



This month's cover knife is a vest pocket bowie made of 1095 and L6 Damascus steel. It was created by John B. Hege, our featured knifemaker. See page 5 for more information on John.

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## NEWS, ARTICLES, CLASSIFIEDS

This is **YOUR** newsletter. To make it the best it can be, we need your help. If you have shared information at a workshop, or if you have certain **tips you can offer** on any aspect of the making of knives, please send these in for inclusion. If you have an **idea for an article**, or would like to read info on something, please let us know so that we can try to work it out. We are also interested in offering a **classified section** so that you can buy, sell, or trade knife-making tools and materials. Send all info to the president or the editor via email.

## ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION AND OUR GUILD

*Billets and Blades* is the official publication of the North Carolina Custom Knifemakers Guild. It is compiled and published in four issues annually with two additional special publication dates possible each year.

The North Carolina Custom Knifemakers Guild was formed to meet the needs of the growing body of custom knifemakers in the southeastern United States. This purpose of this newsletter is to serve as a medium of exchange for the members of the NCKKG.

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Knifemaking and related endeavors are inherently dangerous crafts or occupations. The material contained in this newsletter is for information only and is not intended for private instruction. Therefore, the North Carolina Custom Knifemakers Guild and its officers and editors specifically disclaim any and all responsibility for damage or injury that may occur as a result of the use of any information that is contained in this newsletter.

### Advertising Policy:

The NCKKG accepts no paid advertising as a matter of policy. From time to time, advertisements may appear that are deemed by the officers to be in the best interest of the Guild. Space for advertisements is offered free to Guild members who wish to promote a service or offer specific items for sale. The officers and editor reserve the right to edit advertisements for brevity.

Members, please submit ads to either the president or the editor at the addresses shown at right.

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**A NOTE FROM BILL BISHER**

Our January meeting was a great success! We had roughly 30 people in attendance, and if I'm not mistaken, we gained four or five new members. They are Joel Sandifer, Mark Carey, Curtis Iovito, Bobby Morris, and Eddie Swing. The Guild welcomes you, and we hope we live up to your expectations.

The demos in January were new and very informative. John Hege gave a demo on wire inlays, and as usual he did a top notch job. This was John's second demo for the guild, and you would have thought he was an old hand at doing demos.

The second demonstration was by Cap Hayes and Alan Folts. Alan showed his line of colored titanium chopsticks. How does this relate to knife-making? Well, electrolysis of course! Knife-makers using titanium for bolsters, liners, and other parts can add color to their work using this method. Alan has added chopsticks to his own knife-making line and uses this method to give them vibrant colors. He and Cap were very detailed in how they preformed the operation. Alan even gave Cory's daughter a chance at the process. He and Cap both use this process on their folders.

The last demonstration was given by Philip Jones who showed us how to tie a Turks Head knot, which could be

used as a decorative finish on a handle, such as a pommel or bolster. Great demonstrations were given by all!

Now, to a more serious note: DUES. I received the current paid list and was very surprised to see that a lot of members have not paid their dues. As all members know, **yearly dues are to be paid at the October meeting.** We are listing here the members who, according to our records, have paid. Please check for your name. If you don't see it, pay your dues now, or if you think you've paid, please contact Tony Kelly right away. Only those members who have paid will receive the next newsletter. If you haven't paid, you will be dropped from the mailing list.

Also, we hope to have brochures by the July meeting. If you want your name listed, please get current on your dues.

Do you know someone that has an interest in knife-making? If so, invite them to one of our meetings. The April meeting will be held on the 25<sup>th</sup> at M.C.C. If I'm not mistaken, our Vice President and one Board member will be up for election. Make your voice heard; be there to vote! I will be voting by proxy.

**PAID MEMBERS AT THIS TIME**

- Tom Beverly
- William Bisher
- Mark Carey
- Travis Daniel
- Jim Decoster
- David Diggs
- Ronald Fisher
- Robert Ham
- John Hege
- Curtis Iovito
- Tommy Johnson
- Frank Joyce
- Guy Junkins
- Tony Kelly
- Robert Knight
- Gib Kohr
- Aubrey McDonald
- Tommy McNabb
- Arthur McNeil
- William Morris
- Paul Ondic
- Charles Ostendorf
- Cory Owens
- Murphy Ragsdale
- Bruce Ryan
- Joel Sandifer
- Tim Scholl
- Danks Seel
- Andy Sharpe
- Harland Simmons
- Johnnie Sorrell
- Chuck Staples
- Russell Sutton
- Eddie Swing
- David Vail
- Wayne Whitley

**UPCOMING GUILD MEETING**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 25**

at

**MONTGOMERY COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**Director's Meeting at 9:00 AM**

**Demos begin at 9:30 AM and include**

Filet Sheath (vinyl) by Murphy Ragsdale

Braiding by Eric Luther (new member)

Basic Blade Forging by Tim Scholl

Tomahawks by John Hege

**Also Scheduled:**

Iron in the Hat

Show and Tell—Bring a Jig!

**MEETING PLANNED FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN ENGRAVING**

There will be an Engravers Meeting at Ken Hurst's place in Robbinsville, NC on the first weekend in May.

He is inviting all knifemakers and anyone interested in engraving. For more information, contact Ken at [kenhurst@suddenlink.net](mailto:kenhurst@suddenlink.net) or 1-910-221-5288.

He would like to have a head count before the meeting, so please let him know if you plan to attend.



## Minutes of the N.C.C.K.G. General Business Meeting: Jan. 31, 2009

Submitted by Tommy Johnson, Guild Secretary

President Bill Bisher opened the Jan. 31, 2009 General Business meeting. The old news discussed included:

- The status of the Guild brochures was asked, and it was not known.
- The N.C.C.K.G. 2009 Makers Guide is ready and available at [www.blurb.com](http://www.blurb.com).
- Everyone needs to pay their dues by Oct. 31 of each year, or they will be removed from the members list.

New business was:

- The next meeting will be April 25 at MCC, and plans are to hold all meetings at MCC.
- The winner of the Member's Scholarship was Tommy Johnson. Anyone who wins a scholarship must provide a certificate of completion and a receipt in order to be reimbursed. He or she also must provide a demonstration or an article for the newsletter on the class attended.
- New member Paul Ondic has paid his dues but didn't provide contact information. If anyone knows that info, please provide it to Carol Kelly.
- Rebecca Dresser, wife of member John Hege, has expressed an interest in being Editor of our newsletter, and this is her first issue. Please show her support by providing articles and/or photos.
- The process for having your knives juried to become a full voting member was explained, and it was announced that Arthur McNeil and Murphy Ragsdale had just had their knives juried and passed. Congratulations to both of them!

Visitors were asked for their comments about our meeting. Profile sheets were handed out and are included in this newsletter on page 9. Please fill one out if you have not already done so and return it to Bill Bisher. ABS books were available for sale at the meeting. The meeting was adjourned.



John Hege demonstrates silver wire inlay to members



Cory's daughter watches the demos with much interest



Philip Jones begins a Turks Head knot

## MEET JOHN HEGE

John has always been a metals guy. He began learning about cars as a young teenager, eventually making auto mechanics his profession for many years. During that time he specialized in European makes and models. John has strong preferences about cars, and of course, prefers older models over the newer, computer-filled versions. Old cars and motorcycles, as John says, "have soul." He wrote a book, *The Wankel Rotary Engine*, which was published by McFarland and Company, in 2002. Currently, he is working on other writing projects related to his knowledge of the automotive industry.

In 2001, John ventured into a blacksmithing meeting in Winston-Salem, NC to learn about this trade which he hoped to make his new profession. As fate would have it, he soon met Tommy McNabb, a renowned knife-maker, and Tommy took John under his wing and began teaching him about the art of knife-making. Tommy is a tough teacher, never cutting John any slack, but all of those hard-as-steel lessons have paid off!

After those early years, John began making knives in his own shop in Stokes County, NC in 2004, but he still visits and works with Tommy on occasion, when it's time to make Damascus steel or just to enjoy his company.

Tommy introduced John to the guild, which John joined in 2006, and to Montgomery Community College's courses in knife-making. John took the intensive engraving course in 2007.

"I'm overwhelmed by the talent that's out there," John says of the other guild members. "Every time I see the other members' work spread out, I want to hide mine. The knives of Tim Scholl completely blow me away."

He says he hasn't made up his mind about his preferred method or style because there is still so much to learn. But he does particularly like "period" knives or knives that reproduce classic styles. "One of the really cool things about knife-making, though, is that the possibilities are endless."

"Just to make things interesting, I asked my wife, Rebecca, to design some knives. She came up with three designs that I really like and I wouldn't have dreamed them up myself. They will be challenging though. When I design one for myself, I might avoid a feature that makes it too hard for me to do, but she doesn't care about that."

Rebecca also designed and maintains John's website, which you can see at [www.jbhegecustomknives.com](http://www.jbhegecustomknives.com).

John does everything in his shop until he gets in a jam; then he goes to see Tommy who lives about half an hour away. "Sometimes he looks at my problems and says, 'You know I taught you better than that.' Then he'll pull out a tool or jig designed specifically for my problem."

John's favorite part of knife-making is finishing them. He admits that he doesn't have quite enough control over the process to completely know how they'll turn out, so "every new knife is still a surprise."



John Hege,  
Knifemaker and Guild Member



Two of John Hege's knives:  
The top photo is a boot dagger he made for his wife; the bottom photo is a small trout knife.



John at work in his shop, a restored tobacco barn, with son Caleb

# Silver Wire Inlay

by John Hege

Silver wire inlay has been around for a long time as a method for dressing up weapons and tools or anything else that someone thinks is important enough to get a little embellishment. Early examples can be found on the stocks of antique flintlock rifles and on the wooden handles of knives and tomahawks. I particularly like it on "period" pieces as it gives them an antique and collectable look.

While there are plenty of knifemakers doing excellent silver wire work and just as many methods, the two names that instantly come to mind for me are Bill Moran and Joe Keesler. The examples I've seen of Bill Moran's work have a beautiful understatement to them using simple but elegant scrollwork and plant-like motifs. Joe Keesler's work is more complex and intricate. Both are superbly executed and show careful attention to detail. Their designs are never overdone, but look perfectly natural on the piece where they are crafted.

I was fortunate to attend Jim Batson's Hammer In last spring in Alabama. There I sat in on two demonstrations by Keesler of silver wire work. I took a few notes and came home and tried it myself. Like so many crafts, it's not hard to begin and do some simple inlays, but I expect it to take quite a long time to develop the skill to do work on the level of Keesler or Moran. I intend to keep at it. And Travis asked me to share what I've learned so far with the guild.

To begin with, it was just good timing that Blade Magazine published a two part article by Keesler on silver wire. They can be found in the January and February 2009 editions. If you want to try silver wire, you should pick up the back issues if you can. In two parts Joe spells out the tools, materials and process to get a beginner started.

Among the tools listed, most are fairly low in cost and easily found in any good tool suppliers catalog except the engraver's vise. But for a beginner, I don't think the engraver's vise is essential; I did my first two wire projects without using one. I'm sure it can be helpful, but they're expensive to buy. Keesler describes how to make an inexpensive one in part one of his articles, but you can get to that later.

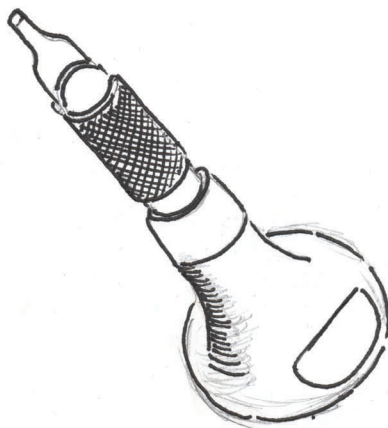
Essential is a good pair of flush cutters, needle nose pliers, and scrolling pliers. Flush cutters are side cutters with one side ground flat to make a cut without leaving a dimpled end on the wire. Scrolling pliers are like needle nose pliers but with conical tips. They're good for winding the wire up into a spiral. It's best to go ahead and spend the money to get good quality tools here because the work you will be doing is fine enough that you will quickly notice the difference. You will also need a small, flat hammer to tap the wire in. Rio Grande is a good source for any of these tools.

The tools for cutting into the wood are fashioned from exacto knife parts and wooden engraver's handles. The mushroom shaped engraver's handles are also available from Rio Grande or other engraver supply stores. They are cheap and useful, so order more than you need. Take a number 1 exacto handle and cut it off about an inch and a half from the knurled nut. Drill an engraver handle down the center with a 5/16 drill and push the exacto handle into the graver handle, securing it with epoxy. This will produce a useful holder for a variety of blade shapes. If you can, make three or more of these holders so you don't have to switch blades back and forth.

A simpler approach is to hammer the blades directly into the graver handles. This makes a slightly shorter tool that some people may prefer.

Tap a short piece of 1/8 brass rod into another graver handle and shape the end into a blunt screwdriver shape. This will be your push stick for straightening up sections of wire after they have been installed.

Illustration 1: Graver Handle

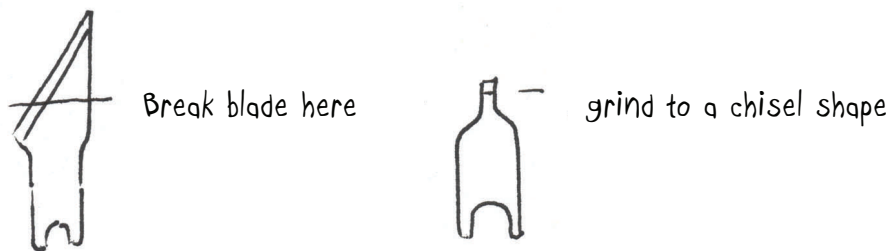


Wooden engraver handle  
with exacto knife and  
modified blade installed



Exacto doesn't sell the shape of blades that you need, so you have to make them. I used standard exacto blades, broken off about halfway down and sharpened to a chisel point. You'll need a chisel about 1/16, 3/32, and 1/8 inches wide to do the average job.

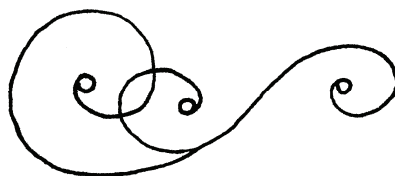
Illustration 2



The wire for inlay is available in a variety of sizes and materials. Brass wire has also been popular and nickel silver wire is a good substitute for the beginner over silver because it's less expensive. The wire is a flat strip, usually about .050 inches wide. Thickness can vary from about .008 to .013 inches depending on the boldness of the line desired.

It's wise to start on a piece of scrap wood. Maple and Walnut work well, I have yet to try any other. Draw out a simple scroll design. The one shown below is good for beginning because it's simple, but contains several design elements that are important to master. Note the pins at the end of each scroll, the one branch and two points where one line crosses another.

Illustration 3: Simple Scroll



Start with the pins or "dots". They are simply metal rod cut off to a point and gently hammered into a pre-drilled hole. Point the rod on the grinder and cut the end off about 1/8 inch. You can flatten the top on the grinder now, or install it in the wood and file off the nib left by the cutters afterward. Either way, install the dots first because if you try to cut a line too close to an unfilled hole the wood will chip and cave in.

Once the dots are in place, start cutting your lines. Beginning right at the dot, cut along the main line by pushing your homemade blade straight down into the wood in a series of short straight cuts. Use the narrowest blade to follow the tighter scrolls right up to the wider blade for the straighter lines. Each cut is started with the side of the blade just in the groove from the last cut. Be sure the cut is clean, straight down, and deep enough to take the wire. Do not remove any material! Just cut into the wood wide enough to insert the wire. You can close the groove back up afterward by "raising the grain" as long as no material was removed.

As you move along the pattern you may find your cut drifting off of the line. If this happens, don't try to correct it all at once. A slightly wider curve or scroll may not be noticeable, but a kink in the line certainly will.

Once you have the first groove cut, it's time to install the wire. Pull the wire between your fingers and a piece of coarse sandpaper to roughen up the sides. Then insert the wire starting at the dot and gently tap it in with the hammer. Don't drive it all the way in at this point, there may be other work to do yet. Install the wire about 3/4 of the way in leaving about .020 above the surface of your work. After the scroll is installed, it may be necessary to straighten some sections. Using the push stick that you made earlier, gently bend any flattened or misshapen sections back up and into line and then tap the wire in fully.

After the major lines are done, start on one of the branches. Here's where it gets tricky. Your work will look best if there is a smooth transition off of the main line. This can be done by tapering the wire with a file or sandpaper. Enlarge the groove a bit along the main scroll for a short distance and lay the tapered wire in alongside the main wire long enough to make it look like it's growing out of the first. This takes a lot of practice, you'll do it wrong a few times before you'll do it right.

The next element to master in the practice scroll is the crossover. A point where one scroll crosses another is done with several short pieces of wire and the work gets pretty fine. You will especially appreciate a good pair of flush

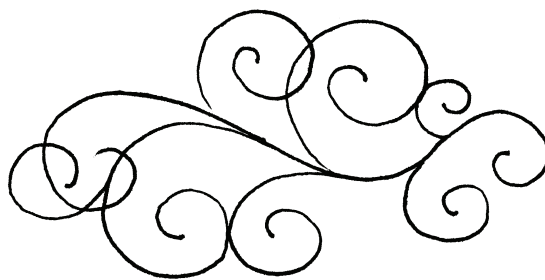
cutters here when you're cutting the tiny pieces to the length to just fit the short groove. The important thing is to make sure your cuts line up where the line is broken.

Sometimes, when making one cut close to another a small triangular chunk of wood may pop out. Don't panic! Just try to find the piece, you may be able to re-install it with a little bit of glue.

When the wire has all been installed its time to close up the gap by raising the grain. I'd never heard of the process before but apparently it's a technique well known among wood workers. Lay a wet cloth or paper towel on the wood and apply heat with a wide soldering iron. Drag the iron gently along the sides of the groove, you should hear the hiss as the water turns into steam. The steam forced into the wood causes the wood grain to swell back into the cut and any reasonable gap between the wood and the wire will close up. When the wood dries, dress the wire with a single cut file to clean up the work. Work gently and try to file along the length of the line. Getting hasty now might pull the wire out of the groove. Then sand the handle with a 120 and a 220 grit woodworkers paper. Using an automotive type wet or dry paper will result in a black powder building up around the wire edges, it doesn't look good. Repeating the raising of the grain and sanding three times should do the trick

I suggest tackling a more complex pattern before moving on to a knife. Shown below is a pattern that I copied of one of Joe's demo blocks. It took me about two and a half hours to lay this pattern after I'd done two of the simple scrolls.

Illustration 4:  
Complex Scroll



I had a couple of simple knives in process while I was practicing on the scrap blocks. One had a maple handle and the other was walnut. Have one or two knives ready to mess with after you've tried a few practice blocks to keep your hand in. Scroll patterns can be found everywhere, The ABS handles and guards book, steel canvas, or other coffee table books that feature rifles and knives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Try tracing the shape of your knife on paper several times and draw a few scrolls on it before committing to a pattern. Joe recommends holding the drawn pattern up to a mirror to check for flaws before cutting into anything. But start simple. It will take a lot of practice before you can execute a complex pattern well. A few well placed lines on a simple handle can go a long way.

Sources for tools and supplies:

**T.B. Hagstoz & Son Inc.**, 709 Sansom St. Philadelphia, PA 19106  
800 922 1006  
Silver wire, jewelry supplies, engraving supplies

**Rio Grande**, PO Box 12277, Albuquerque, NM 87195-0277  
800 545 6566  
Jewelry supplies and tools

**GRS Tools**, PO Box 1153 Dept BL1 Emporia, KS 66801  
800 835 3519  
Engraving tools, design books

Joe Keesler sells a neat little kit to get you started right away. His contact information is in Blade Magazine January '09. I hesitate to print it here because I didn't ask his permission.



As you can see in this issue, we are featuring one knife-maker in each newsletter.  
In order to do this, we need information from you.

We have created the questionnaire below to obtain basic information.  
Some members have already completed the questionnaire and returned it, but many others have not.  
If you have not yet done so, please fill this out legibly and mail it as soon as possible to

Bill Bisher  
1015 Beck Road, Denton, NC 27239

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GUILD QUESTIONNAIRE

(Please don't be chintzy with your answers; we want to get to know you! Use extra paper if you need more space.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone and Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Age/Birthday: \_\_\_\_\_

How did you find out about our Guild? \_\_\_\_\_

Who or what was your major influence when you began knife-making or collecting? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite Knife, Knifemaker(s), etc? \_\_\_\_\_

Preference? Forging or Stock Removal? \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite Steel or Steels? \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite Style or Patterns? \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite Step or Part in Knifemaking? \_\_\_\_\_

Areas of Expertise? \_\_\_\_\_

Is everything done in your shop? Sheaths/Heat Treating, etc? \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliations? \_\_\_\_\_

# 2009 KNIFEMAKING CLASSES

## AT MONTGOMERY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

www.montgomery.cc.nc.us

### Custom Folding Knives with Ed VanHoy

**April 30—May 3, \$315**

Design and craft a custom liner-lock folding knife. The instructor will show the basic principles and methods of construction required. Design, machine work, drilling, tapping, grinding the blade, and finishing will be covered. Each student will complete a knife using both machine shop and common hand tools.

### Grinding Knife Blades with Barry and Phillip Jones

**June 4—7, \$315**

Learn fixed blade design using the basic principles and methods of knife construction, including how to grind and heat treat knife blades, as well as fitting and finishing handles.

### Silver Wire Inlay with Steve Keeslar

**July 17—19, \$240**

Learn the decorative art of inlaying silver wire into wooden gunstocks and knife handles. Students will learn design, layout, and proper tool techniques to make beautiful patterns.

### Basic Knife-making with Travis Daniel

**August 20—23, \$315**

Learn knife-making by designing and making a knife under the guidance of the instructor. Each student will grind, heat, and finish a knife using the stock removal method. This class is for beginners to intermediates who want to perfect their knife-making talents.

### Automatic Folding Knives with Ed VanHoy

**September 10—13, \$315**

Design and craft a spring-loaded folding knife. The course will include basic principles and methods of construction required to make this type of knife. Techniques will include drilling, tapping, grinding, and finishing.

### Forged Scagel with James Batson

**September 24—26, \$315**

Learn the basics of forging and assembling a classic William Scagel style folding knife. Students will learn how to forge the blade and prepare it with a file and grinder for heat treating. Course is designed for all levels.

### The Art of Mokume Gane with Phillip Jones

**October 1—4, \$315**

Learn the ancient Japanese technique of combining various copper-based metals for decoration in knife-making or jewelry-making.

### Basic Damascus Steel Making with Tommy McNabb

**October 16—18, \$240**

This will be an intense class covering Damascus steel, basic and advanced pattern development and finishing. The class will address many aspects of making Damascus steel, including billet preparation, steel combination, and tooling.

## OTHER COURSES OF INTEREST

### Beginning and Intermediate Metal Engraving with Jesse Houser

**August 3—12, \$60 + \$50 supply fee**

This two-week course will focus on drawing and cutting basic and intermediate designs for engraving metals. The class is self-paced, and during the second week, students will work on their own designs and projects.

### Alternative Metal Finishes – Brownells Tech

**August 10 - 14, \$60 + \$50 supply fee**

The purpose of this class is to familiarize students with various alternative finishes other than hot caustic bluing. Instruction and demonstration will be in hot water bluing treatments such as Brownells Classic Rust Blue, Dicropan IM, and Nitre Blue. Students will also be instructed in the setup and use of Zinc and Manganese Parkerizing and in the setup and application of various spray-on finishes. Students will have the opportunity to apply Parkerizing or one of the spray-on finishes to at least one firearm and possibly a second one if time allows.

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM**

Membership/Renewal Fee: \$50 per year

Collector Fee: \$25 per year

Student Fee: \$10 per year

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

New Member: \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal: \_\_\_\_\_

Member Category: Maker \_\_\_\_\_ Collector \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_

Mail form and check to:  
NC Custom Knifemakers Guild  
Attn Tony Kelly  
348 Bell Road  
Kinston, NC 28504

**NCCKG SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM APPLICATION FORM**

All applications are due by December 31 of each year. A drawing will be held by the Board of Directors during the January meeting . If your name is drawn, you will be notified, and it is your responsibility to pay Montgomery Community College for the knife-making class you choose. You must complete the course, send a copy of your certificate to the NCCKG Treasurer, demonstrate your new skill at a Guild meeting or write an article for the Guild newsletter. At that time, the course fee will be refunded to you. Please note that the scholarship covers only the course fee; all other expenses are the responsibility of the student.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Name and Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail form to:  
NC Custom Knifemakers Scholarship Program  
Attn Tony Kelly  
348 Bell Road  
Kinston, NC 28504



Call for YOUR News, Articles, Classified Ads  
List and Descriptions of 2009 Knife-Making Classes at MCC  
Profile Questionnaire

An Up-close Look at Our Featured Knifemaker  
Photos from Recent Guild Meetings  
An Informative Article on Silver Wire Inlay

## LOOK INSIDE FOR....



[www.ncknifeguild.org](http://www.ncknifeguild.org)

Could this man be our next featured knifemaker in an upcoming issue of *Billetts and Blades*? Or could it be YOU? Please look for the Guild Questionnaire on page 9 and fill it out!



SPECIAL  
NOTICE !!!!



P.O. BOX 316  
DANBURY, NC 27016