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Hammer-In story is Un-FORGE-ttable

By JUSTIN STORY jstory@bgdailynews.com 23 hrs ago



Charles Hurst, president of the Kentucky Forge Council, will tell you that the craft of blacksmithing has a rich history that connects people with the distant past.

“The basic concept, the tools and the techniques that are used haven’t changed for millennia,” said Hurst, who helped establish the Hammer-In, an annual gathering of metalworkers that held its fourth edition Saturday at Western Kentucky University.

Visitors at the Hammer-In could watch forgers labor over their creations, including those of David Gibson, a retired farrier for the Kentucky Horse Park who demonstrated how he made horseshoes, narrating his process as he stoked a coal furnace and hammered the shoes into shape on an anvil.

WKU sculpture professor David Marquez supervised the aluminum pour, in which he and his students poured molten aluminum into molds of designs carved on scratch blocks by visitors at the Hammer-In.

Hurst said that smithing is a tradition that has been passed down through several generations of his family.

“I actually started as a woodworker and I needed hand tools, but they were expensive, so I started making them instead and I fell in love with making them more so than using them,” Hurst said.

The Hammer-In takes place on the grounds of the Kentucky Museum, where Hurst is an exhibits technician.

Museum director Brent Bjorkman said the first one, held in 2016, garnered an enthusiastic response from metalworkers in the region, inspiring them to form the Kentucky Forge Council and hold monthly meetings to share advice and discuss their craft.

“We’re pleased with how the event has grown and we’re proud to be the home of that,” Bjorkman said.

Along with demonstrators, the Hammer-In featured vendors selling their own crafts.

Greg Waddell of Bowling Green was at a vendor's tent selling his handmade knives.

Next to him, his 15-year-old grandson, Ethan Waddell of Scottsville was forging his own metal trinkets, including arrowheads and Frederick's Crosses, carefully shaping the hot metal with a hammer and tongs.

The elder Waddell said he developed an interest in blacksmithing by tinkering with unused steel when he worked at the Holley Carburetor plant.

"Once you start doing it, it's like a sickness, you can't stop," Greg Waddell said.

His grandson caught the bug, taking up the craft about four years ago and soaking up the knowledge of more experienced metalworkers.

"I enjoy that I get to sit here and have the creativity and freedom to do what I want to do," Ethan Waddell said.

Many of Greg Waddell's knives were forged from Damascus steel, making for sturdy blades with watery patterns.

"Damascus is like a snowflake, no one piece is like another," Ethan Waddell said.

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