

**Business Notes**

# Vernonia man hosts North America's first Bladesmithing school

A North American "First" occurred in Vernonia last month, when a traditional Blade-smithing School was held here.

Five students and one reporter couldn't have asked for better weather as they attended the most unique course ever held in Vernonia. Participants traveled from all over the country for the first ever traditional Japanese bladesmithing school titled "Secrets of the Samurai Bladesmith".

Instructor Murray Carter, a resident of Vernonia, lived in Japan for 18 years. While there, he apprenticed to become the first Caucasian successor in a 400-year-old family tradition of blade making. He has forged more than 15,000 blades in the past 20 years.

The first class opened with a lecture about safety, and an overview of the week's activities. The goal was to have each participant forge three of their own knives and complete them in five days – a very ambitious goal considering that a hand-made knife can take more than 20 hours and up to 60 steps to complete. The knives to be made included a forge-welded kitchen knife, a neck knife and a camping/hunting knife. A neck knife is a small daily carry knife that is safely suspended upside-down from the neck in a special sheath.

Ron Yamaguchi, a third generation Japanese descendant, traveled from Southern California to attend the class, after having met Murray in Los Vegas at a business seminar. He had never set foot in a bladesmith shop before, but wanted to attend the course to better understand his cultural heritage. Yamaguchi brought along several authentic Samurai sword blades for Murray to appraise, for the benefit of the whole class. "This five day class was more interesting than



Murray Carter giving instruction on shaping handles.

*Photo courtesy of WM Hovey Smith*

my thirty day trip to India," Yamaguchi said.

Bert Seale and George O'Brien, drove the 2700 miles to Vernonia in Bert's green van. Friends since grade school, they kept the group lively with their humor and cheerful spirit. "We had a blast, a priceless learning experience." Seale said, "I'd do it again in a heart-beat." O'Brien added, "I'll never look at a hand-made object the same way again. Now I know how to look for quality in an object."

Mason Payer, from Bend, told Carter, "We made three awesome knives. You perfectly blended the balance between letting us do our own knives and helping us enough so that we ended up with a great finished product. I have no regrets about this class. I consider this a great value in both time and money. I had a great time and learned a lot. I'm very happy I came and wouldn't trade this experience for anything. I felt like a little kid on Christmas all week!"

The fifth student, recent high school graduate Shamus Dotson, has been learning the ancient art of knifemaking from Carter since last summer. Shamus' comments on what he learned: "Sweet! Knife making is so cool!"

Carter's wife, Rumiko, and his four children were present, adding a very relaxed and comfortable atmosphere to the school. Several evenings ended in a garden BBQ, and even

their Japanese dog, Anvil, shared in the camaraderie.

During the course, students were taught hands-on bladesmithing techniques — selection of steel, forge maintenance, lamination techniques, forge welding, forging to final thickness, traditional annealing techniques, scale removal, cold forging, straightening, quenching, tempering, grinding, low temperature silver soldering, polishing, sharpening, attaching handles and sheath making.

Lecture topics included an overview of different types of traditional Japanese cutlery, philosophy of Japanese metallurgy, the five criteria for superior cutlery, an explanation of laminates vs. homogenous steel blades, practical parame-

## For the Record

In the July 19 issue, *The Independent* reported that Scott Laird told the Vernonia City Council that the Bicycle Skills Park budget called for a match of 40 percent. Laird later told *The Independent* that the 40 percent applies to the whole project budget (\$460,995) and not just the recently acquired \$245,600 grant, as was stated in the article. The correct figures are, according to Laird, "40 percent of that is \$184,398, which we show in the grant budget as \$123,550 of in-kind services and \$82,845 of city funds, for a total match of \$206,396 – \$21,997 more than is needed."

ters of cutlery design, proper and efficient blade sharpening and maintenance, regional variation in traditional Japanese bladesmithing, the relevant strengths and shortcomings of man-made sharpening stones vs. natural stones, a guide to the proper pronunciation of Japanese blade-related terminology and a special bonus slide show of a village bladesmith in Japan.

Reporter Hovey Smith, of Whitehall Press-Budget Publications, and author of thirteen books and hundreds of magazine articles, realizing the unique opportunity to cover this North American "first," flew in

from Georgia. "I enjoyed the school and learned a lot from it that I would not have otherwise experienced, Smith said." Hiss report will be published in upcoming issues of "Knives Annual" by Krause Publications.

Carter and his family moved to Vernonia almost two years ago; they enjoy the quiet and peaceful lifestyle of rural Oregon.

For information about future bladesmithing schools, or for a catalog of the knives Murray offers, contact him at:

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