

Fairport-East Rochester Post

Local Celtic jeweler gets international attention

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Fairport, N.Y. — The difference between jeweler Stephen Walker and historians who study Celtic jewelry is simple. While they analyze how ancient metal crafts were made, he has a more hands-on approach — something that comes naturally to him.

Walker, who owns Walker Metalsmiths Celtic Jewelry in Fairport, has worked with silver and gold for more than 25 years, studying the intricate artistry of Scottish and Irish craftsmen of old. It's a topic that's interested him since the age of 13, and his curiosity has earned him a spot on the international stage.

In July he will be presenting his research at the Sixth International Conference of Insular Art in York, England. He is one of the few craftsmen presenting, and says having the chance to share his findings with the best and brightest scholars, archeologists and curators in his field is a great honor.

"I'm a craftsman, so I'm glad to be able to rub elbows with these guys," said Walker.

His research focuses on a metal shaping method called chip carving. He proposed that unlike other methods, this allows the craftsman to pour metal directly into a plaster mold. This is different from the wood carving method, through which the artist carves the desired shape onto wood and create a mold that can be used to create a metal piece. Walker says treasures such as the Ardagh Chalice and Tara Brooch made about 1,200 years ago were likely made this way.

His breakthrough came after trying repeatedly to use plaster for metal casting in Celtic designs with excellent results. Many contemporary analysts have not considered this alternative method, which makes Walker's findings significant.

"To me, it's exciting because I'm actually trying to do it," he said.

He will present a slideshow of the step-by-step process for molding and casting medieval jewelry, followed by a period of critique and discussion from the audience. If selected, Walker's written findings will be published with other presenter's essays. Regardless of the outcome, Walker says he enjoys exploring and talking about his passion among others who share the same interest.

"It's been a blast for me."

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