

Mike Edelman

Blacksmith produces fine art at Spruce Forest Artisan Village

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*Under a spreading Chestnut tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands.*
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(1807-1882)

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous nineteenth century poem about a local blacksmith created a visual image that has lasted more than 150 years. The iconic tradesman working over an anvil served as a role model and symbolized hardworking and self-reliant Americans. While Longfellow's blacksmith has passed into the historical record, the trade he practiced remains viable and may be witnessed at Spruce Forest Artisan Village near Grantsville, Maryland.

Mike Edelman, the blacksmith at Spruce Forest Artisan Village, plays the iconic role of Longfellow's character because his work is solitary and carried out in a rustic setting. The Frostburg, Maryland resident has been forging metal at the village for nearly a decade and has built a loyal customer base.

Mike's attraction to blacksmithing could be described as unusual because his suburban Rockville, Maryland upbringing did not provide an introduction to the world of forges and anvils; even the traditional shop classes offered in high school were of no interest. "I just woke up one day and said, 'I need a forge.' I never took shop classes in school and wasn't around machinery. My parents were supportive and presented me with a forge at graduation."

The graduation gift was installed under the family carport where the steady "bink-bink" sounds of hammer and anvil annoyed a neighbor and resulted in a visit from an Environmental Protection Agency investigator. The EPA official explained his purpose that day was to investigate excessive noise and the burning of coal at Mike's



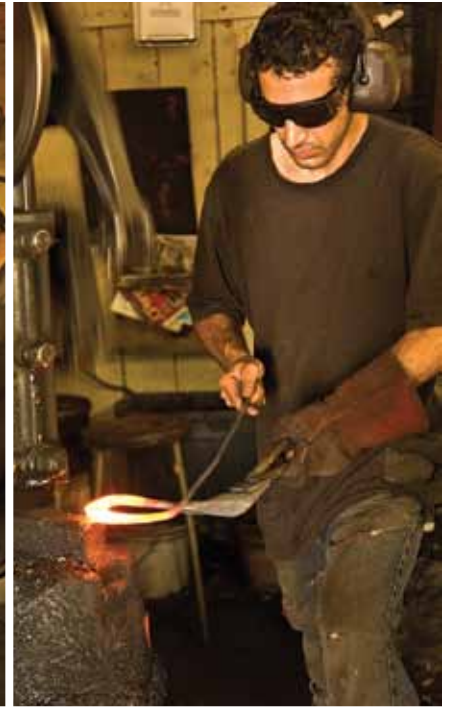
workstation. Mike recalled, "The investigator didn't write up anything or fine me, but it was an interesting start to blacksmithing."

The initial interest in blacksmithing did not fade with time. Thanks to educators in the Art Department at Frostburg State University, Mike pursued his interest in a formal setting. "The school allowed me to bring my own tools and they even provided me with an outdoor space. Unfortunately, I was used to DC (District of Columbia) winters. When I worked outdoors at Frostburg, the metal cooled too fast."

Despite struggles with Western Maryland winters, Mike graduated with an Art degree in 2005. Diploma in hand, he hit the road and made a living by appearing at shows along the East Coast. The mobile lifestyle ended in 2006 when visiting Spruce Forest. "One day I stopped by Spruce Forest and learned there was a blacksmith shop for rent. I decided to accept the offer and have been here ever since."

Mike uses mostly traditional blacksmithing techniques and equipment, however, some modern fabrication equipment supplements his inventory. "I use a welder that is obviously not traditional but it saves hours of time for a simple task. I also use a power hammer. Blacksmiths have always used powered machines, even if the power was supplied by water. Blacksmiths also employed workers called strikers who did the heavy hitting. The image of one blacksmith doing all the work would have typically been in a farm setting."

The blacksmith's lifestyle requires him to be a one-man operation. "I'm in charge of everything and there are consequences that come with that responsibility. My



Facing page photo: Mike poses with his creation of a crane.

Top left: Heating a piece of steel for hammering and shaping.

Top center: Power hammer strikes down to flatten and shape red hot steel.

Top right: Shaping the hot steel.

Bottom far left: A finished steel sculpture.

Bottom left: A finished crane.

income is directly related to my efforts. If I make a bad decision, I live with the costs.”

Most aspiring entrepreneurs face the daunting task of completing complicated business plans but Mike’s idea for setting up shop at Spruce Forest was less daunting. “I started with the idea of maintaining minimum equipment and expenses and went from there. I have to make more money than what I spend; it’s that simple.”

Mike’s creative efforts result in functional and sculpted works that are typically made of iron, brass, copper, and bronze. A wide range of items are displayed and offered

for sale including garden sculptures, tables, chairs, wall art, hooks, garden tools, lighting, gates, and light architectural work. Mike also accepts commissioned requests.

The shops at Spruce Forest Artisan Village host a variety of artists demonstrating old time crafts and are open Monday through Saturday from May 1 to October 31, 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. During the out-of-season, some shops remain open, although the hours may vary. The artisan shops are located adjacent to Penn Alps Restaurant and Craft Shop on United States Route 40 near Grantsville, Maryland.