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Owner Of Shadowhawk Blades Resurrects Forgotten Trade

By MELISSA CROWE
Staff Writer

WINNSBORO -- The pounding of hammers on steel and a yellow, sulfur-scented cloud escape from a bladesmith's renaissance-esque shop.

Charles Adams, the man behind the 2,500-degree forge, cranks the handle on a rotary fan, breathes life into the coal flames and pulls out a piece of scarlet shining steel.

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It is the start to something truly one-of-a-kind and the beginning of a custom, high-carbon steel blade.

Adams made his first sword at 31. He cut it from an old truck's leaf spring and hand-grinded it with a drill bit. He has created more than 1,000 blades over 25 years and showcases his handiwork at his Winnsboro shop, Shadowhawk Blades, inspired by his philosophy to move like a shadow and fight like a hawk.

"I make tools. I don't make weapons," he said. "It's only violent if you use it for violence. A butter knife can be a weapon."

Most of the blades for sale on his Web site, shadowhawkblades.com, cost about \$150.

Everyone should own something special, he said. He works with clients to design custom blades and even work out payment plans.

"If they want it, they can have it," he said.

Nine months after taking up bladesmithing, Adams began studying Isshinryu Karate, a style of Okinawan karate, and combat Escrima, a style of Filipino martial arts.

He is a third-degree black belt instructor at his studio, Adams Martial Arts.

To give a "full appreciation" of the art, he requires his Escrima students to make their own weapons. Students first make a wooden sword or dagger for sparring, and then a second blade that is a true sword or dagger.

"I want to bring out what they can do," he said. "Watch the light dawn in their eyes, make them realize and see in themselves what they really have."

But more than giving an appreciation of martial arts, he said he is just trying to keep the tradition of bladesmithing alive.

The commonplace technology from the Renaissance era, during the 14th century and on, has largely been lost, said Dustin Stephens, owner of the Four Winds Renaissance Faire near Whitehouse.

Average laymen, bankers, businessmen and women cannot duplicate what was once ordinary because society has shifted away from mechanical technology to electronic technology, he said.

"We've lost the ability, yet it's so pertinent and so valuable to us as a species -- not just Americans, but everybody," he said. "And yet we're not teaching it in schools anymore."

Another cause to the technology loss was intentional; people stopped sharing information, Adams said.

Because complete forests were being eradicated, it was ordered that trees could not be used as coals for blacksmithing. Many metal-workers, upset with unfamiliar charcoal, left Spain in search of places where wood was allowed, Adams said.

After that, "they quit sharing knowledge," Adams said. "They were hoarding the knowledge because prices were a premium on their blades."

And when they died, the knowledge did too, he said.

Adams' wife, Sarah, said nowadays, when archaeologists find blades, some dating to 1100 A.D., the techniques and steel types are still unknown even to a molecular level because the information was not shared.

Though the techniques are patented, some will lease their methods to keep the art alive.

"They don't want to lose it," Adams said.

Twelve years ago, Adams met Daniel Watson, owner of Angel Swords in Driftwood, at Scarborough Renaissance Festival in Waxahachie.

Over time, Watson said he turned away hundreds of people seeking help with developing skills. Watson never gave Adams a direct answer, but because of his tenacity, Watson continued

