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TOP STORY

## Hammer-In celebrates blacksmithing at WKU

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) Oct 7, 2017



Cameron Lewis of Bowling Green heats a steel rod in his propane forge during the second annual Hammer-In blacksmithing celebration on Saturday, Oct. 7, 2017, at the Kentucky Museum. (Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Austin Anthony

Smoke scented with burning iron and the sound of ringing hammers filled the air around the Kentucky Museum at Western Kentucky University on Saturday during the second annual Hammer-In event.

For Charles Hurst, an organizer and Kentucky Museum exhibits technician, the event is about keeping cherished blacksmithing and metalworking traditions alive.

Following the success of last year's Hammer-In, participating blacksmiths formed the Kentucky Forge Council, which Hurst leads as president.

“Our goal was just to have a free community event that we could share the craft of blacksmithing with the public,” said Hurst, adding his forging guild now has 25 active members and a mailing list with 75 people.

“100 years ago the blacksmith was the center of the community,” Hurst said. “We’re trying to re-establish that community connection.”

More than 300 people attended the event to take in demonstrations from knife makers, tinsmiths, aluminum pourers and other metalworkers sharing their craft. Along with demonstrations, the event featured forging classes and a narrative stage that allowed artisans to share their life stories.

Among those attending was Bowling Green native Bruce Miller, who said the chance to see knife maker Sam Stoner at work was his sole reason for coming.

“He’s renowned for his knife making in this area,” said Miller, who’s bought his own forge and anvil. “It’s something that I’m hoping to do as a side business once I retire.”

For Miller, forging is a connection to an ancient past that’s hard to reach today.

“It’s something that the average person can’t do,” he said, adding that it’s hands on in a way that doesn’t require a keyboard or mouse and that it “draws on a primal side of human nature.”

Lee Oates with Bearclaw Knives said events like the Hammer-In showcase for the community what can be done through the metalworking crafts.

Showcasing the work and time that goes into metalworking is especially important in a time where nearly everything is expected to be instant.

“That’s nothing but time, sweat and hard work,” Oates said.

Chris Radus, a Pittsburgh native who uses his forge to create art, spent the day teaching visitors basic forging skills.



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In one class, Radus used a crank-powered coal forge to teach a student how to work a steel spike into a decorative hook.

The process involved first hammering one end of the spike into a square spike tip and then hammering its corners into an octagon shape to round it out. After that, the spike is nosed over the edge of the anvil to make a curl and curled further using the anvil’s horn. The other end is flattened out to allow it to be mounted on a wall.

For Radus, the class was about passing on the craft of blacksmithing.

“I was fortunate enough to have someone show me,” he said.

Nearby, Glasgow native Elizabeth Hoffman practiced her forging skills by also making hooks. Hoffman joined up with the Kentucky Forge Council and is new to blacksmithing. She pointed to a nearby table that showcased a letter opener and a Christian cross she made, along with other objects.

“There’s not too many lady blacksmiths out there,” she said, adding that it’s become a creative hobby for her. “I need to be around creative people.”

Cameron Lewis of Bowling Green has been forging for five years and is also a member of the Kentucky Forge Council. After watching behind-the-scenes footage of the “Lord of the Rings” movie trilogy, Lewis said he saw how the films used smithed swords.

“I love it,” he said. “You get that certain satisfaction of making something after a hard day’s work.”

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## **Aaron Mudd**

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