

**Tunnel Mill Craft School class at the end of the first hardware class.**



## Old Mill Site Hosts Specialized Craft Classes

Tunnel Mill Crafts is the place to go to learn a new craft or fine-tune your expertise. Classes can be as simple as learning the basics of tinsmithing, relief sheet metal work, painting barn quilt blocks, candle-making and woodworking. However, they're as likely to take the participant from iron smelting and blacksmithing to fine knife making.

"One of our classes this year was a combination of woodworking and metalworking," explains Carol Adams, Tunnel Mill Crafts. "Participants made a wooden chest, starting with rough boards and metal hardware they forged and hammered out themselves. We had eight students and three instructors here for 12 days."

One of the instructors was Tom Latané. He has taught a variety of classes at Tunnel Mill, including a 3-day class in intricate

lockmaking. This time, lockmaking was just one aspect of the 12-day class.

At his Pepin, Wis., workshop, Latané uses traditional tools and techniques to forge locks, hardware, tools and candle fixtures. The artist-blacksmith is also a skilled woodworker.

He and fellow instructor Paul Nyborg split logs by hand to make sections, which they hewed out to form crude boards before turning them over to the class.

"Students used a hewing hatchet where necessary and planed the boards smooth," says Latané. "We showed them how to process the two end pieces, which are the smallest pieces, and they constructed the chests around them with more boards they processed themselves, including a thick piece they rounded for the top of the chest."

Latané, Nyborg and Derek Olson led the intensive class. Olson was the lead

woodworking instructor, while Nyborg led hinge, hasp and nail forging. Latané taught forging locks.

Latané notes that the students were not beginning crafters. "All had experience with either wood or metal and some with both," he says. "One young woman was a woodworker but had never handled hot metal before, and she really got into it."

Although the class was designed as two 5-day classes with a weekend in the middle, work on the chests proceeded into the night and through the weekend. Three days were scheduled for woodworking, two for hardware forging and making and five days for forging lock components.

"We knew the woodworking could not be finished in three days," says Latané. "We planned to work on it evenings after daytime forging sessions."

Students and instructors worked on their chests throughout the day and into the evenings. One of the things Latané appreciates about Tunnel Mill is that students and instructors can stay on-site and share meals.

The property hosts a dormitory-style room that sleeps up to eight guests and a private room for two. It's equipped with restrooms and showers. The old mill is where students gather to relax and share meals. Over the years, other buildings have been added, including one for "Not Hot Metal Working."

"When we bought the old mill, it was pretty dilapidated," says Adams. It had sat empty since the 1930s, and the building had

been used as a barn. We did quite a little restoration."

John Adams had a welding business in nearby Rochester, Minn., and had become interested in blacksmithing. Offering classes in the craft gave him a chance to learn from experts without traveling to other states. Instead, they came to him. He set up a complete blacksmith shop.

Costs vary by the class, materials used and the length of the course. A 3-day quilting retreat includes five meals, snacks and light beverages with dorm-style housing for \$175. A 2 1/2-day iron smelt has a price of \$275. Room and board (six meals) is an additional \$75. A two-day tinsmithing class that includes lunches costs \$275, while a 3-day Damascus knife with handle-making class costs \$450 with materials. The 12-day chest-making class was priced at a little over \$1,000, including materials fees.

For details and photos of the chest-making class, visit Tom Latané's Facebook page. He has posted dozens of photos with explanations of what the class members and instructors were doing.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Tunnel Mill Crafts, 28036 County Road 1, Spring Valley, Minn. 55975 (ph 507-289-4189; www.tunnelmillcrafts.com) or T. & C. Latané, 412 2nd St., Pepin, Wis. 54759 (ph 715-442-2419; tclataneg@gmail.com; https://www.spaco.org/latane/TCLatane.htm; Facebook: Thomas Latané).

## Chicken Manure Improves Soil Health

Chicken Doo, a product of Soil Production Solutions in Cassopolis, Mich., is a high-quality, poultry-derived fertilizer made from litter available throughout Southwest Michigan and Northern Indiana.

"Chicken litter is renewable, sustainable, and has almost no carbon footprint," says company spokesperson Nick Dussel. "It adds organic matter to the soil, along with the things farmers want in synthetic fertilizers: NPK, calcium, magnesium, the list goes on. And did I mention that it's organic and half the cost of synthetic fertilizers?"

The delivery company got off the ground two years ago. "We'd been in the organic fertilizer business for a few years prior, but more on the application side of things," Dussel says. "Then we decided to put an ad in the Farmer's Exchange and advertise for buying chicken litter. From there, it's been a whirlwind of late nights and early mornings."

Chicken Doo is a product that rewards pickiness. "Litter has gotten a bad rap because most people selling and applying it just get whatever chicken manure they can get their hands on," Dussel says. He shares that boiler and turkey barns often bed the birds with sawdust, diluting the litter's nutrients as it breaks down. "But in layer barns, the chickens are not bedded with sawdust or other types of bedding. We have good, local sources of layer barn litter and take the time to drive to every barn to get samples for analytical purposes."

Soil Production Solutions has invested in its own equipment to keep costs low. "That's allowed us to halve trucking costs compared to working with delivery companies," he says. "Owning the equipment has increased sales and taken away logistics headaches. It's a



straightforward application process. We have three spreader trucks and generally apply one to two tons per acre."

The challenge remains to get customers to understand that chicken litter is more than just NPK. "Farmers should put on litter yearly to boost biology and micronutrient levels and build organic matter in their soil. Getting everyone educated is a major part of what we strive to do. With sky-high input costs of everything and low commodity prices, spending money on the right products for your soil is imperative."

Pricing depends on location, though the team reports that Chicken Doo saves growers about 50 percent over synthetic fertilizers with the same nutrients. Their standard delivery radius is about 100 miles. "Saying that, we've found that there are a lot of farmers that would love to use the product and just haven't had a good source," says Dussel. "If we can get the numbers to work, we'll virtually go anywhere. We welcome growers, large or small. Find us on Facebook and Instagram at Soil Production Solutions."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Nick Dussel, Soil Production Solutions (ph 269-228-1711; nick@soilproduction.com).



**Kesteloot runs a cottage business bringing several farm animals, including Froggy, her all-white pony disguised as a unicorn, to kids' events and fairs.**

## Mobile Petting Zoo Is A Thriving Business

Jessica Kesteloot of Cottonwood, Minn., has mastered the formula for bringing joy and delight to "kids of all ages." She operates Jessica's Family Farm, a traveling petting zoo with her family of miniature farm animals.

After working weekdays as a food researcher, she spends most weekends from May to October traveling to events in Minnesota and South Dakota, showing off her family of miniature, dwarf and small-breed animals.

Her traveling zoo includes a 30-year-old miniature horse named Froggy, a cow named Pitt Squeak, and a donkey named Oliver. An assortment of goats, sheep, ducks, rabbits and a Kunekune pig also belong to her animal clan.

She hauls the animals in a customized 3-horse trailer pulled by a 3/4-ton 2004 Dodge diesel truck, with husband-built panels for containing the animals at events. The panels conveniently attach to the exterior of the trailer during transport. The trailer has living quarters in case she stays overnight at an event site.

Jessica's 9-year-old son and 6-year-old daughter often accompany her, helping with setup and talking about the animals. Her artist sister offers face painting at some events.

Jessica occasionally makes special appearances with Froggy, her all-white pony,

who shows up in disguise as a unicorn. Jessica transforms the all-white Froggy into Rainbow the Unicorn by painting the pony's hooves glittery gold and attaching a custom-made plastic horn to the pony's halter.

Rainbow the Unicorn is also available as a live prop for custom photography or as a surprise guest at kids' birthday parties.

"Froggy was a gift to me 25 years ago," Kesteloot says, "and he's still in excellent health despite his age. He's lost some of his teeth, but hopefully, he'll be around for many more years."

When not at a weekend engagement, Jessica's animals are housed in a barn and outbuildings at her parents' farm, four miles from her home. She feeds them and performs other chores daily. For more details about her programs, visit her Facebook page (Jessica's Family Farm LLC). Rates for events start at \$250.

"I had no idea the opportunities for 'agritainment' with my animals," Jessica says. "Now they're not just my expensive pets, but they bring joy to so many others and pay their own way."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jessica's Family Farm, Cottonwood, Minn. (ph 507-401-1807; jessicalouwagie@yahoo.com).