

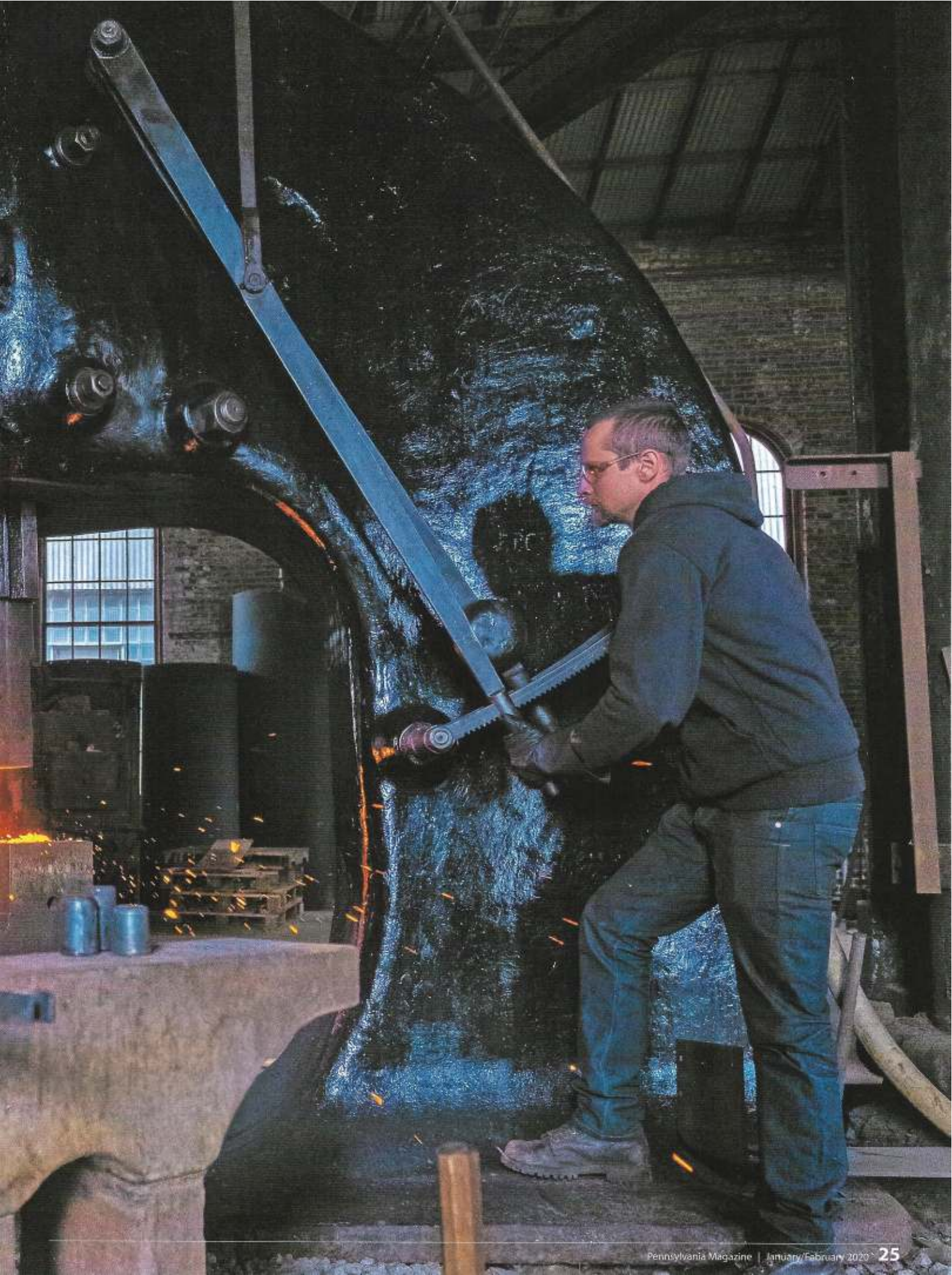
Patrick Quinn, left, and Dan Neville, right, operate the recently refurbished 3,000-pound Chambersburg steam hammer, one of the massive tools that attracted the teachers of the Center for Metal Arts to move their school from New York state to the old Cambria Iron Works in Johnstown.

JARROD BUNK, HOPE CYCLERY, JOHNSTOWN

A blacksmith wearing an orange hard hat and safety glasses is working in a large, historic iron shop. He is using a tool to shape a piece of glowing red-hot metal. The shop has a high, vaulted ceiling and brick walls. A large window on the left side of the frame shows the exterior. In the background, there is a large piece of machinery with the name 'DEW' visible on it. The overall atmosphere is industrial and historical.

FORGING AHEAD

Center for Metal Arts school revives historic 19th century blacksmith shop in Johnstown by Cindy Ross





Students work with each other to strike punches in chunks of tool steel and create the eye in hammer heads (for the handles) during a workshop in October 2018, the first year that the school held classes in the shops in Johnstown.

JARROD BUNK, HOPE CYCLERY, JOHNSTOWN

“Hammers like that simply don’t exist anymore,” Quinn says.

Motivated by this tool of yesteryear, he researched its location and contacted the Johnstown Area Heritage Association to inquire about a personal visit to the blacksmith shop, which dates to 1864 and once operated as part of the Cambria Iron Company.

“I was speechless during the tour,” he recalls. “I had never seen anything like these power hammers before. It may have existed in scrapyards or behind closed doors, but I hadn’t seen them.”

Making the Move

RICHARD BURKHART, PRESIDENT of the heritage association, had a vision to open the blacksmith shop again. He figured it was the best way to preserve the shop’s use. The former Cambria Iron Works is one of two American steel mills to receive a National Historic Landmark designation, and the blacksmith shop is the most historically significant structure, according to the Johnstown Redevelopment Authority, which owns 10 acres of the former steel mill, including four major buildings.

The association had worked with 13 local, state and federal funding sources and agencies to secure grants to stabilize and clean up the shop, whose Italianate design, with 35-foot-high ceilings and octagonal-shaped building, elevated the structure to art.

Burkhart and his team hoped to find a tenant for the shop who would focus on education, but no one had yet come forward with interest. While on the tour, he asked Quinn, “Would you be interested in running a school here?”

Quinn recalls, “I’m the kind of guy who says yes to an opportunity, to an idea. I never even thought of the possibility of the shop coming back to life until I took that tour.”

He and his partner, Dan Neville, had met while enrolled in a Master of Fine

PATRICK QUINN’S SEEMINGLY FAR-FETCHED DREAM OF running a world-class blacksmith school began after finding a black-and-white image of a power hammer in an abandoned blacksmith shop in Johnstown on Facebook.

The hammer had an arch in its design and could deliver a magnificent 10,000-pound punch.





Arts program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Focusing on art and craftsmanship, they both taught classes at the Center for Metal Arts in Florida, N.Y., where Quinn took over running the school in 2015.

When Quinn toured the blacksmith shop in Johnstown, the site for the school in New York was experiencing growing pains, but he wasn't sure how to make the move to Johnstown, and shifting the equipment seemed monumental.

Burkhart introduced him to Johnstown's Korns Galvanizing Company CEO Kathleen Ortel, who advised Quinn on managing the move. They secured a grant from the Waters Economic Development Fund at the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies. Today, Ortel is the chairman of the board for the non-profit Center for Metal Arts and refers to the move of the school to Johnstown as "the project that ate her desk."

Quinn and Neville borrowed funds to buy the machinery at the New York shop, packed it onto two flatbed and two

enclosed trailers, and drove it to Pennsylvania. Today, the Center for Metal Arts uses four buildings at the Johnstown site; it leases three and owns one, an old church rectory, which serves as a dormitory for up to 10 students.

A World-Class Forging School

UPON MOVING INTO THE restored blacksmith shop, Quinn's first focus was reviving the massive old power hammers, which hadn't moved in years. In 2019, his team completely dismantled a 3,000-pound hammer and put it back together, spending hours cleaning, scouring and



(above) Each year, the school offers a six-week workshop, teaching forging techniques at an anvil and with a power hammer. (below) Tools from the shop's 150 years of service have been gathered on pallets, awaiting possible refurbishing and use.

CINDY HOSS (2)

oiling the seized valve and lever until the jammed parts were moving freely. Then, for two weeks, while using a rented air compressor, Quinn experimented with the powerful hammer.

When I visited the school last year, he was in the middle of teaching a six-week workshop called "Forging Focus: Tool Making, Joinery and Applied Forgings," which begins with foundation work at the forge and anvil and moves to more complex work with power hammers as the weeks progress. Students start the day with formal instruction from Quinn, Neville or a guest instructor before moving into an open studio, where they are free to practice.

Quinn takes me on a tour of the facility,



stopping at a few of the pallets that have been piled with dies outside. The plan is to eventually clean and refurbish these 100- to 150-year-old tools.

"It would take an entire lifetime if we had to remake them," Quinn explains.

They have a list of immediate goals, including installing an overhead door to provide forklift access and supplying utilities, such as water and compressed air, to the blacksmith shop. To get the old large hammers running again, they will have to spend around \$250,000.

Quinn figures it could take 10 to 15 years to get the large hammers functioning, but he is hoping to restore the shop to its full capacity. Funding is a priority, and the center is currently partnering with other organizations to pursue that goal.

In the meantime, the Center for Metal Arts has quickly grown, and the school is equipped with eight personal blacksmith forging stations. This year, the center plans to launch a new jewelry/met-

alsmithing studio, too. During weekend and extended courses, students focus on producing a specific tool or item, such as a coat rack, bottle opener, padlock or knife.

The partners have also been working on five- and 10-year plans to turn the three shop buildings and rectory into a blacksmithing campus, with each building serving a different function. In addition to classes, they want to host demos, conferences and events open to the public. They also plan to sponsor emerging artists-in-residence, who will be given personal studio space to work.

"I want to create a scholarship program where artists can apply to use the shop," Quinn says. "There are blacksmith artists out there who would like to translate their work into larger pieces, and they can't with their current facilities."

To build up the school, they have initially focused their efforts on forging the tools needed by their students. Professional tools make all the difference in

the world, Quinn says.

"Right now, few in the world have access to forge machinery like this," he says. "Blacksmith artists hunger for a place like this—a world-class forging school and environment."

The only other school like it in the world is in Australia, he notes.

The rebirth of the blacksmith shop is also helping to revitalize Johnstown, according to Burkhardt.

"People are coming from all over the world to attend this school," he says. "The fact that we can restore this shop and reuse it for its original purpose is special." ♣

—Cindy Ross lives in New Ringgold, Schuylkill County.

WHEN YOU GO

The **Center for Metal Arts** is located at 106 Iron St. in Johnstown. It offers blacksmithing and metalsmithing classes. A spring tour is being scheduled for the general public. centerformetalarts.org; 814-418-0409