

Sykes has his own distinct style he calls 'organic'

• from FLAME on DAY 2

don't do it again," he said, showing off arms only slightly scarred by scorch marks.

At its basic level, a blacksmith heats up iron in order to stretch, spin or mold it in a new way.

"It's like stiff plasticine. It's actually quite nice to work as long as you remember you have to use tools," said Mr. Sykes.

"Strike when the iron's hot. That's where that saying came from."

And if the tools aren't there, he makes them.

"Blacksmiths are notorious for making their own tools because you're always doing something different," he said.

His unusual career was launched after a college course in gold and silver smithing led indirectly to a blacksmith apprenticeship with

famous former Newmarket smithy David Norrie.

He has also acquired farrier and welding papers, and will teach smithing at a cost of about \$100 a day for basic lessons.

Since setting up his Moffat shop in the mid-1990s, Mr. Sykes has been embracing the ephemeral joys of artistic blacksmithing.

Today he makes everything from custom designed coffee tables and candlestick holders to arbours, gates, chandeliers, door handles, hinges and brackets.

From his years as a wheelwright at the former Halton Agricultural Museum (now Country Heritage Park), he mastered the art of restoring wagons and carriages.

And he does commercial projects, including

"I have my own style. It's organic," he said. "With nature, if you don't do them right, it doesn't look right. You've got to put them together like the real thing."

DAVID SYKES

Milton's banner brackets, which can be found holding up the names of various sponsors and touting upcoming events on Main Street.

His own designs are often festooned with sensitively-crafted leaves, vines and grape clusters.

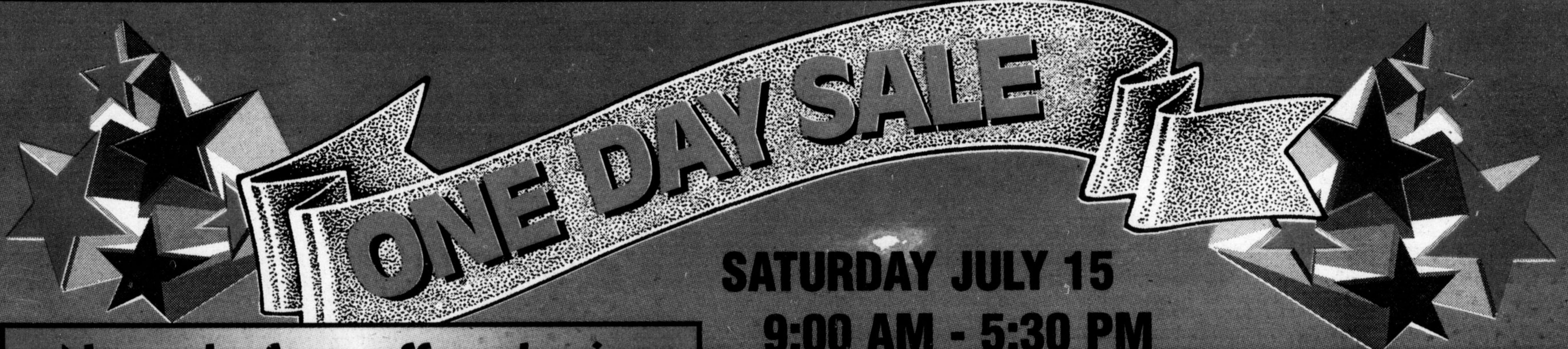
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But with the trade all but lost to dust-ridden history tomes, the future of smithing is uncertain.

Money is the cause. Apprenticeship can run up to seven years, during which cash is scarce. Given that, how many youths will opt to follow in the footsteps of the village blacksmith?

"It's an artistic thing. It takes a lot of suffering to get out there and make some money," said Mr. Sykes.

Visit his website at starpages.com/village-blacksmith. Or call the shop at 854-0516.



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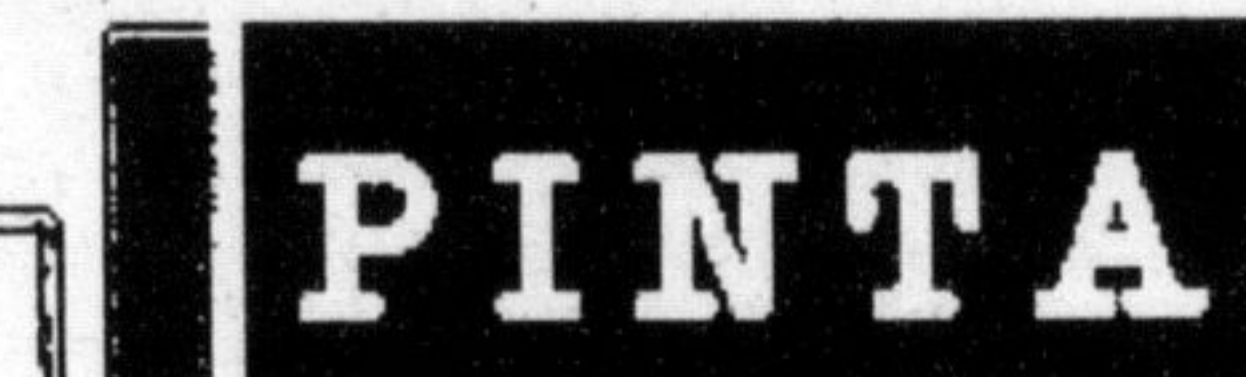

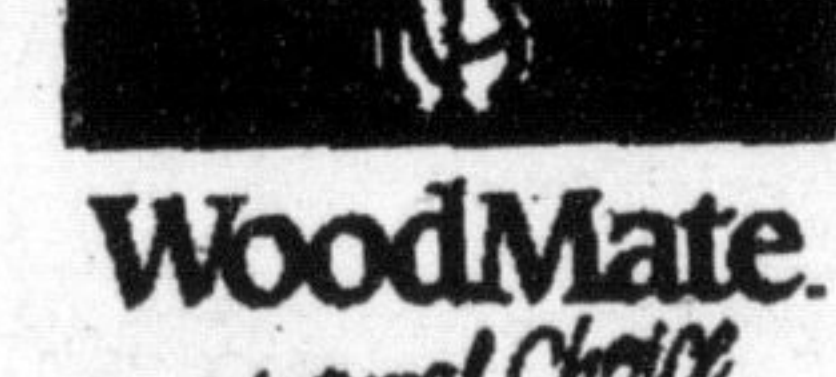

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