

The art of metal



PESCADERO
JEWELERS
TEACH UNIQUE
ART CLASS
TO HIGH-
SCHOOLERS

By Julia Reis

Every May, a storage unit at the back of Pescadero Middle and High School comes alive with the sounds of industry. Over a stretch of several weeks, students concentrate on pieces of stone and metal, chipping and soldering away until their creation matches their vision. At the course's end, they will have collectively created a trove of rings, keychains, earrings and assorted trinkets.

Pescadero High students have been taking advantage of the metal arts class for nearly two decades, ever since Pescadero jeweler Dan Geraci founded the course. Geraci's wife is a teacher at the high school and when he realized it lacked a shop class he felt compelled to act.

"There was no kind of shop class; there used to be," Geraci said, pausing to help a student as she crafted a pewter cup. "The art teacher (at the time) said, 'Would you like to have a short jewel course?' because they had a shop full of tools but no one using them."

Since then, the tools have been put to good use. Geraci teaches the class alongside Pescadero High art teacher Anne Ingraham and fellow jeweler Lynda Bahr, whose work was featured in a New York Times article last year. This is Bahr's

third year teaching alongside Geraci.

"It's really fun," Bahr said. "Whatever you do, you try and encourage the kids and see how they light up and go with it."

Class size varies each year, but the school's small size allows it to stay between nine and 20 students. It meets every weekday morning for two-hour sessions, convening in May and winding down near the end of the school year. It's funded entirely through grants from the South Coast Artists' Alliance and Pescadero Arts and Fun Festival.

Before students use lapidary equipment or pneumatic hammers, they must first learn how to light a torch. Most students haven't had much exposure to the industrial arts, so this first step is significant, Geraci said.

"It helps them feel secure in their environment to understand how things are made," he said. "They don't feel stupid, and there's no language barrier because it's all a practice. There's no lecturing."

Pescadero High student Ari Salgado, who graduated in June, sat at a stool crafting chrysoprase, a green stone, into a rounded shape for a ring. She had already finished work on a pair of leaf-shaped, sterling silver earrings, for which she had to learn how to fold silver and



Ari Salgado, left, a senior, gets help from Lynda Bahr while working on a ring in the metal shop class at Pescadero High School. Crafting the pieces requires detailed work with a variety of tools.





Brendan Boyd-Goodrich, a senior, works on the drill press in the metal shop class at Pescadero High School.

solder on an earring backing.

“I heard it was really fun,” Salgado said, explaining why she joined the course. “Plus, making a ring — who really does that? It’s a small school, so being able to do this is really awesome. Maybe someday, someone wants to do this and didn’t know about it before they were exposed to something new.”

Bahr, standing beside Salgado to advise her about her ring project, added that trial and error comes into play as students learn these new skills.

“They have failures, too, and they learn from them,” Bahr said. “We’ve broken a lot of rocks here too.”

Geraci, who has a degree in industrial arts from San Francisco State University, recalled that he first got involved in the practice

in a shop class in high school and emphasized its value to students then and now.

“In high school, shop and sports kept a lot of guys in school. Now, you’re lucky to have either one,” he said. “It’s an important thing, and this is an easy class to teach because they want to do it. They love this class.”

The course wrapped up in the first week of June, a week before Pescadero High’s school year ended and the Class of 2015 — all 21 of them — received their diplomas. Geraci said that whether any of his students wind up in the world of manufacturing doesn’t matter. The class is still important.

“This was the missing element that belongs in their vocabulary. They’re not all going to Silicon Valley,” he said. **HMB**