

JACOB'S HAMMER

Modern blacksmith crafts a new career path

By DAMIAN MULINIX
For EO Media Group

CHINOOK, Wash. — Jacob Moore is taking life a little bit slower these days. He admits to procrastinating when it comes to returning emails sometimes while getting ready in the morning. Something he wouldn't have done not that long ago.

An average day features a 20-minute drive from his Chinook home to that of his in-laws, Mike and Lynn Dickerson. He doesn't have his own shop yet so he's working out of their garage for now.

There, he will spend the next several hours doing custom metal work, his new business, which he named "Jacob's Hammer." It's the kind of metal work that can be dangerous if you screw up, but beautiful when finished.

His work routine stands in stark contrast to his average day not that long ago.

"Two years ago my average day was eight to 10 hours long, and I usually started no later than 7 a.m., after driving a minimum of 45 minutes to get there on a really curvy, elk-infested road with downed trees, floods and landslides," he said.

He's referring to the drive from Chinook up U.S. Highway 101 to Goose Point Oysters in Bay Center, where he was employed as seed operations manager until spring 2015.

"I usually spent most of my day outside in the elements regardless of the weather. A lot of work at night in the winter-time. And really early in the morning in the summertime," he said. "Basically every tide."

This is just a long way of pointing out how his life has changed thanks to a new profession.

"It is quite different," he said, explaining, "I'd always had a boss. I've managed my own time and had some freedom as to when I worked, but it essentially became a 9 to 5 sort of thing. So for the first time, really ever, I don't have regular hours."

A life aquatic

Moore graduated from the University of Washington in 2010 with a bachelor's degree in environmental studies, with a focus on emerging non-native species in the marine environment. Right out of college Moore worked seasonally for Nick Haldeman at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife eradicating spartina in Willapa Bay. There he met and worked alongside Kim Patten of the Washington State University extension office. He then worked at Cape Disappointment State Park as a park aide and was given half his time to study gorse, another non-native invasive species.

"I did a lot of GPS data collection and made some maps to show where these plants were growing," he said. "Half the time I was literally scrubbing (expletive) off the walls and the other half I was carrying out a study that I designed."

While working with Patten on his gorse project, Moore was made aware of an opening with the Willapa/Grays Harbor Oyster Growers Association. He was soon hired as their integrated pest management project coordinator.

"So I really moved into invasive species and pest management, not necessarily intentionally. It was really just where employment opportunities presented themselves."

But he was also the right person for these unusual jobs.



LEFT: Jacob Moore is the owner of Jacob's Hammer Custom Metal Works. RIGHT: Moore grinds down the leg of a chair — one in a series he made for the new Salt Hotel restaurant in Ilwaco.



Photos by Damian Mulinix/For EO Media Group



LEFT: Examples of Jacob Moore's form folded jewelry. RIGHT: Jacob Moore heats a hinge for a recent custom metal project.



"I just built on my experience and knowledge in that area," he said.

In summer 2013 he was hired by Goose Point, only a few years after the farm opened a hatchery in Hilo, Hawaii. Moore worked to help "smooth out some of the bumps in the road" the new hatchery was experiencing at that time.

"I had to work closely with their hatchery manager so that the farm (in Bay Center) received the proper amounts of incredibly expensive product from the hatchery," he said.

His main job was managing the brood stock, or parent oysters.

"We hold these oysters in the convenient womb that is the Willapa Bay. And on a weekly basis throughout most of the year, I would select specific brood stock from the repository that I managed and ship them overnight to Hilo."

There, he said the stock would be put in a conditioning system that would "coax" them into spawning.

"Then 800 million fertilized oyster eggs are floating around in this 10,000 gallon tank and 30 days later it's larvae that's ready to be set."

That larvae was also key to another project Moore worked on, developing the 'singles' oyster farm, which was an emerging market.

"The single oyster that's sold raw. It's the cream of the crop. And traditionally they were culled out of tons of oysters that were destined to be shucked."

He explained that the hatchery would set that larvae on ground-up oyster shell, so that the baby oysters would grow off of a grain of sand and be 'singles' from the get-go. Moore would then put them in the nursery and grow them out until they could be planted in the ground and grown to about 3 inches long before hitting the market.

A new challenge

It's been a year and a half since he decided he'd spent enough of his young life — he turns 30 next year — out on the mudflats, and a year since he decided that custom metal work was what he'd rather be doing.

"It is hard work. It's physically demanding," Moore said of his new gig. And this is coming from someone who is not physically large. "One hundred thirty-four pounds. Been that way since 2006, probably."

But doesn't that limit his ability to do this kind of work?

"There will be times during installation and transportation of projects when I need several more sets of hands," he agreed.

His most recent project was also his biggest so far — the

new iron fence at the Columbia River Heritage Museum in Ilwaco.

"With the fence, for example, I needed (friend and Ilwaco High School teacher) Steve Blasko to stop by once or twice a week for a little while so that I could flip these 200 to 400 pound panels to work on the other side of them."

The fence was a heavy project — around 2,400 pounds of material before it was painted — with a lot of grinding. Before welding heavy pieces of metal together he first had to grind away a whole bunch of material so that there was a void to fill with molten metal.

"The weld has to penetrate, it can't be a surface glue, because that won't hold," he explained.

And in order to grind that material away, Moore used an angle grinder, a very high RPM machine that fits in the hand and vibrates, a lot.

"There's a pretty stiff gyro effect," he said. "When you turn it on it wants to twist out of your hand. So when you rotate the thing (you're working on), that gyro resists it. You actually have to exert some real force just to rotate it in space."

"If you just hold it there gently it'll take all day. You've gotta press way into it and just, 'Meerrrrrrrrrr!' he says as he does an impression of the sound. "You really expedite the process."

Another large project was making all the chairs used in the new Salt Hotel restaurant at the Port of Ilwaco, a project he did in collaboration with Round 2 Design, also in Ilwaco.

Making a new way

"There is a lot of other fun stuff to do and sometimes you get into steps in the process you don't necessarily want to do," Moore said of some of the more tedious tasks. "I keep my eye on the surf report and even if it's not that good sometimes I'll decide I better just close up and go catch some waves."

Moore said that surfing does tend to be the one thing that pulls him away from work most often. "In terms of recreation, yeah. It's either surf or gardening. But it's really the surf."

Does this freedom come with regrets though?

"I would say if a deadline is looming I'll be a little dissatisfied," he said of having gone surfing when he should have been working.

But Moore doesn't have to look far for inspiration on how to manage his time and a burgeoning business. His wife, Madeline, has owned and operated the Pink Poppy Bakery and Farm since 2012. You can often find Jacob filling in for her at their stand at the Long Beach Farmers Market on Friday's and the Port of Ilwaco Saturday Market. Not only can you buy one of Madeline's baked goods, but you can also purchase some of Jacob's micro greens that he grows or some of his metal jewelry. His micro greens have also been featured at local restaurants including Pickled Fish, Bridgewater Bistro and Buoy Beer in Astoria.

And Moore is the first to agree that going from working in natural science to metal working is a pretty big change career-wise.

"(Back then) I wasn't spending any time doing metal work, but it's been a hobby since I was a freshman in high school," he said.

Larry Holland, his chemistry

teacher, practiced blacksmithing and he was intrigued.

"He did this thing, called 'Tool of the week' and he would bring in a tool that most of us couldn't identify and we'd talk about it. The tools he brought in were mostly handmade tools for cutting wood. He made his own drill bits. They were beautiful. Very sharp."

Moore said the idea of heating up metal until it was yellow-hot and sparkled was "really interesting to me."

"To this day, I still think there's something really moving about a glowing piece of steel. It just looks cool and it's hot as hell."

Some of Moore's jewelry pieces resemble those handmade tools.

"It's inspired in the sense that it's hammered and I like to leave hammer marks on there. Tools forged by a blacksmith always have those imperfections that you can see."

His father-in-law gave him a book on fold-forming, a technique for shaping metals, which has influenced his jewelry work so far, a facet of his business that he is still expanding.

"I have a set of tools for the light work and another for the heavy work. They don't overlap. Two totally different types of work," he explained. "I really enjoy it and it takes practice. When I spend some time doing it I get a burst of interest, kind of like practicing an instrument, you see yourself change and improve and you gain inspiration from that."

And Moore knows something about that, too, having been a top trumpeter with the Ilwaco High School pep, concert and jazz bands and now as a guitar player.

Moore has a short list of smaller projects that have been waiting in the wings in anticipation of his completion of the museum fence project.

"All of (the clients) have been quite patient as I was stressing over the fence. But I have a lot more time now, and it's cooking right along."

While other newspapers give you less, The Daily Astorian

GIVES YOU MORE

Our new

CAPITAL BUREAU

covers the state for you

From left:
Mateusz Perkowski,
Paris Achen

