



Farrier

Master farrier William "Buddy" Leonard has been part of the racetrack life since about 1955. At around age 22, he apprenticed himself to master blacksmith Emory Detray at Magnolia Park (now Jefferson Downs.) He apprenticed for four years shoeing horses and then spent the next forty years or so making his own horseshoes and tools. A native of New Orleans, he traveled the state shoeing horses. Farriers were hired by a racing stable and would follow that stable's horses from track to track. He says that he has "just about shod every type of horse there was," and is an expert on the special corrective shoes needed to keep racehorses sound.

The important role of farriers at the racetrack is reflected in Buddy's stories of how knowledgeable bettors would check on what kind of shoe a horse was wearing before placing their wagers. Mr. Leonard is one of the few remaining traditional blacksmiths who is knowledgeable about corrective shoeing for racehorses and he has created a board with examples of the different shoe types to assist in demonstrations. He also makes other forged items like tools and hinges.

He remarks that farriers in his youth had to serve much longer apprenticeships than young blacksmiths do today. They forged all of their own horseshoes rather than buying ready made shoes like many farriers do today. His necessary tools include his forge, files, and other blacksmithing tools. Mr. Leonard even made some of his early tools.

According to Buddy Leonard, "Blacksmithing has become a lost art and people are interested in bringing it back. Blacksmithing is part of St. Tammany Parish for the horses in the area and also for the horse racing industry. The tool making and working with the forge has become the forgotten art."

Retired since 1987 after a car accident, Buddy Leonard lives with his wife in Covington, Louisiana, but stays busy and active. He was recently awarded a Louisiana Folklife Apprenticeship Grant as a master craftsman to teach the art of blacksmithing to an apprentice. He has demonstrated his skill at the Louisiana Folklife Festival, at the Louisiana Native Crafts Festival, in the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, various school programs, and programs at the Louisiana Nature Center.

Updated March 23,2017 by Natchitoches-NSU Louisiana Folklife Center Staff