see yourselves providing.

And, those of you who are like me, a mere peon ;-)
I'd like you guys to sit down and write out the plusses and minuses of ABANA as you see them.

For the Board members, I want you to keep them somewhere you can access them once we get the poll taken. I think it might be helpful to have a list in black and white of what you think you're doing, and compare it with what the members and prospective members think you're doing. As for the rest of us (and Board members can do this too- just mention you're on the Board), send them to me, preferably privately (phlip@99main.com) telling me whether you're a member or not. I'll use this information to help tweak the poll for maximum relevance to both parties.

More I'm looking at this, and listening to you guys, the more it appears that there's a communication gap - one end doesn't know what the other end is striving for. Maybe, with the poll, and good will on both ends, we can bridge that gap.

Saint Phlip

**Old Chinese Proverb: “Tell
me, and I will surely forget.
Show me, and I might
remember Make me do it, and
I will certainly understand”**

From: "Saint Phlip"

Really. My usual deal with my apprentices is that if they make something, I give them half the money. I did that at a RennFaire, on some tent stakes- guided my apprentice through everything he needed to do, but let him do it- and he was utterly thrilled ;-)
And, this from a man who makes many many dollars in computer stuff in the real world ;-)
Oh, and if you're wondering why I needed to guide him on tent stakes, it was his first day on a forge, and the tent stakes were especially designed for a large merchant tent.

Saint Phlip

Response

On 2/22/07, Jerry Frost wrote:

I figured that's what you meant. Then after a moment thought why not both? <grin>

Yes Phlip, exactly what I was talking about.

One of Richard's first “fully elective” projects was a wall mounted pot rack for his Mother. It was very basic and not only took him several sessions to finish, I spent a lot of time instructing and insisting all the hooks were the same, by size. There were three lengths of hooks to maximize pot hangeage in limited wall space.

Not only was Richard inordinately proud of it, his Mother packed it in tissue paper, individually wrapping each hook. Mike, his Father and I were shaking our heads but didn't say a word. I do have THAT much survival instinct.

The only thing Richard was prouder of than the pot rack was a set of 4 leaf coat hooks he got PAID for. The leaf coat hook is what I start every student on unless they're severely limited on time and only want a little hammer time, then it's a "S" hook.

Anyway, making less than half minimum wage for his efforts paled in comparison to discovering

someone was willing to actually PAY him for those efforts. Not only did they pay him, they hung his coat hooks in a prominent place in their entryway.

It was a big lesson, HUGE.

Frosty

If it ain't forged
it ain't real.
Wrought iron is.
The FrostWorks
Meadow Lakes, AK.

Smithing for Cash

By David Childress

This month I have a situation that I would like to have become a chance for someone to earn a living as a Blacksmith. I do not know how to make this work and am asking for the wisdom of others.

“Billie Creek Village” outside Rockville, IN is a non-profit “Living History Museum”, (my term not theirs) set 1800 - 1910. They have always tried to have a blacksmith demonstrating in their shop when they are open, Fri.-Sun and holidays during the summer and assorted special events. Twenty years ago they had a thousand visitors a day and 5000-12000 visitors for special events. The Blacksmith was paid \$10/hr by the village and sold his crafts giving “Billie Creek” ~15%. A blacksmith could almost earn a living.

Today things are different for a variety of reasons. The village can no longer afford to pay craftsmen and the attendance is about 10% of what it was twenty years ago. The current Blacksmith, understandably, does not want to demonstrate if he is not paid and the traffic is not high enough for profitable sales. The Board of Directors is trying to continue operations, but without salary or traffic for sales almost all of the craftspeople can not make ends meet. The craftspeople are being asked to volunteer until a solution is established. The blacksmith shop is not suitable for cold weather use.

The management should be open to suggestions, but right now the situation is not good. The current smith has gotten permission to use the shop for 4-H Blacksmithing classes but much more is needed. Any suggestions?