

Freetown Historical Society offers free blacksmithing lessons with 'Hammer In' event

By Kiernan Dunlop

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FREETOWN — A fire crackled in the forge as a blacksmith brought her hammer down on red-hot steel. The scene may seem centuries old but it's just another Saturday at the Freetown Historical Society.

For the past five years the society has been holding blacksmith training at their replica blacksmith shop, to reintroduce a trade that once thrived in the community.

The event on this particular weekend, "Hammer In," was different from typical training sessions because it was free to the public and featured professional blacksmiths Brian and Candy Martens, instructors at the Arc & Flame Center in Rochester, N.Y.

Over the course of two days the Martens showed anyone who was interested how to use a forge, anvil, and hammer to make tools and a few decorative items out of steel.

The purpose of the event was to generate interest in blacksmithing and to show those who have taken the training courses the next level of the trade, said Paul Russell, a member of the society's board of directors.

"We do some very rough training here so this is just a demonstration of what is possible," said Russell.

The ability to come into a shop and work with other people and ask questions was important to attendee Mark Pinhancos, an Acushnet resident who's been coming into the shop since winter.

Pinhancos had been interested in blacksmithing and started working on making his own forge at his house, he said, but thought there had to be other people who had the same interest as him. That's when he came across the blacksmith shop at the Historical Society and events like "Hammer In."

"This is great," Pinhancos said of the event, "I'm definitely taking more than one thing home today."

The event also attracted attendees who had never tried blacksmithing before.

"Blacksmithing has always been interesting to me," said Sarah Sacchetti who attended with friend Saria Sweeney of the Old Colony History Museum. "I thought it'd be cool to join her."

One goal of the event was to let people like Sacchetti know that there is still a vibrant community of blacksmiths, according to Brian.

"People mistakenly think it's dead and gone and that if it exists, it's only there for making horseshoes," said Brian. "There's so much more to blacksmithing than that and it's so not a dead craft."

Brian was also quick to point out that anyone can be a blacksmith. "Anybody can do it, if you can lift a hammer you can do it."

Dick Renker, a volunteer with the society, agreed.

"I can guarantee you, in three hours we'll do a project and you'll bring it home finished," he said talking to someone with no blacksmithing experience. "Then when you go home you can say 'I made that, that's mine. I didn't go buy it, I made

it.”

Renker was an instructor with the Martens and is responsible for bringing them to the SouthCoast.

Blacksmithing classes are available at the society during the fall and spring and Renker said they are hoping to introduce summer classes as well. The society also offers basket making, rug hooking, and wreath making classes at different times of the year.

“Lynwood French who started the museum wanted to preserve the history of the town and this is a good way to do it, with some of the old trades and crafts,” said Russell. “And it kind of makes the museum come to life.”

The Freetown Historical Society is located at 1 Slab Bridge Road, Freetown, Assonet MA. The museum is open Mondays 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

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