

ROBERT WINK
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Will "dangling carrot" be amended? SD "exemption" policy mulled by board

By BRUCE WHITE
Editor

Bellville High School Principal Tim Batson is hoping a dangling carrot will result in better test results from its students. During Thursday night's Bell Independent School District board of trustees meeting, Batson presented a plan, that received a lukewarm nod from the board members. The plan was not an agenda item, and did not require board approval. Superintendent John Conley said he wanted the board to be aware of the plan and he felt it should be discussed. The plan makes changes in the school exemption policy. In the past seven or eight years, students were exempted from examinations who had three absences or less and an 80 or higher grade point average. The new policy will exempt

students who have three absences or less, a 75 or above grade point average, and who have passed all portions of the TAKS test.

Batson hopes that will motivate some of the students to do better on the TAKS.

"The problem we have is that we have some freshmen and sophomores who really don't care about the TAKS. They have no motivation or incentive to pass it.

"When they are juniors and seniors, they have that motivation because they have to pass it to graduate. Our hope is that this will motivate some of these kids to work harder on the TAKS. If they know they can be exempt from their tests, then maybe that will give them some incentive."

The original plan presented to the board allowed for four absences, but trustees Lonnie Lischka and Karen Winn balked at

that idea.

"I'm against lowering the standards and our expectations," said Lischka. "If anything, I think we should make it two absences. Students used to have perfect attendance."

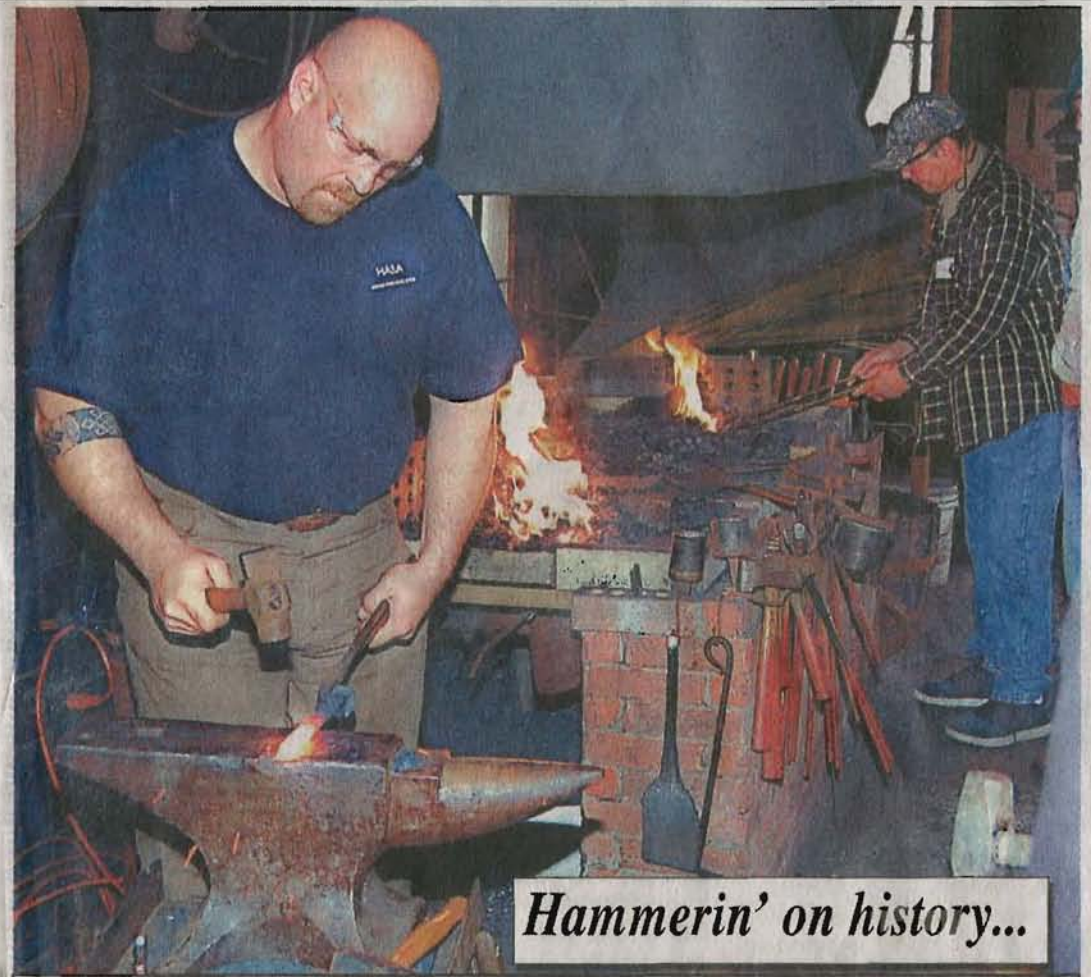
Winn agreed with Lischka on the absence policy, but she also said she was against exemptions for any student.

"I would like to see our valedictorian take the finals," said Winn.

"What's happening is we are sending our children to college and they discover that it doesn't work like this. They have to deal with the complexity of exams and it can be a bit of a struggle."

Lischka, who agreed to the compromised plan with three absences instead of four after it was made clear that the previous

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Hammerin' on history...

Visiting blacksmiths Richard Myers, left, and Roland Guettler, hammer away Saturday.

"Smiths" & newbies come from Corpus Christi, Houston, Magnolia...

Old world tradition alive in Bellville as regional blacksmiths gather here

By David Emswiler
NEWS Editor

"Hey Locke," called out metal worker, Cowboy Szymanski, to a teenage boy working across the room, in a local blacksmith's shop. It was a busy hive of smoky kiln fires, anvils and hammers.

"Bring it up to yellow. It's too cold." And so the young student of steel grabbed a long pair of metal tongs, gripped the cool end of what was a railroad spike from the top of a large anvil, and placed it back into blazing heat of a gas charged forge furnace -- a kiln. It was one of several such kilns offering colorful, extremely hot fire to visitors of this ancient craft.

These aren't your normal eggs and bacon fires. This stuff melts steel, shaped by large hammers, gripped by men, boys -- and even women -- who mould railroad ties and over-sized carpenters' files into swords, knives, and works of art.

It's all part of the Houston Area Blacksmith Association's (HABA) annual gathering that drew interested members to Bellville this past weekend, from as far away as Magnolia, Corpus Christi, Houston and Warda.

Richard Myers stayed in a local motel Friday after driving here from

Corpus Christi, to offer himself the opportunity to shape steel into a knife.

His large arm held an over-sized hammer (top photo, left man) and the metal spike wielded to his force, as

Myers stood next to a 10-foot long coal fired kiln receiving heaves of air from a large canvass two-chamber bellow hanging from chains. It was hand made by Szymanski in the style of antebellum and colonial bellows of old.

The visitor -- Myers -- buried the railroad spike for a minute into the orange-red coals, before pulling it out again, and striking it with the hammer. "It's good stress relief," he says, adding he has been a HABA member for four years.

The large, heavy anvils were scattered throughout the shop in midtown Bellville this weekend. A kiln was also set up outside to accommodate an over-flow number of students. A very large man with beard and red suspenders pulled steel from the coals outside, within feet of automobiles racing by. He placed the steel upon yet another anvil, and struck

away, just as a well-known department store truck rumbled by, within mere inches.

The man seemed oblivious to the 55-mile per hour world around him and did not bother to look up.

Anvils were scattered throughout

place where she and her husband are working. The man helps with the last few feet, picking the stump up and dropping it to the stone floor.

The building, according to Szymanski, was constructed in 1891 as a blacksmith shop. It's not hard to en-

vision it being that another 100 years, either -- same stone floor, same kiln, new set of smiths.

Like the fires used to heat the metals, the anvils as well, have been tools used since early Bronze Age by smiths of all kinds.

Blacksmith coals are hot coals, used in kilns, kept hot this day by hand cranked blowers and

a unique canvass bellow that opens its air-filled lungs with the pull of a chain.

Blacksmithing bellows were very large tools in their day, according to one history source, but there are few around anymore. There were several questions about that huge bellow,

calendar

Food Addicts in Recovery, Christian Faith Church (next to Sonic), 520 South Front St., Bellville. Each Thursday at 7 p.m. Call 979-830-3483.

Woodmen of the World Lodge 3060, 5193 Hi. 36 N, Best Soup Rules -- Members asked to bring favorite soup. 6 p.m., Jan. 24.

2009 Project Graduation, Mr. Debonair, Sat., Jan. 24, 6 p.m., Bellville High School, with silent auction.

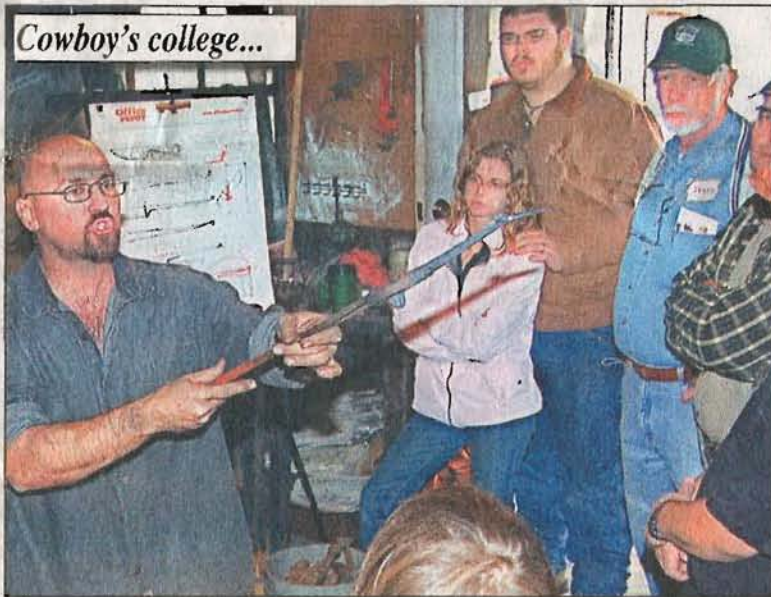
Women of Austin County, Beth Moore Bible Study, Tuesdays beginning 6:30 p.m., January 27 at Christian City Fellowship. Call 885-3113.

Animal Friends Shelter seeks foster home centers for animals. Please help. Call 992-3761.

sports shorts



Steel Magnolia



Old world tradition alive in Bellville as regional blacksmiths gather here

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which Szymanski made from scratch. In colonial times, bellows were used by blacksmiths to stoke their fires for the pro-



duction of horseshoes and other farm tools. Back in those days, blacksmithing bellows were as important to the American community as electrical power and computers are to people all around the world today.

"They didn't come out with the hand-crank blowers until about 1896 to 1902," Szymanski explained. "So generally, before 1890s (the local blacksmith) would have been operated off of bellows."

Made from canvass, the earliest bellow were constructed primarily from leather and many were about three feet by five feet in diameter, smaller than the four-foot by eight-foot design

Szymanski accomplished.

Divided into two chambers – and called a "grand bellows" as a result – the unique device was used constantly by visitors to give the special blacksmith coals the fuel they needed to achieve a blazing hot source to alter matter.

"So the shop, being built in 1891, probably did have some sort of bellow like this one," Szymanski explained.

HABA member Richard Boswell wore over-alls and safety glasses and looked right at home next to his kiln and tools. It wasn't his first visit to Bellville, as the blacksmith carries with him trade magazines, and crates

to shape a long rod. A common paper chart displayed various sorts of marker-drawn knives beside him and the large kiln smoked behind Szymanski as he held up a large fork-like object, bright red hot at its tip.

Roland Guettler said he traveled to Bellville from Wardu. He received hands-on advice from several HABA members as he hammered his first knife into shape.

So why the popularity and draw to a blacksmith shop filled with smoke, tools and tradition?

"I think a lot of people are tired of a mass production cookie cutter world we live in," Szymanski explained. "It's about history

Grand bellows....



of materials, knives, tools, and membership information. He patiently answers questions for those new to the trade.

At one point during Saturday's events at Szymanski's shop in the 300 block of East Main, at least 25 visitors were engrossed in a how-to demonstration Szymanski, as he demonstrated how

and craft and even family."

A father-son team working on a knife together seemed to exemplify the argument.

Meanwhile, Locke put the finishing touches on his piece and held it up for his father to inspect.

"I think the fire was hot enough this time."



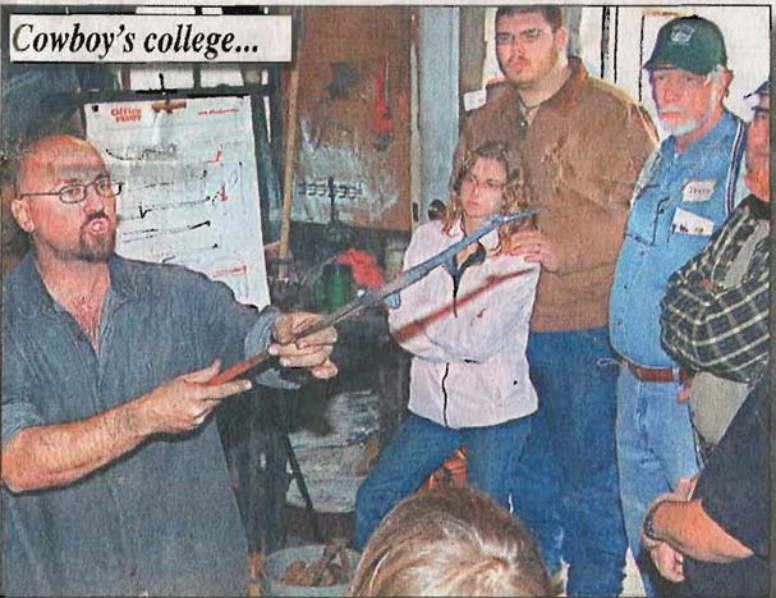
Hammerin' on history...

Visiting blacksmiths Richard Myers, left, and Roland Guettler, hammer away Saturday.



Steel Magnolia

Cowboy's college...





Grand bellows....

