Farriers gather to learn from each other in Sisters

By Kathryn Godsiff
Correspondent

Farriers — men and women who trim and shoe horses' hooves — are a fiercely independent bunch, working in one of the few self-regulated industries left in America. It's skilled work and takes a determined individual with a good work ethic to succeed. So it was a major commitment for 35 farriers from all over the state and Washington to congregate last Saturday, a workday, for a continuing-education clinic.

The idea of a clinic for working farriers was the idea of several Central Oregon farriers who desire to see collaboration and community grow among their peers. The weekend clinic was a first for the area but judging from the atmosphere, it won't be the last. This is a good thing for local horse owners.

The event was held at Weston Equine Services, where Paul Weston headquarters his business. The clinic was organized by Bend farrier Scott Smith.

It also served as a benefit for Rick DeHutt, a Sublimity, Oregon farrier who was injured in a fall from his horse and then diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. Photos were taken during the day and sent to Rick, a sign of solidarity between dedicated people, many of whom did not know one another, or Rick.

Veterinarian Paul Edmonds, from Cinder Rock Veterinary Clinic in Redmond, opened the day with a lecture on hoof structure. He then took a series of digital X-rays of a demo horse's front hooves, explaining what he was doing and interpreting the images to the audience.

The horse was then reshod by Scott Norgaard, a certified journeyman farrier with a forge endorsement (CJF, FE). The certification, from the American Farriers Association, tells horse owners that very high standards of expertise have been attained by the farrier. Norgaard fashioned the shoes from a piece of steel bar, demonstrating the precision of his craft.

After the horse was shod, Sisters veterinarian Scott Weems took another set of images to show how the trim and shoeing had changed the horse's hoof angles, bringing them into correct alignment.

Weston's indoor arena was wall to wall with rigs set up to shoe horses. Forges stood ready to fire up, anvils and tools arranged in orderly fashion. After the lectures and demonstration, the farriers were ready to get moving and do some work. The day concluded with an Eagle-Eye competition. In this, participants fashioned a shoe after assessing the horse's hoof for only 10 seconds.

This, of course, is not how farriers operate in real life. Caring for a horse's hooves often requires a collaborative effort between farrier, veterinarian and owner. The occupation takes a keen eye and patience while trimming a hoof and then shaping a horseshoe.

The teamwork aspect of caring for a horse's feet is relatively recent.

Dr. Edwards said to the group, "I want to do what I can to help your business."

The farriers agreed that a team approach is what's best for the horses.

Weston said, "Vets aren't just telling us what they think we should do. They're asking what we think."

The farrier is often the first one to hear from an owner if a horse is lame, but the veterinarian has the diagnostic tools. So having everyone on — or at least near — the same page makes sense for the horse.

There are three main organizations that offer certification, the American Farriers Association, The Brotherhood of Working Farriers, and the American Association of Professional Farriers. Each has its own certification standards. Tobias Ellis of Madras is a member of all three, and he encourages horse owners to be proactive.

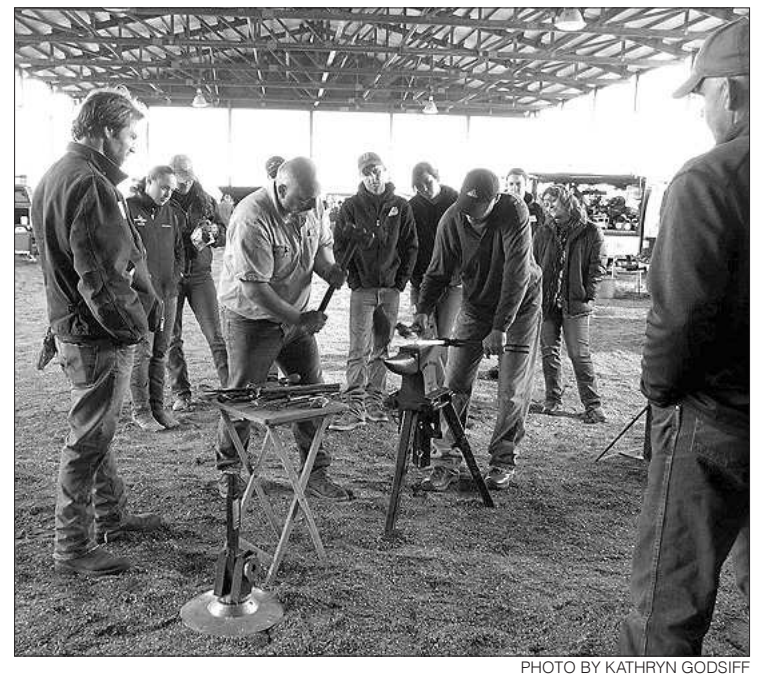

PHOTO BY KATHRYN GODSIFF

Working together to craft a shoe. A spirit of collaboration was encouraged at the clinic.

"Ask your farrier if they've done anything fun for continuing education lately," he said.

Staying up to date is important in an industry that is in good shape, with many young people entering it.

There is a wide range of diversity and specialization among farriers, but on this day, the spirit of camaraderie and learning was at the forefront — all for the good of the horse.

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