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North Dakota teen girl finds creative outlet in blacksmithing

CAVALIER, N.D. --Like many teen girls, Elva Berg likes to draw and dreams of becoming a fashion designer. Unlike other teens of either gender, she has learned the art of blacksmithing and sells her pieces at shows and festivals.

By Tracy Frank, Forum News Service

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CAVALIER, N.D. -Like many teen girls, Elva Berg likes to draw and dreams of becoming a fashion designer. Unlike other teens of either gender, she has learned the art of blacksmithing and sells her pieces at shows and festivals.

"I like to blacksmith because it's something unique and out of the normal of everyday teenage society," she said. "I don't like to fit into normal teenage society. I like to stay out of the box." The 15-year-old, who lives near Cavalier and is home-schooled, first tried her hand at blacksmithing two years ago. She was watching a blacksmith work at a pioneer show and he asked if she wanted to try it.

"I just fell in love with it," she said. "It just felt right."

"It is definitely different," said Kathy Berg, Elva's mom. "It's not something I would have ever thought of her getting involved in."

Elva learned a lot at pioneer shows. She also experimented on her own. Then last winter she was able to take lessons with Dean Hagen of Hagen Blacksmithing in Maddock, with the help of a grant from the North

Dakota Council on the Arts.

"I can make forks, knives, candle holders, jewelry, anything really," she said. "One of my favorite things to make is a heart made out of a horseshoe. I also like to do jewelry pieces and artistic work, like fancy candle holders."

Blacksmithing comes easily to Elva, she said. Even techniques considered advanced, she said she found to be simple.

"We have been told by a few people that she seems to have a natural gift for it," Kathy said, adding that her daughter has always been artistic and creative.

"I'm really glad she's finding something that she enjoys doing," she said.

One of Elva's favorite creations is a triple cross made of nails she donated to Big Pembina Lutheran Church in rural Langdon.

"Our family has a lot of history in that church, and about a year or two ago the original church burned down, and just as a symbol of our family's past, I wanted to donate something to the new church," she said.

When people see her working, Elva said most don't realize she's a teenager.

"I think it's important that people step out of everyday life and try something new," she said.