

LEARNING BY DOING: Freshmen explore the art and science of blacksmithing

DECATUR, Ga., April 30, 2012 // Freshmen at Academe of the Oaks, an independent high school grounded in Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf curriculum and philosophy, recently celebrated the completion of a four-week, blacksmithing studio course by putting the finishing touches on an original metalwork designed and created by the students themselves: a three-dimensional interpretation of the oak leaf, the school logo.



Twice a week, students spent afternoons working on-site at Phoenix Metalworks alongside studio founder and visual artist Corrina Sephora Mensoff, who specializes in metal work, sculpture and mixed-media and who established the studio's journeyman apprenticeship program. The artist modeled the freshman project after those of the late German blacksmith Manfred Bredohl (d. 2002), who was instrumental in promoting and popularizing the craft of "smithing" internationally as a "friendship bridge" for bringing communities together peacefully.

"We divided everyone into groups and gave each one responsibility for creating part of the design," Mensoff explained. In addition, each student created one of the individual leaves that border the center spine. In this way, she noted, "the whole process fostered a sense of teamwork and gave each group the chance to take part in each step" of working with the metal.

Along with four apprentices, the freshmen "team" gained hands-on experience with the blacksmithing process, including forging, striking, filing, and wire-wheeling ("like a high-speed toothbrush for metal," explained one apprentice). They also learned the importance of protective gear and safety procedures, and the proper use of metalworking tools such as the Hossfeldt Bender and the metal saw. Academe English instructor Bowman Garrett, a longtime friend of Mensoff's with his own fine arts background, even jumped in during the next-to-last session to operate the drill press!

Academe freshmen Christian and Diego reflected happily on their experience in Mensoff's studio. While the one particularly enjoyed the trust placed in him -- he had opportunity to use the saw as well as more basic blacksmithing tools -- the other took greatest pleasure in refining the work -- after all the hammering, seeing to the finer details of the pieces in his charge. These two eager apprentices agreed that the high school's blacksmithing block was "definitely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

As they move on to their next art project, Academe's freshmen blacksmiths will no doubt recall their afternoons of metal-bending as they pass by the fruits of their labor: the completed sculpture will be installed in the new Arts & Sciences building on the Academe campus.

Opened in 2003, Academe of the Oaks offers a high school education without parallel in the Atlanta area. The rich, experiential Waldorf curriculum stimulates developing minds, and its close community of teachers is deeply committed to each student's total growth. Academe of the Oaks offers a challenging academic program, laying a strong foundation for postsecondary work, while fostering students' confidence to think independently and engaging their enthusiasm for learning. The accredited high school, located just east of downtown Decatur, offers 9th through 12th grades. For more information about the school, please telephone (404) 405-2173, or visit <www.academeatlanta.org>.

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