



## NEWSLETTER

February 2009 Volume 2 Issue 2

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**ABANA Affiliate Liaison Letter: What is ABANA and what can it do for us?**

**1/28/2009**

ABANA is the Artist Blacksmith Association of North America. It is an organization that helps unite artist-blacksmiths from over 75 affiliated groups in the United States and other countries.

**ABANA is an important resource for a wealth of artist-blacksmithing information from around the world.** This information is passed on to its members via its two quarterly publications The Anvil's Ring which presents feature articles on many blacksmithing topics, affiliate news and many other subjects and the Hammer's Blow which features technical tips and techniques for the amateur and professional smiths.

**ABANA has a very extensive and usually current web site.** In addition to being an information resource, the web site allows affiliates and ABANA members to post a link to their own web sites and to post announcements of their conferences, exhibits and other events. ABANA's web site is also open to the public and has been very effective in reaching and educating the general public about what the artist-blacksmith can do.

**ABANA is planning to resume its biennial national conference in June 2010 with a grand effort.** It will be a gathering of international artist-blacksmiths from around the world with a sharing of their ideas and techniques. Coinciding with the conference is a National Ornamental Metal Museum international contemporary blacksmithing exhibit which will tour the US for two years after the conference.

**ABANA's Scholarship Program** provides financial assistance to its members for educational workshops or for extended study such as journeyman programs.

**ABANA's Affiliate Grant Program** provides financial support to ABANA Affiliates sponsoring a visiting artist for educational conferences or workshops.

**ABANA members receive a 5 to 10% discount** when shopping with blacksmith merchants supporting ABANA.

ABANA members can obtain affordable health insurance through Transamerica and Ameritas; including limited medical and hospital, disability, dental and vision coverage. **A**

These are but a few of the benefits ABANA offers blacksmiths. **ABANA is continually seeking ways to benefit its membership**, such as in obtaining affordable health insurance for the self-employed smith or for the recently laid off hobbyist who could not afford a COBRA or private insurance plan. ABANA is also working to soon have catastrophic medical and property and casualty insurance available to members.

The economy right now is terrifying and it is predicted to get worse before it recovers. And it will recover, however for now, millions of good workers have lost their jobs and many companies have shut their plants down permanently. Not since the great depression in the 1930's has the economy's outlook been so bleak. In the middle of all this mess are professional smiths who are trying hard to make a decent living from an honest day's work. There are amateur smiths, now unemployed because of plant closings, who are doing all they can to survive and turn their hobby into a fledging business and get through these rough times. And they can do it. For, unlike during the depression, today's artist-blacksmithing community has the resources and networking available to help them successfully compete in today's turbulent business world. And ABANA with its affiliates is at the center.

Some of our affiliates have been around a long time. Some of them were formed as local chapters of ABANA soon after ABANA was formed. Well, they have grown up. They are big boys now and no longer need the guidance and the direction and the assistance of their parent. And they really have done a great job of it. They have extensive workshops, great grant and scholarship programs, sponsor and promote artist-blacksmith exhibits, coordinate extensive demonstrations and conferences and the list goes on. ABANA is a very proud parent, and I am sure our founding fathers would heartily agree. As in any family, we have had our disagreements and conflicts, but we are all part of the family of blacksmiths and that's the way it is.

ABANA was begun many years ago with a gathering of blacksmiths to share ideas and methods. Demonstrate one and learn a dozen more. This marvelous method of sharing of knowledge was carried to Europe by British and German smiths and has since spread over the world. At the founding of ABANA, Dimitri Gerakaris said "Our task is great and so is our joy". And the joy of a proud parent is a wonderful thing indeed.

If you are a member of ABANA, we thank you.

**If you are going to become a member of ABANA, we welcome you.**

If blacksmithing is important to you but what ABANA can do for you is not enough, will you become an ABANA member for what ABANA can do for blacksmithing?

Bruce Woodward

ABANA Affiliate Relations Committee Chair

[woodwardiron1@roadrunner.com](mailto:woodwardiron1@roadrunner.com)

### ABANA News:

Wayne Coe has retired from the ABANA Board of Directors, but not from blacksmithing. His white hat, mischievous grin and country lawyer wit will be found at smithing events for a long time to come.

We welcome Len Ledet and Lance Davis as new members of ABANA's Board of Directors. Len, from Scottsdale, Arizona, will fill the seat vacated by Kim Saliba. Lance, from Jonesborough, Tennessee, will fill the seat vacated by Wayne Coe.



## Interview with a Blacksmith: by Vince Nakovics

Tim Cisneros' website [www.theforgeworks.com](http://www.theforgeworks.com) caught my eye and I found the work on his site to be truly inspiring. So much of it appeals to my personal favorite thing about blacksmithing "To make a simple design complex and a complex design simple", so I guess it was only natural that I would be drawn to his work. Tim Cisneros has given several extensive interviews for Anvil Magazine and revels quite a bit about himself on his website, which we hope that you will visit, enjoy and draw some inspiration from. This month's interview is going to cover how Tim got interested in Blacksmithing (the short version) and my favorite topic "Traditional vs. Modern Techniques". I give you Tim Cisneros of The Forge Works, San Francisco, CA.

*"A man who works with his hands is a laborer. A man who works with his hands and his brain is a craftsman. A man who works with his hands, brains, and heart is an artisan".* St. Francis of Assisi.



I had started college at Akron University in Akron Ohio. One of my first classes was metalsmithing in the jewelry Dept. My teacher one day said to me "Cisneros, you like to hammer stuff" I'm not sure if it was a compliment or not as jewelry is generally not HAMMERED on. The next summer I went to the Eastern school of Horseshoeing in Martinsville Va. At the time I didn't really know the difference between Blacksmithing and Horseshoeing so off I went to become a Farrier. I spent 20 years horseshoeing around the country, finally ending up in Northern Ca. I always had an interest in metalsmithing though and played around with it as more of a hobby than anything else. The moment of revelation came from a visit to a Blacksmith shop in San Francisco in 1997. Frank Trousil and Jim Austin had a shop which I stumbled across by accident. I had never seen a power hammer and when I saw these guys using a Nazel 3B I was totally amazed!

Forging with the Nazel 3B. Manufactured 1913.

Wow, I had never seen anything like it, the power and its ability to move metal just blew my mind. I was so intrigued by this experience that I started to look into how to get one of these machines and really start Blacksmithing. I had wanted to retire from Horseshoeing anyway as my body was starting to show signs of breakdown I.E. hips hurting constantly, neck pain, lower back pain, knees.....just basically sore everywhere. So in 1998 I "retired" from Horseshoeing and started a "Blacksmith Shop". The rest is history.... as they say

*"Share your knowledge; it's a way to achieve immortality"* Dalai Lama



Eagle Sculpture



Fireplace Tree and Tool Handles

*There is often much discussion about traditional methods versus modern methods and the merits that go with both. How do you, personally define the difference?*

When Edgar Brandt started to use the oxy-acetylene torch for his work in the 1920's he was vilified by his contemporaries for using "non-traditional" methods. Do any of us believe his work should not be included in the historical record of ornamental ironwork because he used torches? My belief is that whatever equipment is used is not the point of good design and craftsmanship. When I use a mig welder I "finish" the welds so that they are not visible. Isn't that what a forge weld is? Sometimes a forge weld would not even be possible in an area of a gate without lifting it into position over an open forge. I don't have 8 guys working for me in the shop to control a piece that large. What do you think a smith in the 1700's would have given for a mig welder? Probably his first-born son! I can talk at length about this but hopefully I've made my point. It is an argument that I'm sure won't ever go away but I'm in the business to try to make a living, I'm not a "hobby" smith. Technology is there to improve our lives and make it easier. Would you give up your forklift because it's not "traditional"? How about your pickup truck?



*One more thing Tim you went on a trip to Czech Republic in 2007, what did you find there?*

The Czech trip was a life changing event for me. The creativity of the European smith's was amazing. It changed the way I look at a piece of raw iron bar. I was fortunate enough to meet Alfred Haberman and stayed at his son's Freddy's "Smithy-in-the-forest" overnight before the conference at Helfstyn Castle.

*Since this interview is about Tim Cisneros, check out his website where he has a photo album displaying the Czech work, [www.theforgeworks.com](http://www.theforgeworks.com).*

Genesis

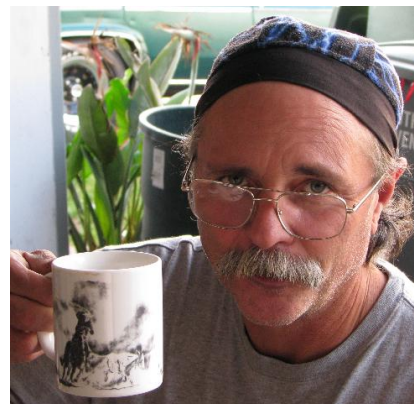


Gate Scroll Drawing

The finished Gate



Tim Cisneros



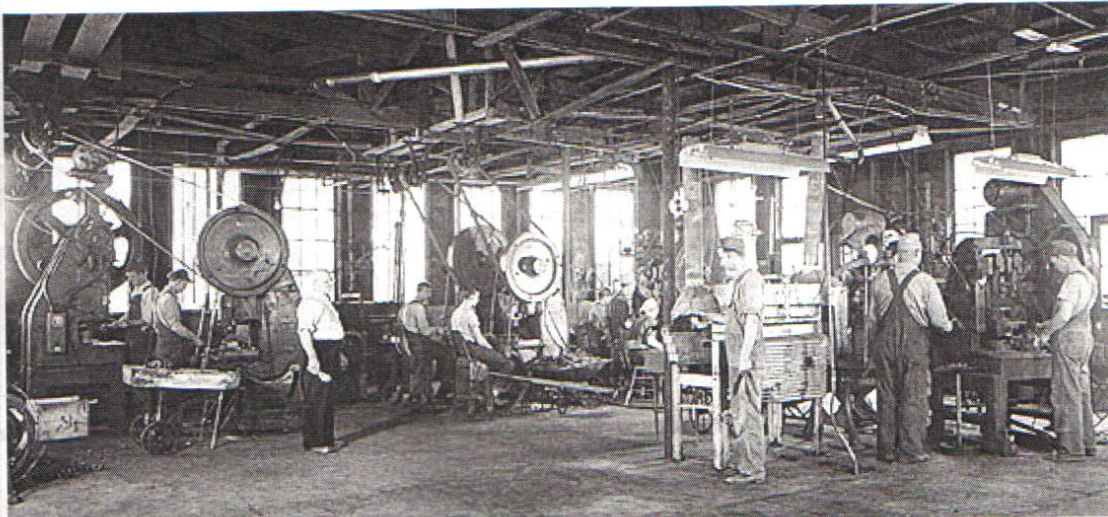
**January Meeting:** You missed a good one if you weren't there. Travis was busy as he was also doing the demo today and well that means he had a lot to do with a little time to do it in. Additionally Joe Gentile was conducting the Beginner's Class that was filled to capacity. We had an excellent Iron in the Hat with a lot of hand forged items. We really do appreciate the time and effort to make, donate and/or participate in IITH. Travis demonstrated a good item for field demos; a Steer Head hook. With some practice this was a fast method that would not lose the interest of you audience as they can see you make one from start to finish in 20 - 30 minutes. Okay that's slow for some of our more accomplished members, but you can do it faster with practice and hopefully your audience will be so enchanted that they will not mind making a big donation to our guild, yahoo!!! Mary Hanson was kind enough to submit some excellent photos of our beginner's class, which also happen to make up about half of our meeting attendance in one form or another, Thanks Mary!



Remember that there is a class by Nathan Walker of Colonial Williamsburg available for \$50 on Feb 21<sup>st</sup> and will be a project to be determined by Nathan using basic skills with an emphasis on hand control. You must be beginner certified to participate. Space is limited so Contact Travis Covington soon.

I can attest to Nathan's skill and craftsmanship and encourage any and all who can attend to attend you will not be disappointed.

## Vise Grip another story of American manufacture moving to another country!



William Petersen (third from left with wrench) supervising workers at Dewitt, Ne. factory. NSHS.

### (Take a good look at your "Vise Grips" and they might say "W. Petersen")

World War II established markets for hundreds of products that are now household names. At least one such product became a standard component of every farmer's toolbox and was manufactured in a small rural town in Nebraska.

The product was the Vise Grip locking pliers. The small town was, and is Dewitt, Nebraska. The agricultural innovator was an immigrant Danish blacksmith named William Petersen.

Petersen came to the U.S. just after the turn of the century. He tried his hand at farming, but he was in incurable inventor. At one time, he even tried to build and sell early motorcars. Each of those enterprises failed. In the early 1920s, he arrived in Nebraska and opened a blacksmith shop.

At some point, he realized his job would be a lot easier if he had a set of pliers that would clamp down and hold the piece of metal he was working on "in a vise-like grip." He undoubtedly had sets of pliers and at least one vise in his shop. But the pliers couldn't be locked and the vise was hard to set up. Somehow, he came up with the idea of combining the function of the two tools.

He figured out that a screw mechanism in the handle could adjust the opening of the pliers. Later, he figured out a way for the other handle to lock it in place. He built several prototypes, first out of cardboard and then wood. Finally, he hammered one out of metal on his forge. It worked.

He got his first patent for a primitive version in 1921. The patent for the locking lever was issued in 1924. He built an inventory and starting selling the Vise-Grip Pliers out of the trunk of his car to farmers and mechanics in the surrounding towns. Gradually, he built a business, but the Depression slowed its growth.

Thanks to NEB for this Article, Vol 28, No.5

In spite of hard times, the tool was popular. In 1934, the Petersen Manufacturing Company was formed, but it wasn't until 1938 that they opened their first official manufacturing plant in a defunct drug store in "downtown" Dewitt. That first plant had a staff of 37.

When the war started, Bill Petersen was still working on refining the product, two of his sons, Chris and Ralph, handled manufacturing, and another son, Richard, was struggling to put together a network of sales agents. One of them sold the government on the advantages of the Vise-Grip.

By 1941, the little plant was operating at capacity to fulfill government contracts. Defense industries used thousands of Vise-Grips. Thousands more were shipped to England for their aircraft industry. Builders of the Liberty cargo ships found them so useful – and the time pressures to finish ships so great – that welders simply welded the Vise-Grips into the hulls rather than removing them from the pieces they were holding together. At the time, the tool sold for \$1.25.

The war saved Petersen Manufacturing because 1941 was the same year that their original patent ran out. Without government contracts, competition could have destroyed the fledgling company.

Bill Petersen kept inventing and expanding the market. Right after the war in 1945, the first National Hardware Show was organized tapping into the huge interest that returning soldiers and their families had in building their dream homes. Vise-Grip tools were there.

In 1957, the easy release lever was added to the pliers. In the 1950s, the company incorporated. In the 60s, they opened a second manufacturing plant in Wisconsin. In recent years, the company has gone through several ownership changes and mergers. They are now known as Irwin Industrial Tools and are now a division of Newell Rubbermaid, Inc.

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<b>WITH Cutter</b>		<b>WITHOUT Cutter</b>	
No. 7W—7",	\$2.25	No. 7C—7",	\$1.85
No. 10W—10",	\$2.50	No. 10C—10",	\$2.25

*If not at your dealers, order direct.  
Postage paid if price accompanies order.*

**PETERSEN MFG. CO.**  
Dept. N-1 DeWitt, Nebr.

Vise Grip ad in 1949 Nebraska Farmer.

**Associated Press release LINCOLN, Neb.** - Gary Oden has known for weeks that the plant where he has spent the last 19 years helping build Vise-Grips, one of Nebraska's most famous products, would be shutting down. But he still wasn't completely prepared for the meeting at 5:30 Wednesday morning. He and other employees were officially told the bad news, the kind that has stung workers in upper Midwestern states for years but is relatively uncommon in Nebraska: The DeWitt plant is shutting down so operations can be moved to China. "It's a kick in the head," Oden said from a DeWitt bar where employees gathered to discuss the announcement and "try to forget about it." Newell Rubbermaid owns the Vise-Grip brand. A plant employee said managers were in meetings Wednesday and not available to comment. About 300 people work at the plant, which for decades has anchored the southeast Nebraska town of DeWitt, population 572. Roughly 40 of the employees make Unibit tool parts. According to Oden, managers said Unibit operations are moving to Maine.

When Petersen died in 1962, his family took over. The business was eventually renamed American Tool Cos. American Tool sold out in 2002 to Newell Rubbermaid, a minority owner since 1985. Since then, the DeWitt plant has operated under the name of Irwin Industrial Tools, a company American Tool bought in 1993. Oden said employees were told that "to keep the Vise-Grip name competitive, they had to move to China."

## **Tidewater Blacksmiths Guild Mission Statement**

“The Tidewater Blacksmiths Guild is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the craft of Blacksmithing and to increasing the public awareness of the history of Blacksmithing while at the same time demonstrating that in this world, things hand made still exist and remain objects of art”

### **2007 - 2009 TBG Officers:**

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#### **Newsletter:**

Vince Nakovics [restoreman123@msn.com](mailto:restoreman123@msn.com)

**Tidewater Blacksmiths Guild** meets every third Sunday of the month. Location of the meeting is posted on our website: <http://tidewaterblacksmiths.com> .

**Demonstration Schedule:** None scheduled

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