

Blacksmith finds it isn't too hot to handle

August 12, 2014 11:00 AM Sally Asher
sally@tulane.edu

Staff in the **CITY**



Irvin Schwarz, a user services analyst at Tulane University, also is a blacksmith. (Photo by Sally Asher)

Irvin Schwarz tries to avoid having too many irons in the fire, literally and figuratively. The user services analyst for the Tulane University [School of Continuing Studies](#) has been practicing blacksmithing since the age of 5. Born and raised in Gretna, Louisiana, Schwarz learned the trade from his father, who had his own shop at home.

One day, while heating irons on the forge while his father bent them into shape, Schwarz got confused and accidentally grabbed a hot piece of iron instead of a cold one and burned his hand. This lesson taught him the importance of balance, timing and skill, and did not squelch the belief, installed by his father, that “just because something is made in a factory doesn't mean that you can't make it.”

After getting a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering at the University of Louisiana, Schwarz spent decades as an engineer for an oil company, where his blacksmithing fell by the wayside. When the oil industry declined in New Orleans, Schwarz took a job at Tulane, where he has happily been for 16 years now.

In early 2014, Schwarz's passion for blacksmithing was renewed when he took a basic blacksmithing class from Jill Ott at the Gretna Green Blacksmith Shop. Schwarz intended to be a student, but after making his first plant hook he was asked to teach basics to new students.

“What I like best about teaching,” Schwartz says “is showing someone the basics, how to strike the metal, mold the metal into what you want, and help to keep the art of blacksmithing alive.”

He also is keeping his father's memory alive by restoring his old machine shop, occasionally making new parts for equipment that are no longer available in stores.

It's all a matter of balance, timing and skill.

“What I like best about teaching is showing someone the basics, how to strike the metal, mold the metal into what you want, and help to keep the art of blacksmithing alive.” -- Irvin Schwarz