

'Excited to get to work'

Center for Metal Arts hosts first workshop at historic site

BY DAVID HURST
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For years, Michael Gottlieb has been relying on custom-made steel knives for his Savannah, Georgia, bakery and restaurant's kitchen.

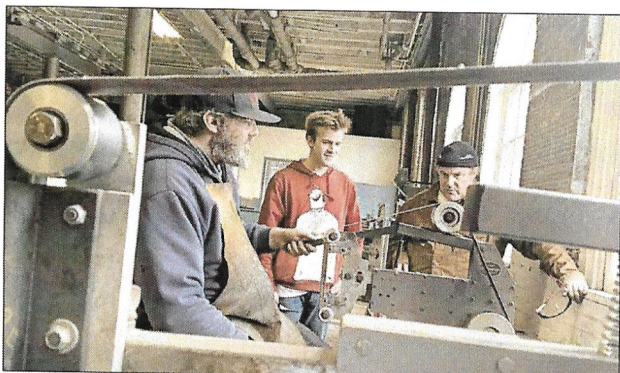
"It was exciting to have the fires going again, hearing the ring of the anvil."

**DAN NEVILLE,
SCHOOL OPERATOR**

On Sunday, he was in Johnstown making one himself, learning from the Johnson, Vermont, bladesmith who forges his specialized cutlery.

"As a chef, I want the knives I use to be an extension of my hand ... so this is an incredible experience for me," Gottlieb said, taking a break from polishing an 8-inch Damascus steel blade.

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PHOTOS BY DAVID HURST/THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Nick Anger (left) offers students tips on knife-making on Sunday during a workshop at the Center for Metal Arts at Cambria Iron Co., above. Below left, Michael Gottlieb, of Savannah, Ga., uses a clamp while polishing a knife. Below center, Don Bell, of northern New York, uses the skills he learned to put final touches on a blade. Below right, Alex Commons, of Ottawa, Canada, looks for imperfections on his knife.



WORKSHOP

Continued from A1

Inside a former pattern shop that, until this weekend, was quiet for years, Gottlieb was one of seven students from as far away as Ottawa, Canada, who spent three days forging, etching and polishing metal at The Center For Metal Arts at Cambria Iron Co.

If all goes as expected, bladesmith Nick Anger's workshop will be the first of many courses the industrial site will welcome over the months and years to come, according to Dan Neville and Pat Quinn, the school's operators.

The pair spent the past several months relocating their school from New York to Johnstown.

The move required them to haul truckloads of tools and equipment to the Iron Street site, run electricity to the pattern shop and add duct work, Neville said.

Concrete patchwork repairs to the shop itself were also needed to make the more than a century-old brick building safe again, he added.

"It was a couple months of picking things up (in New York) and putting them back down here," Neville said.

But that all changed on Friday.

"It was exciting to have the fires going again, hearing the ring of the anvil," he said. "Once all of the students were here and Nick was starting his demonstration, it was like this shop came alive."

"That's why we're here," Quinn added.

And that's why guys like Gottlieb were here, too.

He said he'd been ordering knives from Anger for years and jumped at the chance to learn from him when he saw he was offering a knife-making class through the center.

He flew to Pittsburgh last week and spent all weekend in Johnstown, spending 8-hour days

trying to craft "an old school" French chef's knife. "I wanted to sort of go back to the roots with it," Gottlieb said.

Like Gottlieb, Don Bell, of Kinderhook, New York, said he originally signed up to take the course in eastern New York.

But when he learned the Center For Metal Arts was shifting to Johnstown, he embraced the 400-mile drive it meant, realizing it would also put him inside a piece of living history: A brick and mortar landmark that once served as a steel industry leader across the globe.

"It's amazing here. It almost puts you in awe when you look at the size of the machinery in that shop and realize what people did with it here," Bell said.

Anger agreed.

He said he couldn't imagine a better place to teach someone to work with metal.

"Anymore, places like this - a shop this old - it's something you can only read about," he said of the Civil War-era blacksmith shop. "Seeing it for the first time, there's almost a visceral response."

The former Cambria Iron Co. blacksmith shop is a national historic landmark. Neville and Quinn plan to rejuvenate it in the years to come, making it a centerpiece of their nonprofit metal arts school, which will serve as a home for metal-working courses, private lessons and artist in-residence programs.

For now, a line-up of blacksmithing or metal-working workshops are set to begin in early March while work continues on pattern shop, Quinn said.

A list of upcoming courses is available on the school's website, www.centerformetalarts.com/blacksmithing.html.

"We're excited to get to work," Quinn said.

David Hurst is a reporter for The Tribune-Democrat. Follow him on Twitter and Instagram @tddavidhurst.