

# Metal arts school hammers out niche for itself in region

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The Center for Metal Arts has, over the course of less than a year, brought new life into two long-empty Bethlehem Steel structures on Johnstown's Iron Street.

About 200 students have taken metal-working classes inside the old pattern shop and gotten a look at



the blacksmith shop, a structure built in the 1860s that is one day expected to be a main attraction of the school.

Still, though, many local residents might not be aware of the transformation that has occurred.

So, on Dec. 1, the Center for Metal Arts and Johnstown Area Heritage

Please see **SCHOOL, A2**



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Patrick Quinn, executive director of the Center for Metal Arts, works at the shop at 106 Iron St., Johnstown, on Nov. 12. The center and Johnstown Area Heritage Association will offer tours of the site on Dec. 1.

## SCHOOL

Continued from A1

Association will offer tours of the site that is owned by the Johnstown Redevelopment Authority. Five tours – of up to 40 people apiece – are scheduled to take place at 10 and 11 a.m., and 1, 2 and 3 p.m. For a fee of \$5 – to cover the costs of car and eye protection – individuals will get to see the working school in the pattern shop and the blacksmith shop that houses a 10-ton industrial hammer.

"Having these guys here is wonderful because these buildings, they have a heart to them, and they're bringing the heart back into them," Angela Ashby, JAHAs tourism and visitor services coordinator, said.

The tours will also include an industrial forging demonstration, inspired by the site's blue-collar manufacturing history.

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JAHA PRESIDENT**

that we've been discovering in the historic blacksmith shop," Patrick Quinn, the center's executive director, said. "Being toolmakers ourselves, we are going to do – for the demonstration purpose of this tour – an industrial working demo, based on inspiration from the forgings that we've actually found that were created here by the Cambria Iron Co. and Bethlehem Steel. As blacksmiths who are interested in tool-making, every day that we're here we're just more and more inspired by what people forged here before we got here."

The center started offering classes in February after relo-

cating from New York state to Johnstown.

"We really can't believe how fast we've grown and the amount of support that we've seen from both the Johnstown community and from all over the country," Quinn said. "In general, the forging community is really excited about what we're doing here, paying attention through social media, attending our classes. I think it's only going to grow even faster next year once we really get into refurbishing the historical blacksmith shop and continue to grow the pattern shop."

New classes have been designed for 2019, a year during

which work is also expected to continue on getting the blacksmith shop ready for operation.

"We're working really hard to grow the school as quickly as we can, but with care and pride in what we do," Dan Neville, associate director, said. "I think the blacksmith shop is going to be a huge success for us when it gets up and running."

The center has received support from numerous individuals and organizations, including JAHAs and the JRA.

"People in Johnstown have been extremely happy that we're here, but also really have done what they can to help us, kind of going out of their way – it feels like – sometimes to really help us out with what we're doing," Neville said. "That support feels really great for what we do because sometimes the crafts and arts get lost in society. So to have these organizations in town really care about that feels really special."

JAHA President Richard Burkert sees the center as a key component in the city's historic



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Dan Neville, associate director of the Center for Metal Arts, is shown at the school at 106 Iron St., Johnstown, on Nov. 12.

and artistic identity.

"I think this is going to be a growing factor over the next five to 10 years as – I think – a key point in Johnstown's economic diversification," Burkert said. "If you want to make Johnstown stand out as a unique place that values its heritage and art I think this is just a real coup for Johnstown. People should know more about this, be proud

about this."

Burkert, optimistically looking toward the future, thinks that "in five years, this will be the national – if not international – center for artist blacksmiths."

*Dave Sutor is a reporter for The Tribune-Democrat. Follow him on Twitter @Dave\_Sutor.*