

Blacksmiths Gather on Island To Show Skills

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convention's 23 year span that can be seen around the Island. Past projects include a restraining fence by the water fountain in Marquette Park, appliances for a fireplace in the commissioner's cottage at Fort Mackinac, a weathervane on the Officer's Stone Quarters at the Fort, and numerous memorabilia at Ste. Anne's Church.

"One of the neat things about it is you never really learn it all," Mr. Cline said.

The idea for the convention was pondered in the early 1980s when Islander Dennis Bradley worked as the master smith in the blacksmith shop. Mr. Bradley and others who were interested in the craft discussed the fact that the Michigan Artists Blacksmiths Association (MABA) met primarily downstate.

So Mr. Bradley worked with the state park to arrange an annual blacksmiths convention on the Island. Twenty-three years later, the convention has grown and is still bringing attention to a labor intensive craft that constructs so many things that people take for granted. The blacksmiths who gathered at the convention have even formulated a type of mock name for themselves, the Greater Straits Area Un-affiliated Non-Dues Paying Blacksmith's Association.

Mr. Cline said that invitations to the convention are more word of mouth than any-

thing.

"Everybody who has been here has been acquainted with one or more of the guys who are already involved," he said. "Space is limited. You couldn't get 50 guys in here."

The blacksmiths have developed friendship and camaraderie over their years working together. Together, they work as an assembly line of sorts; one group heats the iron, another bends it, while another group reshapes it. Inside the shop, other blacksmiths worked to shape and create door handles and other items for Ste. Anne's Church. As they work, they share their skills.

"It's one of the great things about blacksmiths," Mr. Cline said. "In all of my time here and elsewhere, I've not found any who won't tell you stuff. They're very open, very helpful."

Mr. Cline said that helpfulness is contrary to tradition of blacksmiths, however. In the early days of the craft, blacksmiths wouldn't share their knowledge with others to protect their competitive edge.

"It's one of the more challenging crafts to make a go at it in the financial sense because it's probably the most labor intensive," he said. "The time spent in producing per dollar of a project is much more challenging."

One blacksmith who has succeeded as a full-time smith is Kalkaska resident Pat Hayes.



Kalkaska resident Pat Hayes hammers out the end of an iron rod at the 23rd annual Mackinac Island Blacksmith Convention. This year, the blacksmiths finished building a fence to surround the war memorial at the city park on Market Street. Mr. Hayes has been a full-time blacksmith since 1969.

Mr. Hayes started blacksmithing in 1969. He started out making horseshoes and has expanded his skill into a full-time job over the years.

"It's in your blood," he said. "You still want to hit some-

thing hot."

Like many of the others at the convention, Mr. Hayes wears earplugs to protect his ears from the constant hammering and other noises that come with the job.

"I do this for a living and I don't want to go deaf," he quipped. "Things just get a little loud over there every once in awhile."

Mr. Hayes has been attending the convention since the early 1990s and likes the traditional and historical sense of working on Mackinac Island.

"Everything has been done traditionally," he said of the convention's yearly projects.

"We try to do it in the spirit of the time it was supposed to be done."

Over the years, Mr. Hayes has built everything from decorative flowers to horseshoes and fences.

"If you think about it, this stuff will still be here after we're gone," he said. "The nice thing about working with this medium is ... we can make roses, we can make flowers, and we can make the Mackinac Bridge and there isn't anybody else that can do that. We're the guys who can make the pretty little decorative things to the big functional things that you have to have."

Young Island Riders Enjoy Day of Games



Paul Fisher (left) hands a baton to Burton Gough in the Two-Man Relay.

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in 37 seconds, Burton Gough won second with 47 seconds, and Kristi Gough came in third with 55 seconds. Paul Fisher was disqualified for incorrectly running the course. In the trotting division, Sarah Spitzer won first in 1 minute, 25 seconds. Rachel Spitzer clocked in at 2 minutes, giving her second place, Jackie Brandonio placed third in 2 minutes, 10 seconds, and Shayla Mayo

came in fourth with a time of 2 minutes, 19 seconds.

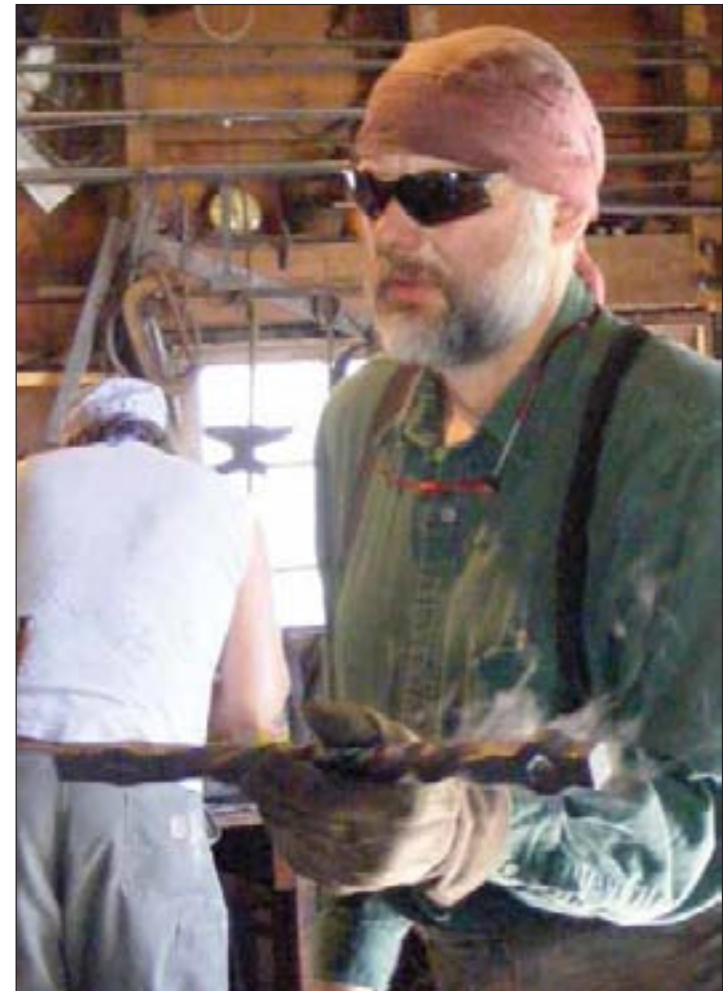
Riders put their horses through their paces while holding a dollar bill to the saddle with their thigh in the Sit-a-Buck contest. The winner got to keep the bills lost by the other riders. Kristi Gough beat out Paul Fisher in the final minutes to capture the loot. Jessica Beaune was third and Morgan Brodeur-Bunker took fourth.

In the Flag Race, Burton

Gough took home first place, Sarah Spitzer won second, and Rachel Spitzer was awarded third.

Two-Man Relay, Burton Gough and Paul Fisher won first place, Morgan Brodeur-Bunker and Kia Olson won second, and Diana Dupre and Rachel Spitzer received third place.

The much-loved Barrel Race was won by Diana Dupre, who was followed by Amelia Roe and Kyra Kolatski.



Stu Smith models an iron handle inside at the Benjamin Blacksmith shop. He worked with Dan Nickel and Kent Cummins on door handles and other memorabilia for Ste. Anne's Church.