

Entertainment & Life

Topeka metalworks artist opens NOTO makerspace donating classes to veterans

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Five months ago, Ptr Sponseller didn't have a studio space or any concrete plans to leave his job — although he always dreamed of doing so.

Sponseller is a metalworks artist known for his creations and shows around the NOTO Arts and Entertainment District. Fans of his work may know the Russian nesting doll outside Matryoshka Tattoo, or the battle ax and raven inside Norsemen Brewing Co., among many creative pieces adorning Topeka.

So when his longtime friend Nicholas Pinero, founder of The Gilbert Foundation, approached him with a partnership opportunity, Sponseller wasted no time accepting the offer.

On Friday, during the December First Friday Art Walk, Sponseller is opening Clover Gear, a makerspace with a focus on teaching veterans metalworking skills and providing them an outlet for their creativity.

“Together we started this program called The Arc of Hope,” Sponseller said. “Veterans are going to be able to come in and work with me twice a week. ... We’re going to work on some art projects for them to see if they want to be artists or just do some art to work through whatever they’ve got going on in their lives.”

The Gilbert Foundation is a nonprofit bridging the gap between military training and civilian careers. It offers various certifications, such as occupational safety and health administration certifications, a commercial driver's license endorsement and roof inspector certification.

Clover Gear is located at 1001 N.W. Central Ave., just north of the NOTO Arts Center. The space is small, Sponseller admitted, but is still a major improvement over his garage, where he used to work.

Sponseller will showcase a few of his available pieces in the shop, including his largest piece to date: a commissioned manticore. A manticore is a mythological creature similar to a sphinx.

“It’s sometimes kind of hard to keep up with all of them,” he said of his commissioned pieces. “I haven’t found one I haven’t been able to do yet, and it’s kind of fun with different people and all their ideas, asking if I can do this creature or that one.”

When working with veterans, Sponseller said, he hopes they can create two pieces while working with him. One he hopes they will keep, and one could be donated back to the foundation to sell for funding.

“It was important to me for them to have the decision to do what they want with it,” Sponseller said. “Because that’s kind of the whole thing about art. You created it, so you can do what you want with it.”

Also during First Friday, there will be a silent and live auction to benefit The Gilbert Foundation.

Gallery hours for Clover Gear haven’t been finalized, Sponseller said, but updates on the shop are available on his Facebook page, “[Clover Gear reclaimed art by Ptr Sponseller.](#)”

For information about The Arc of Hope workshops, visit thegilbertfoundationinc.org, the Gilbert Foundation [Facebook page](#), or contact Sponseller at Clover Gear.