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TOP STORY

Blacksmiths gather for third annual Hammer-In

By JUSTIN STORY jstory@bgdailynews.com Oct 6, 2018



It's a low-tech, hands-on craft, but that is metalworking's appeal for many of the blacksmiths who gathered Saturday for the third annual Hammer-In at Western Kentucky University.

The grounds of the Kentucky Museum hosted forge classes, demonstrations and aluminum pours that comprised the Hammer-In, organized by the Kentucky Forge Council, a group of blacksmiths that meet monthly to share their knowledge.

"It's an old tradition that goes back thousands of years, and we want to keep that going," said Charles Hurst, Kentucky Forge Council president and an exhibits technician at the Kentucky Museum.

Smoking-hot coals on forges, freshly-made blades glowing with heat and reverberating clangs as metal tools were shaped on an anvil were among the sights, sounds and smells at Saturday's event.

An impressed crowd of onlookers watched Saturday afternoon as Western Kentucky University sculpture professor David Marquez and WKU students Mac Miller-Reeves and Zach Plocica poured aluminum into molds of designs carved on scratch blocks.

The group wore protective masks, gloves and heavy coats while pouring the aluminum, which melts at 1,250 degrees.

Miller-Reeves said she dabbled in art before developing a passion for sculpting.

"I was drawn to the fact that it was little bit dangerous," said Miller-Reeves, of Louisville. "The people involved with it are kind of my tribe."

Marquez said he appreciates the cooperative nature of metalworking, where several people can have a hand in the making of a single metal tool.

Chris Radus, a sculptor who works with metal and wood, led a class about firing coal, demonstrating on a World War I-era forge in which a hand crank introduced oxygen to the coals to stoke the flames.



Radus' great-grandfather was a blacksmith in Hungary, and the passion for metalworking was passed down to him through the generations.

“Whether it’s (making) an arrowhead or a hard drive, this is still a necessary part of the world,” Radus said.

As a craft, blacksmithing has a centuries-old history.

The reality TV blade-making competition “Forged in Fire” has helped spark present-day interest in metalworking, and Hurst said the Kentucky Forge Council has grown to about 25 members since the first Hammer-In in 2016.

Before getting into blacksmithing, Hurst said he did woodworking, but the tools he used for that craft were costly, so he set about making his own.

“There’s a lot you can learn if you’re willing to put in the work,” Hurst said.



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