

Center for Metal Arts sees programs, optimism grow

BY DAVE SUTOR
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New workshops, internship programs and housing for students are all expected to be part of a year of growth for the Center for Metal Arts in 2019.

Just one year after moving to Johnstown from the town of Florida, New York, the forging school — located in the former Bethlehem Steel Corp. pattern shop on Iron Street — has been quickly integrated into the local arts and history communities, giving Dan Neville and Patrick Quinn a sense of optimism as they prepare for the future.

"I couldn't be happier," said Neville, associate director of the center. "The Center for Metal Arts has been growing really quickly here in Johnstown. I really enjoy it. We have a great space and plenty to do. We're expanding really quickly and hiring more people."

Plans include offering more in-depth beginner-to-expert classes after approximately 225 students participated in mostly weekend workshops last year on topics such as sculpture, joinery and knife making.

"In 2019, we're offering a lot of different workshops that really are reflective of the growth we've experienced in Johnstown, so we've got some longer-term workshops, more exciting topics and visiting artists from all over the country," said Quinn, the center's program director. "For the students who come to the shop here, there is going to be a little more than 2018. But we're shooting less for the numbers of students (than) more and more of the workshops being longer-term and more in-depth learning."

Neville and Quinn recently purchased a building in the Cambria City Historic District, just a short walk from the center, to use as a student residence.

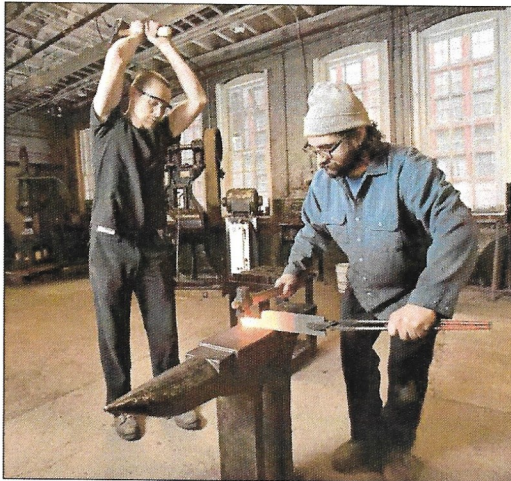
"It's huge for us," Neville said. "Our students coming here from all over the country are looking for an affordable place to stay, and we can offer that now. It also really helps build our community of blacksmiths and artists that come to work here and take classes."

"It's beneficial in a lot of ways for us."

The center also revived its internship program that was operated in New York.

"In our old location, we had an internship program — six months — where someone comes and works with us part time and works on their own work the other part of the time," Neville said. "This year, we decided to have two interns because we have more space."

Work is also expected to continue on restoring the former blacksmith shop, built in the 1860s, which houses several industrial hammers — including a 10-ton hammer, owned by the Smithsonian Institution and leased to the



JOHN RUDENKY/THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Dan Neville (left), associate director of Center for Metal Arts, and Patrick Quinn, the center's program director, forge a sculpture from a piece of steel heated to more than 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit at the Johnstown shop on Jan. 18.

Johnstown Redevelopment Authority, which owns the property that is a National Historic Landmark.

"The historic nature of the blacksmith shop is part of an aura that attracts students to the school."

"Everybody really loves it," Quinn said. "They're super inspired by the city, by the surroundings here in the old Cambria steel mill site."

Before the Center for Metal Arts opened in 2018, the property had sat unused since Bethlehem left in the early 1990s. But JRA and Johnstown Area Heritage Association worked for years to preserve the historic blacksmith shop that was once part of the Cambria Iron Co. and Cambria Steel Co. during the city's glory days.

Please see METAL, 27

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CENTER FOR METAL ARTS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Those organizations, along with others, including the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies and Korns Galvanizing, helped attract the center to Johnstown.

"We definitely would not be where we are right now without the local support — like JRA, and the Community Foundation (for the Alleghenies) and Korns Galvanizing and many others, to be honest," Neville said.

Missla Radovanac, president of the Discover Downtown Johnstown Partnership, called the center "a unique business and school to have in our community."

"A lot of credit goes to the folks that brought them here, relocating from Florida, New York, here to Johnstown, Pennsylvania," Radovanac said. "With the history that we have here in our steel mills, it makes perfect sense for

them to be here. And the impact has already been felt."

The Center for Metal Arts is now part of an Iron Street complex that includes Cambria Industrial Development Park and JWF Industries.

"Iron Street is very near and dear to the authority," JRA Executive Director Melissa Komar said. "We basically have taken those existing steel mill buildings and brought them back to life."

"One of my favorite stories to tell is the first time that I looked across the river as I was driving on Broad Street to show that the lights were on, not only in the carpenter shop, but also the machine shop and the rolling mill office. That shows the hope and the rejuvenation of our town."

Dave Sutor is a reporter for The Tribune-Democrat.

METAL

Continued from 26

"Without that effort, that building would be rubble," said Shelley Johnsonson, JAHAs marketing and communications director. "It is a nationally significant building. And it is absolutely beautiful."