

CHESTNUT PARK REAL ESTATE LIMITED, BROKERAGE

INVEST IN STYLE

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Forging Ahead The Smithy Blends Tradition and Technology

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL McPHERAN

Once as ubiquitous as the community general store, the role of the blacksmith's shop has now been largely relegated to history textbooks.

Such is not the case in the small community of Glen Orchard, Muskoka, where Ryan Church still plies the same trade as his grandfather Ted did when he opened the Smithy in 1945.

"He was literally the village blacksmith," says Ryan. "Most of his work was fixing tools or things people needed around the farm but it grew and changed over the years."

The products created by Ryan and fellow blacksmith Christopher Hodgkinson these days now run the gamut from delicately detailed metal work to durable and functional wrought iron works.

The shop can trace its roots back to the Second World War when Ted was working at the steel mills in Hamilton. Following the war, he moved to the Muskoka area and started up his blacksmith shop just metres away from the current location.

While the creations were strictly functional at first, as Muskoka grew to be an increasingly popular tourist destination much of the work became more decorative and suited to the needs of the area's cottagers.

All of Ted's three sons would eventually enter blacksmithing but it was Ryan's father Tom who took over the family business in the 1970s. Ryan's sister Kathy Foreman helped with the business for many years and took over when her father passed away in 2001. That was also around the time Ryan decided to get involved in the business.

"The family connection was definitely a big draw for me but when I was younger my father never pushed me into it. He always told me I can do whatever I want to do," says Ryan.

Sadly, Kathy passed away last winter of cancer and Ryan has done his best to try and take over her role as well as blacksmithing.



The designs created by Ryan Church and Christopher

Hodgkinson at the Smithy run the gamut from delicately detailed metal work to durable and functional wrought iron works.

The Smithy now specializes in everything from fireplace doors and screens to chandeliers, railings, ornate metal gateways and even dock ladders.

The technology has also improved significantly since the operation began in 1945. Coal-fired forges, which took many hours to heat, have now been replaced by gas and propane versions which can heat the metal much quicker.




Following World War II, Ryan's grandfather moved to Muskoka and started up his blacksmith shop in Glen Orchard.



The Smithy now specializes in everything from fireplace doors and screens to chandeliers, railings, ornate metal gateways and even dock ladders.

Plasma cutters and electric hammers also help to make the work much more efficient and effective. Nonetheless, the work of the blacksmith remains essentially the same as it did originally- metal is heated and manipulated to create new strong and useful products.

With business busier than ever at The Smithy, despite the pandemic, it's safe to assume that the sparks will continue to fly and the sound of metal against metal will continue to ring out in Glen Orchard much as it has for 76 years. 

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