

Blacksmith Ed Venditelli works in the Hannaway Blacksmith Shop; hot iron is hammered and bent on the anvil; hooks crafted in the shop.





Forge Your Own History

Blacksmith Ed Venditelli teaches a bygone trade at the Hannaway Blacksmith Shop at Lincoln's Hearthside House. **By Hugh Markey**

"Find yourself a hammer that you feel comfortable swinging," says blacksmith Ed Venditelli.

An assortment of tools lies about the workshop, each wooden-handled and topped with a rusty red head that looks like a miniature sledgehammer. Ed Venditelli is a blacksmithing instructor at the Hannaway Blacksmith Shop, part of the Great Road Heritage Campus at Chase Farm Park and Hearthside House Museum in Lincoln.

He has spent more than a dozen years giving the public a taste of the ancient craft of bending iron. The building itself was originally constructed from a nineteenth-century carriage house built by William H. Hannaway and located a short distance away, until it was moved to its current location in 1989 by the town of Lincoln, which owns the property.

The blacksmithing lesson begins with instructor Venditelli and two students working with a square rod of iron, roughly a half-inch in diameter and two feet long. First timers will craft a hook that might be used to hang fireplace or gardening tools. Venditelli says this project provides the "smithy" with the skills needed to make most other projects. He took his first class at the Hannaway Shop, and now spends weekends sharing his love for the hobby with participants ages eleven and up.

In his coveralls blackened with coal, sporting long hair tied back and a mustache and beard, Venditelli looks as if he belongs in some village square, laboring over the glowing embers of a coal fire. Yet his voice is soft and encouraging. "Just take your time, take it easy. Remember, you're here to have fun," he says.

The shop's floor is dirt blended with coal chips, tamped down from years of use. A few bare bulbs light the place, and the barn-board walls are mostly original to the structure. A small metal shovel scrapes along the brick hearth of the forge as coal is added to the glowing embers. Beside the forge is a crank that spins a fan beneath the fire that whooshes air to heat the coals as a bellows would have done in the original shop.

When the iron glows from orange to yellow, it's lifted to the anvil and is twisted, bent and hammered into surprisingly delicate shapes. Conversation is punctuated with the pink-pink-pink sound of the hammer flattening iron on the anvil.

"I really enjoy doing this, and it's really fun to teach people things I enjoy. A lot of times when you think of working with metal, you think of it as this immovable object," Venditelli says. "Then you start to think, 'Let's see what else I can do with this.' "

In Venditelli's case, the "what else" are sculptures that line the shop's shelves: a frying pan containing metal bacon and eggs, an octopus, numerous knife designs and morphs of teapots, pans and tools that make fantastical animals.

For the student, this is an opportunity to relive history and create art. By the end of the two-hour lesson, the cold iron rod has been shaped into a decorative piece that will last another two centuries.

Venditelli gives a final word of encouragement: "Remember, it's handmade, so a little mark just gives it character."

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