

# BENCHMARK SPOTLIGHT

(FORMERLY WELDER SHOWCASE)

2022



**STEVE KOST**  
**@DADS357 (METAL HEALTH ARTWORK)**

#WELDERSHOWCASE #BENCHMARKSPOTLIGHT

## This weeks #BENCHMARKSPOTLIGHT is...



**Name:** Steve Kost

**Business Name:**

Metal Health Artwork

**Location:** Chicago, IL

**Website:** [www.stevekost.com](http://www.stevekost.com)

**Instagram:** @metalhealthartwork

**facebook:** Metal Health Artwork

**YouTube:** Metal Health Artwork

**Specialties:** My specialty is Scrap Metal Art from discarded metals

**Tell us about yourself - what inspired you to get into your trade? And how long?**

I have been an Ironworker in Chicago for 25 years and I enjoy the camaraderie and sense of brotherhood, trust and teamwork while working in dangerous situations high above the city. After graduating high school six months early, I shipped off to Navy bootcamp to become a Hull Technician (Welder and Firefighter). I was a scrawny kid weighing under 120 pounds and only 17 years old when I stepped off the bus at Great Lakes Naval Base. I did plenty of push-ups and bodyweight exercises to pack on pounds and muscle. I became a section leader for my company while my high school classmates were still going to school. After completing "A" School in Philadelphia with top honors I earned my way into a land based combat construction battalion The Navy Seabees! I think it was the greatest decision of my young life learning construction, blueprint reading, welding, heavy equipment repair and all sorts of weapons training and I deployed overseas working on runways, schools and airports in Spain, Greece, Guam, Saipan and was among the first deployed to Mogadishu, Somalia. Where I had some hard to forget experiences that stayed with me my whole life. In 1995 I was out of the Navy and started my exciting career as a union ironworker in Chicago utilizing the construction skills I learned during my time in the military.



### What keeps you motivated throughout the day?

Using the welding skills I learned as an ironworker I began assembling metal sculptures from discarded metals in 2015. It helped a lot to have a positive outlet at a time in my life when I was miserable and my PTSD was making things worse with nightmares and sleeplessness... I began taking apart typewriters and sewing machines whenever I could not sleep. I bought a 110 stick welder and began creating art from the interesting pieces I harvested from the machinery. Luckily for me I had friends and family encouraging me to share my work in public. I had my first art show in 2018 and since then I have gotten messages and emails from other veterans that were inspired by my artwork and appreciate me speaking out about mental health and PTSD. What really keeps me going every day is knowing that some of the men I served with and many other people see my work and are inspired to find healing in art and music. In just seven years my Mental Health Artwork has taken me all the way to The Library of Congress where I had an exhibition this June and I had an opportunity to speak about my story and my struggles to find a healthy outlet for PTSD.

### What is your favorite shop tool and why?

My favorite shop tool is the greatest motivational tool - my shop radio! Music helps me to calm down and focus on my artwork. I also play drums in a rock band: The Seventh Sons, so I am playing drums in my mind while listening to music. Most of my scrap metal art is made with two simple tools: a four and a half inch angle grinder and my 110v stick welder. I love the simple approach to Creativity.





**What's your favorite piece that you've worked on?**

My favorite piece is called "Achilles Heel" a life-sized metal sculpture made from old tools, bolts, springs and a horseshoe....modelled after my own lower leg!

**If you could have any job as it relates to question 1 what would it be and what would you do with that?**

My dream job would be installing large scale public art installations in major cities. My inspiration is Alexander Calder and I could see myself erecting a bolted structural steel monument with a team of skilled ironworkers if I was given the opportunity. So far I worked with a team of local artists to create an upcycled metal sign for the visitors center at the famous Old Joliet Prison, and I installed a pair of steampunk angel wings for The Law Office Pub in the town of Yorkville, Illinois. I also had my art featured in the Illinois State Museum.

**What BA product is your favorite and why?**

My favorite Benchmark Abrasives product is the 4.5" T1 Premium Cut Off Wheel. I do not use a bandsaw or torch in my work, and I like to keep the components I use in their whole recognizable forms, so a durable long lasting cutoff wheel makes my work much easier!

**What BA product surprised you in terms of quality - what about it set it apart from the competition?**

I was surprised by the longevity of the 4.5" Flap Discs I purchased from Benchmark Abrasives. I use all sorts of old discarded materials in my art, so a hard working long lasting flap disc can get through all of the surface rust and paint to prepare for a good weld. I have used grinding discs and flap discs on job sites for years and the T29 angled face discs are my absolute favorites.

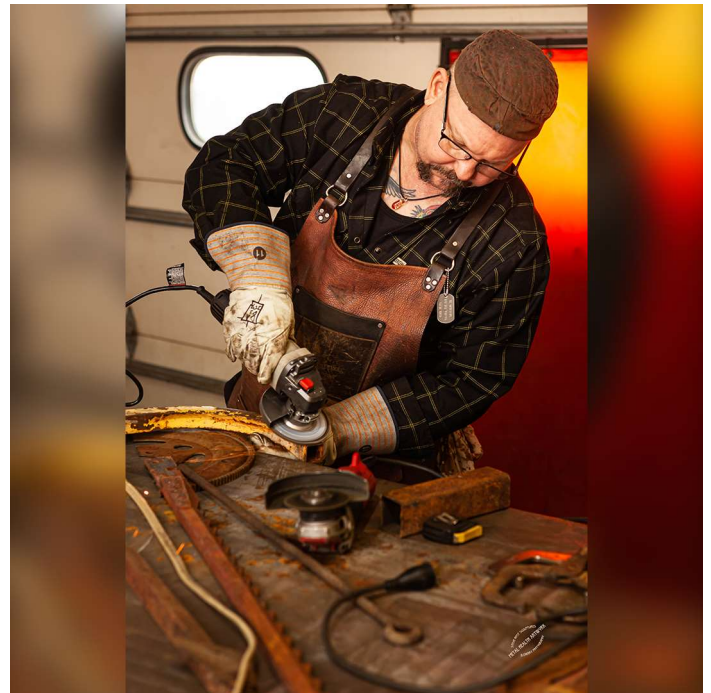
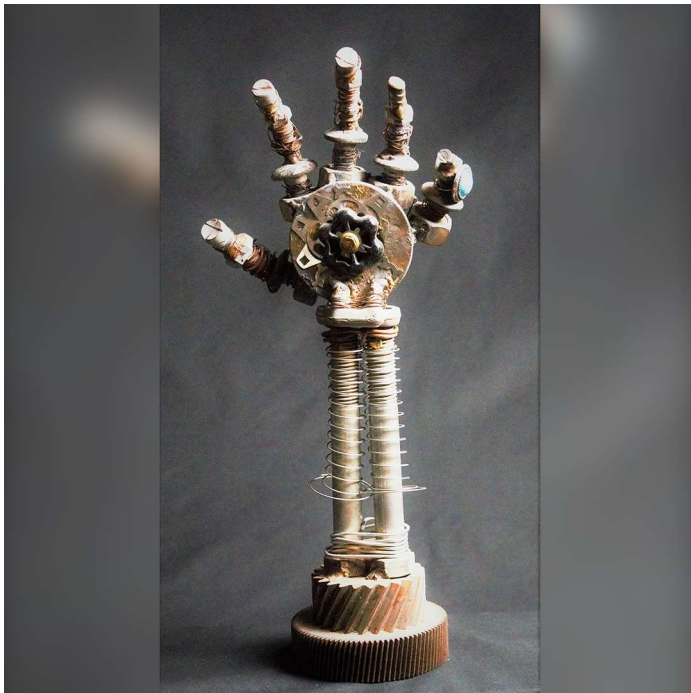


**What tips and tricks do you have for us that might be different or eye opening for others to try with BA product?**

My tips for using a cut off wheel on an angle grinder is to score the surface with a few strokes to create a groove and then to use the weight of the grinder to do the work gradually! Pushing hard will only wear the discs out faster and create a lot of dust and noise.

**If there was one person you could collaborate with - who would it be and why?**

If there was one person I could collaborate with it would be my hero: Dr. Evermor... zhe was a demolition expert that saved the most interesting components as he knocked down breweries, powerhouses and hospitals across the midwest. He used these artifacts to create the world's largest scrap metal sculpture "The Forevertron" in Sumpter, Wisconsin just outside of Madison. After I began to feel comfortable as an emerging artist, I made a pilgrimage to meet him and tell him my story... but I was too late. He passed on from this world and into the Stratosphere before I could thank him for inspiring my work. I did get an opportunity to meet his family, and I was invited to share my story at his memorial service on the site of the Forevertron Sculpture. I even got a chance to play drums in the shadow of his sculpture! I welded together a memorial piece for Doc after I gathered some special materials from his stock of scrap metal treasure.



**Do you have any advice for the next generation that you wish you had when you first started?**

My advice for people just starting out on their artistic journey is to QUIT WAITING!!! Our lives are short and sometimes painful, let art of any kind be the solace you find after any difficult experience. I would also like to emphasize the use of hearing protection! As an ironworker and drummer, my ears have been subjected to some very loud noise. Luckily I have earplugs at work and in ear monitors in my music studio to fend off hearing loss.



## What are your future plans for your shop?

My future shop plans are pretty hefty... I would really like to be in an industrial building with an overhead door and crane rail so that I can begin working on larger installations. I would install a dust collection system and air conditioning so that I could work in any weather. Also I would have a photography studio in a separate room to have my team photographer Dan Cherry document my sculptures. I would really enjoy having a gallery in the front to showcase my art and to provide an opportunity for other visiting veterans to have the gallery experience for the first time and take some of the mystery and anxiety out of the process of sharing artwork. One of my favorite sayings is that the junkyard is my candy store, and sharing my work is like show and tell every day! It's a very rewarding basic human emotion to see your efforts accepted and enjoyed by others, and it lets me know I am on the right path as an artist fulfilling my purpose.

Thanks for sitting with us and sharing your story with the community - is there anything you'd like to add?

I would like to share the new Suicide Prevention Hotline number (988). As a combat veteran I have seen firsthand how the effects of trauma can lead a person to some dark and desperate places. Being an adult in this world can be traumatic too, and the best thing you can do for others is to be a good listener and supportive friend. A little kindness can go a long way when everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. This life is tough, and If you are still standing... help others stand back up!

