



Blacksmiths of Central Texas

President's Corner

May 2011

Greetings!



It's a good thing we had the April meeting early, it seems to be taking longer and longer for me to get over a couple of day of swinging a sledge hammer. I guess I'm just out of shape, unlike Brian Brazeal and Lyle Wynn who entertained us

by swinging the big hammers at the Bluebonnet Workshop. Lyle actually hit with a 30 # hammer and you could feel the ground shake outside John's shop. These guys made everything from large rounding hammers to copper finger rings, nonstop!

I still can't say enough about the folks that helped put the Bluebonnet Workshop together. Form Dave and Elise's shrimp boil to Jim's anvil stands, not to mention John and Carolyn who put up with a smelly old porta pottys a week after the demo was over. Thanks for another great event!!

Next time you see our newest Balcones Forge Life Members, give 'em a pat on the back. John Crouchet and Vince Herod have been going out of their way for many years to keep this organization up and running. John opens his house to just about anybody and then lets us rearrange his shop and abuse all this tools, and Vince, who has been working like a madman at his regular job, still manages to get the newsletter out month after month and year after year. Hats off to you guys and the gals behind you too!!

Back in the old days of the Texas Artist-Blacksmith Association or TABA, each member had a yearly obligation. You had to either: host a meeting, demo at a meeting or write an article for the newsletter and with a small membership you often had more than one. As the group grew, we eased off on the rules, but we still need your help. Think about hosting or demonstrating and give Vince a little help with the newsletter. Write an article on anything that might appeal to the rest of the group, even book reports, safety items or upcoming events. Just remember, Vince it still the editor.



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President's Corner continued from 1

Hope to see you all in San Marcos on the 21st for the Texas Natural & Swing Music Festival. It's an old cowboy thing, so dress accordingly if you care to. We will need forges and anvils to demo for the public and bring your show 'n tell items as well as any of your work you want to sell. Don't forget your trade item.

Jerry Achterberg
Balcones Forge President

Meeting Date is May 21 9 am

SECRETARY'S REPORT



ANOTHER WINNER FOR BALCONES FORGE!

TWELFTH ANNUAL DEMO IS A BANGING SUCCESS

The twelfth annual Balcones Forge Demo was just like all its predecessors, a terrific show and a great party! Success has become a Balcones tradition as, year after year, outstanding blacksmiths come to share the skills that made them famous.

This year marked the return of Brian Brazeal, one of the acknowledged "hammermasters" of mod-

ern blacksmithing. Not here just to put on a show, Brian wanted to really teach the lessons behind his legendary hammer control. And teach he did. Through a four day series of all-day hands-on seminars and the two-day demo, Brian explained over and over, in detail, how his precision methods of using a heavy rounding hammer could result in greater and more controlled metal movement. By the end, a number of Balcones Forge members had become, if not skilled, at least good beginners at using the technique.

All this heavy-duty teaching and forging was helped immensely by the efforts of Brian's very knowledgeable assistant, Lyle Wynn. Lyle turned out to be much more than just a good striker. He was a total part of the teaching team, carefully helping and correcting as students tried and retried and sometimes tried again to follow Brian's examples. By the end of the classes, it was clear why Brian always wants Lyle along when the teaching starts. We were lucky to have him here.

Fortunately, we had excellent weather all week, although it was a bit chilly some mornings and a bit warm some afternoons. (After all, we are in Texas!) Food, snacks, drinks and propane for the week were rounded up and presented by class helpers Jim Elliott and Leslie Renfro and by Dave Guerrero and Elise Garza who also doubled as camp cooks and excellent hosts. (Special thanks to Dave and Elise!)

Saturday morning of the big demo began with a good turnout, and more blacksmiths continued to arrive throughout the day. President Jerry Achterberg, assisted by Vice President Jerry Whitley and Treasurer/Auctioneer Rudy Billings got things off to a good start with a very short meeting, taking into consideration that folks had come for the demo, not the meeting! Veteran members Vince Herod (currently Newsletter Editor) and John Crouchet (currently Secretary) were given Balcones Forge Lifetime Member Awards in a transparent attempt

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to cajol them into continuing to work.

Following a brief introduction, Brian got right to hammering and did not stop until lunchtime. Lunch was catered by Noon Spoon Café of Marble Falls and many members remarked on the improved food quality from years past. During lunch, Larry Stevens announced to all his friends that, due to failing health, he will be unable to continue his attendance at future Balcones events. In closing, he made a benevolent cash contribution to Balcones Forge. Many members thanked him and wished him well before he departed for the day.

Following lunch, Brian began hammering again and did not slow down until he was forced to break for the Blacksmiths' Dinner. Barbeque was catered by Artz Ribs of Austin, voted favorite rib house of Balcones Blacksmiths! Dinner was followed by the Annual Auction with Auctioneer Rudy Billings and Chief Art Patron, Cheryl Craig!

Many Balcones members brought excellent items for the big Saturday night auction. As the years have gone by, contributions to the annual fund-raising auction have become more and more generous as well as higher in quality. This year continued that trend with carefully forged tools, great tomahawks, numerous blacksmithing items and intriguing metal art pieces. Most notable this year was senior member Larry Stevens' generous contribution of an entire library of excellent and rare books. Coupled with very enthusiastic bidding from our supporters, the auction was a raging success, ensuring the needed funds for the continuing work of Balcones Forge.

Brian began hammering again Sunday morning, bright and early. Throughout the day, his work was auctioned as he finished it, bringing in even more for the auction fund. Finally, at two o'clock, the demo wound down and the Balcones Event Crew, led by Jim Elliott, began to dismantle the set up for another successful Bluebonnet Demo.

A tremendous amount of preparation and labor go into the setup and take down of every big annual demo production. Our heartfelt thanks to those

members who showed up to do the hard work. We could not have done it without you!

John Crouchet,
Balcones Forge Secretary

BALCONES BOARD

The seven members of the Balcones Board are:

Jerry Achterberg
Rudy Billings
John Crouchet
Jim Elliott
Vince Herod
Tom Lupton
Jerry Whitley

Please send any suggestions for meeting or workshop ideas to any member of the Board.

The list of Officers is on the front cover.

THE BF FACEBOOK PAGE

Hey, all you social butterflies -- Balcones Forge has a Facebook page. Now there is another way to connect with your fellow blacksmiths. Last count -- 55 people like the site. Check it out next time you log on.

Rudy

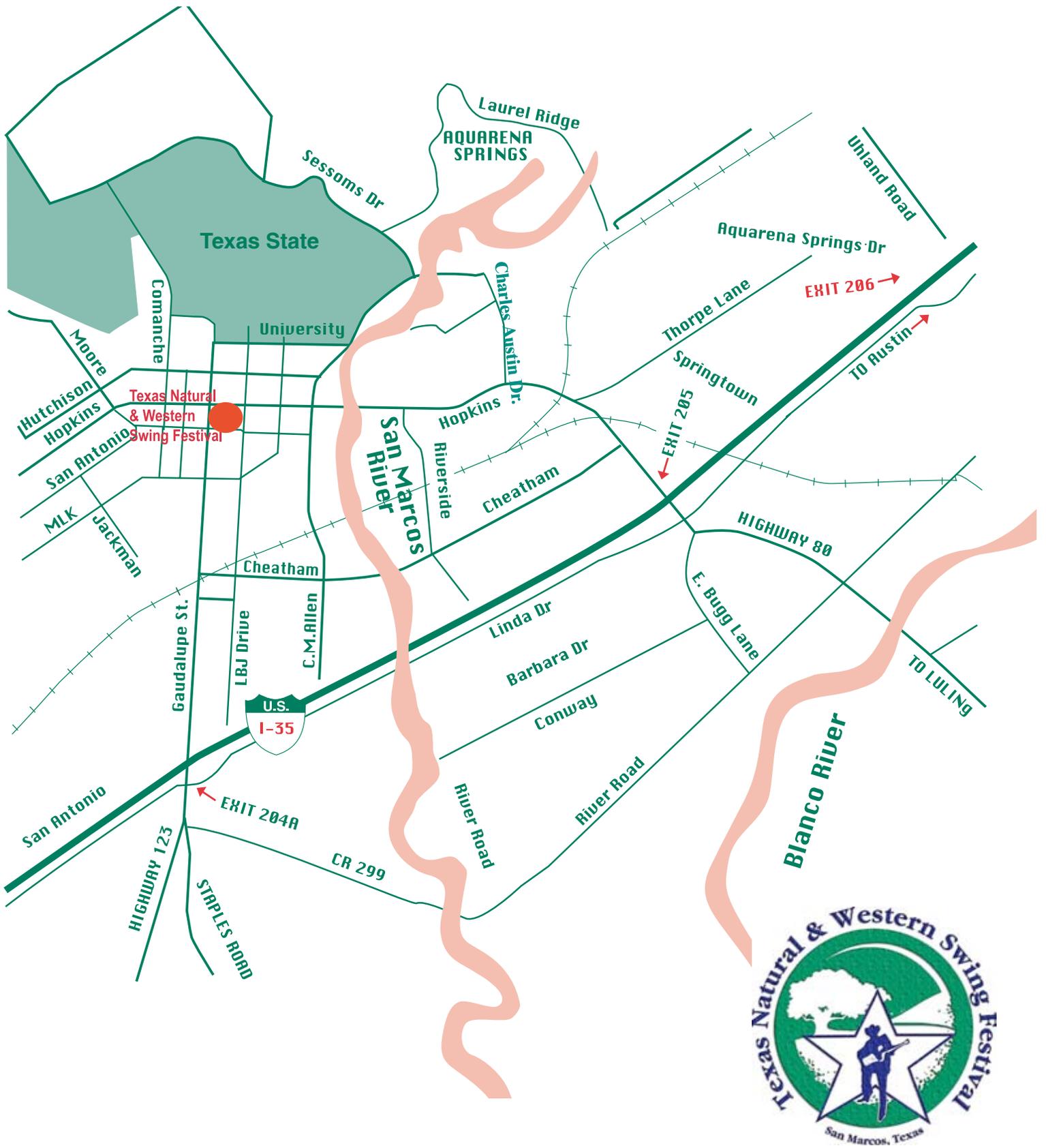
BUY - SELL - TRADE

Balcones Forge has a new web page. You now have a marketplace where you can buy or sell blacksmithing equipment. Check it out.

NEW ADDRESS

Please make note of the new e-mail address for Vice President Jerry Whitley:

jerry.whitley@ymail.com



www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us/departments/mainstreet/TexasNaturalFestival.htm

MONTHLY MEETING INFO

May 21 - 9:00 AM

Texas Swing Festival

Courthouse Square - San Marcos, Texas

This is always a fun event -- live music, good food, vendors of all kinds, western shoot-outs, dog tricks, and even blacksmiths! Dress up in your western duds and forge under the huge live oaks on the courthouse lawn. This is a great time to bring your hammer and try out some of the things you learned at the Bluebonnet workshop.

Also, there will be tables available for you to display and sell your items.

Come make it a day in San Marcos -- bring the whole family!

JUNE MEETING

The June meeting of Balcones Forge will be on June 25 and will be hosted by James Helm.

Be sure to check our website for updated information as well as all the great content. Be sure and say thanks to Rudy Billings for keeping the website in great shape.

LEG VISE

Balcones Forge is on the look out for a leg vise to donate to the Waldorf School. Does anyone out there have an extra that could go to a good cause?

Please let one of the officers know if you do.

TRADE ITEM

For the month of May the trade item is
.....A Personal Lighting Device!

Ya know, a rush lamp, candle holder, flashlight... Well, maybe not that last one, but you get the idea. It is always fun to see what folks come up with, so try your hand. To take one home, you gotta bring one.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF BRIAN

By Cori Wilbanks

The first time that I saw Brian Brazeal was at the ABANA conference in Memphis this last year. There he was, doing his thang under a shade tree. Humble, talkative, and well, the best thing there really. I became intrigued by his smaller work, his fine lines and attention to detail. Elegant.

So needless to say, I was excited when I heard that he was coming to town. This would be my first workshop to attend, so naturally, I was a little nervous, and naturally, I was a little late...but these things never start on time right? Wrong. This is a man who comes early and stays late....really late....past midnight kind of late. Some people work to live, but this guy, he lives to work...there is no doubt that blacksmithing is his passion.

Did I mention it was FREEZING that day? We sat huddled in the barn listening to Brian discuss the advantages of the tapered, crowned, hot-cut hardie tool over the straight, fitted hardie. (and I could tell ya, but then I would have to kill ya). Someone asked, "wont the taper in the hardie hole split the anvil?"...The gist of his response was something like, Well, its a HOT-cut....if your metal is hot, there is no danger in anvil abuse.

He then revealed his oh so cute little baby radius block hardie. Basically, a one inch thick hexagon fit to the hardie with good edges....used if the edges of your anvil are shot, or if you are working a really small piece, the height of the block acts as a shelf. Cute I tell ya. Brian then went on to explain why it is that he uses the round, pillow-faced hammer as opposed to the square-faced hammer. Its because, you see, you can get any radius you need by the degree at which you tilt the hammer. Instead of just crowned and edge radius, there is everything inbetween. "I don't make these things up, its just the way it is...the steel makes the rules...." was a common phrase throughout the day.

Of course Brian's hammer weighs about four and a half pounds and I couldn't even pick the thing up (his forearms must be about ready to explode), so I was not really able to test out the "way it is" theory. Apparently the key is to choke up on the handle when dealing with a heavier hammer or smaller stock.

Then after getting up several times for coffee, just so I would have something to warm my freezing digits, we began the one-sided horse head demo.

Now I am not sure if any of you have heard Brian speak, but, well, its kinda like a nice long canoe trip....meandering the river...circumnavigating the point, but oh buddy, when you reach the end...glorious. Revelation. That is, if you can find it.

So he shows us how he makes the horse head bottle opener in about 2 minutes, and voila, gorgeous. Okay, our turn to give it a whirl. I can do this...I think I can do this...I thought I could do it. They make it look so easy you know. Okay, deep breath, don't look like a fool in front of these people you don't know...2nd try. One good thing about being a woman in a mans world is that they are generally pretty eager to help out....which often backfires and they just want to do the whole thing for you...not the point guys. Anyhow, I had Brian's side-kick Lyle to the rescue. What a nice, cheery, little bubble of a guy, that one...I secretly named him the "hammer slammer"...Brian don't need no power hammer, no sir, he's got a Lyle. Just don't get into a cup balancing on a nickle competition with the guy...you will not win.

Its the punching of a hole that kills me. Brian has this cool little rectangular punch that he uses to start a large hole rather than slitting it with a chisel (think squashed center punch). And naturally, he

smacks it 3 times, and only 3 times, and bam, a perfect little rectangular hot biscuit pops out. Well, my biscuit didn't want to come out of the oven. Apparently I just need the "hammer slammer"...works like a charm.

Brian was pretty adamant about marking where his chisel and fuller lines would be while the metal was in a lower heat. Maybe this is his secret to success.

So I was pretty pleased with my final product...and it works...it opens, um, you know, coke bottles really well! We still had a bit of time before the lunch break, so I decided practice makes perfect... I forged another head which was in its final state, and man was it a beauty...black beauty, my little stallion friend.

Lunch...if you are a meat eater trying to explore the world of vegetarianism, don't order the veggie sandwich while everyone else around you is chowing down on a quarter pound of pastrami. Bad move... But then again, I did just forge that beautiful horse head....it will all be okay.

Round 2.

Flower ring.

Someday I will learn what the heck a half faced hammer blow really is, but not today. What really amazes me about Brian is his ability to forge "tiny shiny" i.e. jewelry scale objects, with that great big giant hammer. He had a unique way of forging out a tiny reverse taper with an element, such as a flower, on the end. Its a kind of two sided taper (reverse hour glass, if you will) where you start on the far side of the anvil at the neck of the element (flower) with these mysterious half-faced hammer blows, and, well, "neck it down"...then you move to the back of the taper, on the near side of the anvil, and guesstimate where you want the tip of the stem to be, and start necking that down on the opposite side with half-faced hammer blows....so opposite end, opposite side. Then you are left with two necks, and an adam's apple in the middle. You want to crush that peak down...until it is even with the other two tapers. Now you have a teeny tiny taper with your soon-to-be flower element on the end....

Trial time duex.

Here comes....success! Two beautiful copper rings finished with the tiny penny scroll twist-off. So what if Lyle helped me... I still did most of it... sorta. Oh, and a word of advice, if you borrow the teachers chisel and accidentally hit it on the anvil and "forget" to say anything...just slowly turn your head in the opposite direction when he finds out and starts fussing about it....works every time...he'll never know it was me.

I later tried to make a flower ring out of steel and the only thing I could get it to resemble is a pile of you know what.... why does this happen?

It was starting to get late, and since John lives between Muleshoe and Trainswitch, I figured I better get going. Packed up my tools, and went to grab that beautiful black stallion that I had forged earlier... Gone. Caution, damsel in distress. Everyone was scouring the ground high and low. Gone. Why would someone take my piece? Why? John assured me that someone must have mistakenly picked it up....sure, "mistakenly"...I know the real reason...its because it was so good it must have brought them to tears...they had to have it for themselves...yep....I've got my eye on you Rudy, yes indeed. :)

In conclusion, it was a fantastic day in the neighborhood, and I learned a great deal from two great men....

And there you have it, a day in the life of Brian....

Thanks to Cori for this submission and the pictures below, Editor.






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FORGING CLINICS AND DEMO'S



Photos on this page by Gerald Pollard





Larry Stevens, “The Armchair Blacksmith” Takes His Leave

By John Crouchet

A lot of Balcones Forge veterans were surprised at the Bluebonnet Demo when long-time member Larry Stevens announced that he was ready to hang up his hat! After many years and lots of long term friendships along the way, Larry let us know that his failing health will keep him from future Balcones Forge meetings.

Although he always called himself an “armchair blacksmith”, the real truth is that Larry brought an extensive knowledge of machining and mechanical work, learned during a long career in the United States Navy and doing large-scale mechanical maintenance. Over the years, he became the “go-to guy” for many of us when we had questions and problems with mechanics or machining for professional blacksmithing projects we were involved in. Larry’s teaching and advice – or often, even machining the work for us—bailed us out on many a day! We were very thankful for Larry’s backyard machine shop!

Always a generous and thoughtful person, Larry proved it once again at the Demo, as he donated to Balcones Forge his very extensive personal library of books on blacksmithing, mechanical information, sheet metal working, woodworking, welding, history of metalwork, and related topics. Many of these books are rare and out-of-print, as well as first editions and very sought-after titles. Balcones Forge has never received such a huge donation and Balcones President Jerry Achterberg quickly called a meeting of the Board of Directors to decide how to handle this unexpected treasure. The consensus of the officers was that the rare and important blacksmithing and metalwork books should go to the Balcones library for the use of all members. Other books and those titles already in the library could be auctioned off in our big annual Demo Auction that night. Librarian Joe Jelemensky took charge of all books for the library and many members spent the rest of the afternoon perusing the many remaining books to see what they would bid for Saturday night. Needless to say, those books added a great deal to the amount we took in at the big auction! Many of us now have a number of new books for our own education!

In addition to the donation of his extensive library, Larry also made a cash donation to Balcones Forge. Like Larry, this donation was very, very generous. It will make a big difference in what Balcones Forge can do in the future. We will need to use it wisely and well.

For those of you who missed this chance to give your regards to Larry Stevens, we are planning a late fall Balcones Forge meeting at the Boerne Agricultural Museum, near Larry’s retirement home. We will make a real effort to have him there!

From all of us: **Thank You, Larry!** What a guy!



HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST YOUR CO-WORKERS? SAFETY FIRST!

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