



# Balcones Forge Dispatch

President's Corner

April 2017



Greetings!

Can't say enough about the Bluebonnet Demo and the wonderful time we had. This one was right up there at the top. This was probably the biggest group project/demo we have ever had. Although Jim Elliott did an

excellent job on designing the mirrored wall piece, I'm sure a few of smiths were cussing him before it was finished for making it so involved. With about twenty smiths working in three teams this has to be the greatest piece of ironwork ever produced at a Balcones event. Thanks to everyone involved and to John and Caroline for the winning bid at the auction. I know you will enjoy it for many years to come.

Although the workshops went well we were a little shaky with the registration and getting everybody signed up. We apologize for any inconvenience or confusion and are working to correct the problem. The problem is that we don't have enough folks working with the board to help all the extra work that comes with putting an event like this on. We also need help during the workshops and demos and well as cleaning up after and putting John's shop back in order. We could also use new librarian to take some of the load off Peter Garza who now has help from our newly elected board members: John Crouchet and Rudy Billings. Welcome back guys! I know Vince is always looking for help with articles and reports for the BFD. You can always send photos, drawings and descriptions of your latest projects.

Thank you John and Caroline for hosting again and thanks to Team Dorothy, Lyle and Dana for all the hard work. You guys rock!

## Meeting Date is April 29

*President's Message continued on page 3.*



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## SECRETARY'S REPORT

If the beautiful blue-bonnets didn't fully awake you on the way to the demo in Marble Falls, the amazing sketched art design displayed in the shop by Jim Elliot probably did!

Some of us were privileged to see it a few days before the actual Saturday demo began. I was there Wednesday for a class with Lyle Wynn and Stan Bryant in which we smithed out a hair pin and a ring. These efforts were accomplished in coal forges and because I was having difficulty with my air supply system of old, Lyle & I discovered two dirt dabber nests in the outlet shaft. After that, it was smooth going. The Thursday class was with Dorothy Stiegler and we fashioned a free style necklace and an arm bracelet by using gas forges. The Friday classes were also well attended by blacksmiths forging iron into beautiful jewelry. One thing I really like about attending and participating in these blacksmithing classes, is that you can't do anything wrong - your hammer forged pieces are one of a kind, although I could see there was plenty room for improvement in mine.

Each morning, John Crouchet made sure everybody had everything they needed to get the class started as well as take orders for lunches, and then Carolyn would make the trip to town and return with some very delicious sandwiches. As usual, Carolyn would please the hungry crowd with some wonderful homemade cookies. The annual Friday shrimp broil prepared by Elise and Dave was also well attended and enjoyed by everyone. My favorite side dish was the slow cooked red beans and rice.

Saturday morning brought many more people in early, as well as a few tailgaters. Some really good deals can be made such as great prices on 50 pounds of coal offered by Texas Farrier Supply. Of course, hammers and tongs brought lots of attention for Gary Hilton and Matt Marti. The Balcones Forge Treasurer, Peter Garza began registration and passing out name tags and then about 9:30 am the Bluebonnet demo began by speaker and president Jerry Achteberg welcoming the crowd. By 10am, all the forges were full of hot steel and Dorothy Stiegler, Dana Flanders, and Lyle Wynn, the primary blacksmiths were pounding away on the individual parts of the project given them by Jim Elliott. Jim is insightful, visionary artistic and unselfish with a talent to share - a rare combination indeed. Other remarkable blacksmiths began to help out with the details, such as Matt, Mary Jo, Fernando, Stan, Jennifer, Tiffany, Sue, William, and Laura. The shop was suddenly filled with the sounds of hammers and the sparks of hot metal being molded for completion of the masterpiece inspired and designed by Jim Elliott. Walking through the shop and watching all this talent was something I will never forget and I certainly was amazed to see Laura Armstrong striking for Dana Flanders with an 8 pound sledge! Another notable moment was when I overheard John tell Dorothy, who was blacksmithing with an orthopedic boot up to her knee, to stop for lunch and she said 'Do I have to?' If you weren't there, you really can't appreciate the intensity and embellishment applied to every handmade piece of steel. The artists present today were not secretive about their work as they welcomed questions and disseminated their knowledge to one and all to better showcase and promote the blacksmith's skills. Once the piece was finished, it was an electrifying display of handcrafted steel into a beautiful design anyone would be proud to be a part of. Certainly proud, of course, was the highest bidder at the end of the day. And by mention of that, our auction was a success as well.

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On behalf of the Balcones Forge, I want to thank everyone for attending and a special thanks to the crew that helped set up and clean up for another successful Bluebonnet demo as well as to Jim & Carolyn crochet for their great Texas hospitality.

Tim Tellander  
Balcones Forge Secretary



*photo by Tim Tellander*

## **APRIL MEETING INFO**

Our meeting is this Saturday, April 29th. We will be gathering at the Hye Heritage Festival. Trade Item is a decorative punch.

They are asking that all smiths bring their branding irons. They will use them to brand wood that will be part of a permanent display. Bring what you have and be part of history.

The event starts at 11:00am. We will begin with our meeting as usual at 9:30.

This is going to be another good one. We look forward to seeing everyone there,

<https://allevents.in/hye/hye-heritage-festival/1235515399896804#>

Jerry Whitley  
Vice President, Balcones Forge

### *President's Message CONTINUED*

Patrick Watson has asked us to be a part of the 2nd Annual Hye Heritage Day in Hye, TX on April 29th at the 4B Ranch just east of Hye, which is a few miles west of Johnson City on Hwy 290. There will be lots of things to do and see with a few wineries nearby. There will be food and drinks available. We will also need a few forges and anvils for open forging and show-n-tell. The trade item is a "decorative punch" of some type that is hardened and finished. Try to get in and set up well before our meeting start at 9:30

John Crouchet is working with William Bastas to put on another demo at the Ranch for our May (20th) meeting. I did hear the term: "tong making workshop" so be prepared to do some hammering.

See Y'all in Hye!

Jerry Achterberg  
Balcones Forge President

# Lost and Found

As usual, we wound up with a few abandoned, forgotten, or misplaced items following our annual Bluebonnet Demo. In the past, we have managed to acquire some pretty colorful and unusual items, but this year's harvest was fairly mundane.

We have a lovely little triangle file with an orange handle. Somebody is going to want that back. We also have a slightly burned twelve foot tape measure in a lovely shade of green.

If you are eyeing that nice hardy tool bolster, you are already too late. Doug Eichert has already claimed it. If it is actually yours, then you and Doug will need to have a conversation.

We have a well-loved folding chair, complete with a side table to hold your beer or guacamole dip. Surely someone is missing this orphan chair!

Last, but not least, someone is missing their very personalized insulated stainless steel YETI coffee mug. It has grown a nice layer of coffee mold by now, but I expect its owner wants it back anyway.

To claim any (or all) of these lovely items, text John Crouchet at 830-798-3710 and arrange to pick them up either at the ranch or at one of the next two Balcones meetings. You will be glad to know that items not claimed will be donated to one of our local Marble Falls charities.

*John Crouchet*



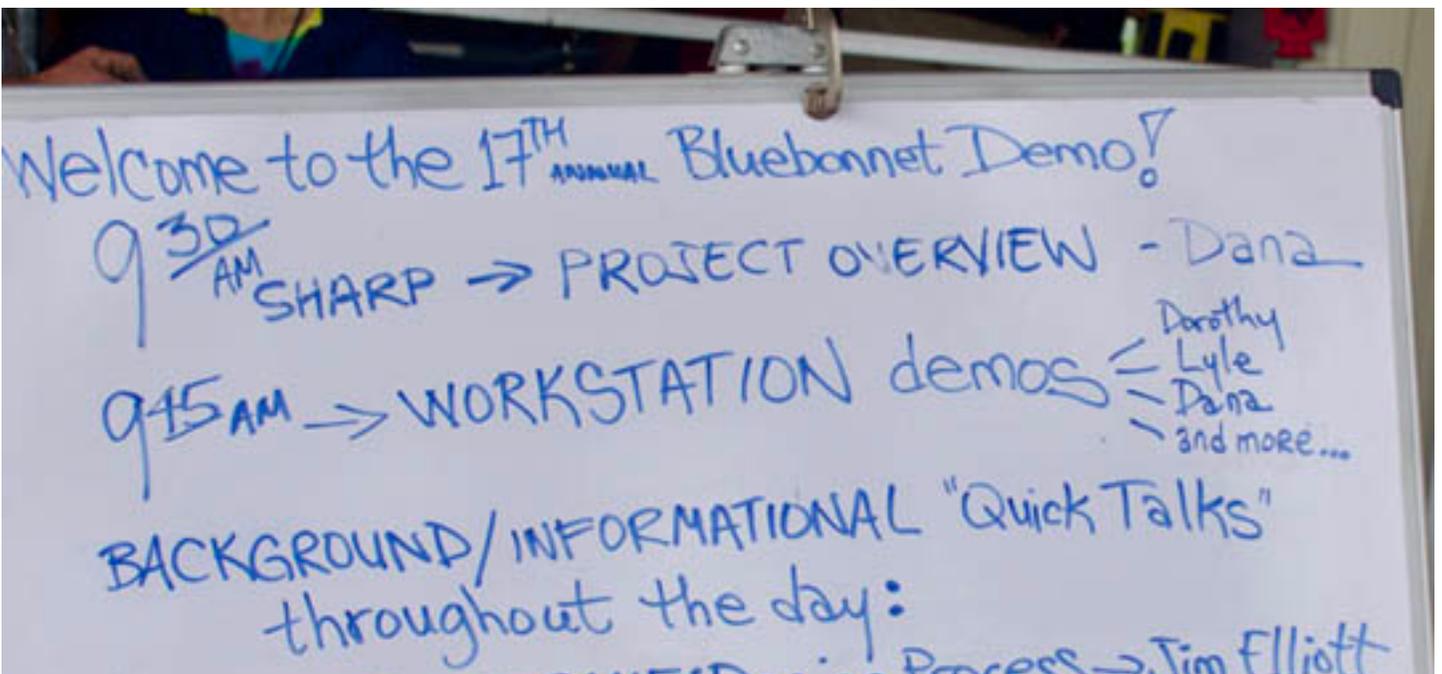


The TEAM with the completed mirror.

*Photo by Tim Tellander*

Look for lots more pictures from the Bluebonnet Workshop and Demo in future editions!

*Below photo by Gerald Pollard*





Dana Flanders, Jim Elliot and Henry Stone with the completed mirror and layout drawing, designed and drawn by Jim.

*photo by Tim Tellander*



ABANA is excited that our 2018 Conference will offer new concepts, excellent demonstrators, and quality programs at the birthplace of Secretariat, the Meadow Event Park in Doswell, VA, just north of Richmond. The grounds are gorgeous with plenty of parking, camping, ATM's, and shower facilities with a 63,000 sf air-conditioned main building.

Hope to see you in June 2018!

*Coming Soon to a Shop Near You.....*

# **Hammering, Pounding, Forging Red Hot Iron... Tong Building!!!**

Of course you want a pair of those fancy Will Bastas monkey-paw tongs! We all do! Unfortunately, they always sell for way too much money when Will donates them to our auctions. Well, friends, your luck has changed!

Will Bastas has offered to lead a Balcones Forge meeting to make everyone a pair of those handy little grippers! Naturally, we took him up on that offer, and we will all be building tongs with Professor Bastas at the May 20th meeting of Balcones Forge.

The meeting will be held in the blacksmith shop at Sycamore Creek Ranch, a familiar destination to everyone who has been to the annual Bluebonnet Demo. The meeting will begin at 9:30 am. Please notice that the meeting has been moved to May 20th to avoid conflicting with everyone's Memorial Day plans!

Monkey-paw tongs have unique split ends at the gripping tip of the tongs. This allows the blacksmith to securely hold a wide variety of shapes from a number of different angles. These tongs may quickly become your all time favorites.

We will be forging these tongs from #5 rebar which makes a sturdy, resilient pair of tongs, with properties very close to chrome-molybdenum steel. We will learn how to work with this steel at the meeting.

There is no charge for participating in this meeting, but you must be a member of Balcones Forge so that you will be on our insurance. Bring safety glasses and your favorite hammer. Wear cotton clothing (No synthetics) and sturdy, closed toe shoes.

Our special thanks to Will Bastas for his generous offer to teach us all the finer points of tong forging.

***A little blacksmithing history: Many of us know Will Bastas from his popular blacksmithing classes at Austin Community College. However, Mr. Bastas was also the very first Forge Master of the Texas Artist Blacksmith Association (TABA), which was the predecessor organization to Balcones Forge.***

*John Crouchet*



# Whatzit??

I purchased this jig years ago when the venerable Tips Iron and Steel Works in Austin closed their giant fabrication shop down by the Colorado River. It was part of a large lot of tools that I bid on, trying to acquire a nice heavy welding table. I got that table and I also wound up with this really heavy adjustable welding jig.

Because the jig was too heavy to hang from the pegboard in my welding area, I just kept it on the floor near my welding tanks. I always wondered what it would be good for, as I proceeded to stomp my toe on it really hard every six months or so for the next fifteen years.

Last week, I had four gates to build out of 1 1/2 inch square tubing and it finally occurred to me that this was the perfect jig to hold the corners square while I tacked them up. It worked like a dream. Now I am out looking around the ranch for anything else that needs to be held square while I weld it!

No, it is not for sale. I have gotten used to stumping my toe on it and I think I would probably miss it if it were not there.

*John Crouchet*

W W W . B A L C O N E S F O R G E . O R G



## Poster Contest

Win 2 Free Passes to the 2018  
Conference

Open to anyone 18 years of age or  
older

Any 2-D medium or Digital Design

June 1, 2017 Deadline to Enter

Complete details on ABANA Website

[www.abana.org](http://www.abana.org)



*photos by Dave Guerro*

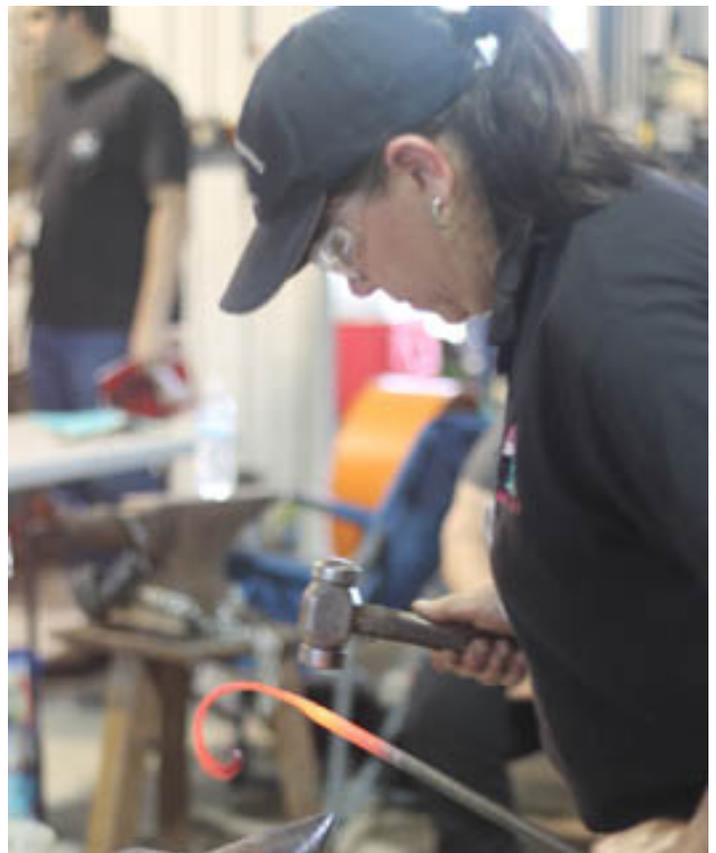
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***Learning from the Past  
Forging to the Future***

**Poster Contest Coming Soon!  
Watch your email for details**



# What I Learned From Dorothy

by John Crouchet

I first met Dorothy Stiegler seventeen years ago. She stayed at our house when she arrived in Texas to teach the very first annual demo for the Texas Artist Blacksmith Association (TABA). We became good friends. That demo was a big success and Dorothy has been back for many more successes since then.

As a beginner blacksmith, I learned a lot just watching Dorothy's very practical approach to ironwork. "If you are going to forge something from nature, first go get one to look at." That seems obvious to me now, but it surprised me at the time. Of course I should go pick a seed pod before I try to forge one from my (faulty) memory. And I quickly learned that Dorothy was glad to use everything available to achieve her objectives. She sent us all down to the local craft store to buy silk flowers. What better way to come up with a perfect pattern for forging flowers than to deconstruct a perfect silk flower? My ironwork got better by the minute!

I remember years of tips like that I got from Dorothy. I watched her at ABANA conferences and every chance I got. I finally put enough of those tips together to arrive at an attitude of practicality that still guides my work. But that is not the really important stuff.

The important stuff I learned from Dorothy was about BEING a blacksmith. How to treat your fellow craftsmen, and always always being grateful for all the generations of hard working smiths who came before you and kept the craft alive.

I learned to give credit where credit is due. We invent very little (or nothing) ourselves. When you forge a fancy piece or show a nice technique, open your mouth and give some credit to the person who taught you that. When you forge a Claydon knot, or a Stiegler globe, give credit to the blacksmith who came up with that dandy attraction.

If Bill Epps or Will Bastas or Jerry Achterberg taught you to forge, say so. Thank that person, if you still can. Thank the people who came before you and openly gave you the secrets of the fire, and then, teach someone else. Show them what you know. Show them EVERYTHING that you know and never ever hold back, because you owe that to the blacksmiths who gave it to you.

...and when someone admires that cute little calla lily ending on your iron jewelry, tell them, "Dorothy Stiegler taught me that!"



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