Librarian hammers new hobby out of old craft

By MARILYN HUDSON
Advocate correspondent

LAFAYETTE — Every weekend Charles "Chuck" Hamsa sheds the visage of a mild-mannered librarian and becomes a 19th-century village blacksmith hammering away at lumps of smoldering metal.

A collection development bibliographer at the University of Southwestern Louisiana's Dupre Library, Hamsa trades his card files and books for a forge and anvil at the Acadian Village to demonstrate the craft of his ancestors.

"My father was an orthopedic surgeon," he says, "but several generations of blacksmiths provided the economic base."

Two years ago, with no knowledge of the craft, Hamsa decided to become a blacksmith.

"I learned by reading a lot of books and practicing," he says.

Now he hammers out products on the anvil, to be sold at the Acadian Village country store or for his personal use.

Hamsa makes cooking utensils, musical triangles, hanging implements, fire irons and iron-forged wagon wheels. He said metal can be forged only after exposure to a fiery mass created by converting coal into coke through intense heating.

"There's nothing like hot iron in the sense of making something," the 6-foot, 220-pound blacksmith said. "I like it because I enjoy working with iron and steel, and it gives me a change of pace from the library."

"On Sundays, I beat everyone to death on the anvil, but on Mondays I go to the library and everyone is my best friend," Hamsa said.

Hamsa came to Lafayette from Omaha, Neb., some 20 years ago with his wife, Sara. He says he walked into the Dupre Library and asked if there was a job opening.

"I was told yes, and I said I'd take it. They gave it to me."

Hamsa wanted to show gratitude to the community by volunteering at the Acadian Village.

The history buff was president of the Civilian Club when members erected the first building on the site.

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