

# The Transylvania Times

## Features

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### Copper Craftsman Finds His Home Here – Cedar Mountain NC

By Jeremiah Reed  
*Staff Writer*

Most people in Transylvania County know Hanes Hoffman as the friendly guy with glasses who pours glasses of their favorite craft beer at the Brevard Brewing Company.

What they don't know is his talent for creating amazing custom pieces of aquatic art using copper or the events in his life that led him to the Brevard area.

Sitting on a couch in his cabin located in Sherwood Forest, Hoffman has the look of a man at peace with his life and at home in his environment.

All this for somebody who just a year earlier suffered the loss of his best friend.

"My journey to Brevard started nearly a year ago to this day when I lost my golden retriever, Marley," Hoffman said. "Basically, a year ago to this day a man lost his best friend."

Shortly after Marley's death, Hoffman said he planned a week-long trip to the Brevard area to do some mountain biking, camping and to spread some of the ashes of his old friend. It was during this sabbatical that Hoffman thought it was time to return to the mountains he'd loved his whole life.

"I had an awesome week of biking and met so many nice people," he said. "Everything just seemed to point to this being the right time to make the move."

Hoffman, who is originally from Wrightsville Beach, N.C., said he spent a lot of time in Transylvania County growing up and always felt at home in the area.

"I grew up coming to this area with my parents camping a lot in Pisgah," he said. "When I bought some land up here, I started exploring the area even more. I remember riding in DuPont even before it was a state forest."

Hoffman was still living and working near Wilmington, N.C., when he decided the time was right to make the permanent move to the Brevard area.

"After 15 years of living near the coast, my business was established and I had a pretty good following," he said. "Marley had passed away, and I didn't have any anchors in the water. So I started thinking this might be the time."

Before his trip was over, Hoffman said he'd already begun looking at properties and settled on his cabin nestled in the woods. An avid mountain biker and outdoorsman, Hoffman said the move helped him revitalize his life after the loss of Marley.

"To me moving here was a way of nurturing my soul because I feel more at home in the wilderness than I do anywhere," he said. "I compare it to a surfer moving to the North Shore in Hawaii. For somebody who loves mountain biking like I do, this is the Mecca."

If mountain biking is his hobby, creating copper sculptures is his craft.

Hoffman owns and operates Bluewater Copper Works, a business that creates everything from trophies for fishing tournaments to large home installations featuring amazingly detailed replicas of aquatic species, from small game fish to life-size blue marlin.

Hoffman's copper career started years ago in Wilmington when he met a local fisherman who also owned a metal shop in the area.

After being offered a job, Hoffman said his fascination with copper and its potential as an art craft began piquing his interest.

"I became incredibly enamored with copper and how it's joined together, and I started thinking about making something," he said. "I pretty much just started banging them out of a plastic tub, and it really just grew from there."

Today, Hoffman is renowned for his work and travels throughout the East Coast, providing trophies for an average of 15-20 major fishing tournaments a year. His workshop, which happens to be his basement, allows him to work from the peaceful environment he loves.

The workspace is filled with tools, scrap metal, completed trophies, trophies-in-progress, and a picture of his old companion, Marley, hanging on a post, as faithful as ever.

While creating life-size replicas of barracudas and bluegill may seem challenging enough, the attention to detail and the intricate coloring of each piece is what sets Hoffman's work apart.

As Hoffman's hand passes over the copper with a blowtorch, a vibrant hue of blue and purple rise to the metal's surface. Another pass returns the copper to its bronze color. A final delicate touch reveals a bright green contrast. Hoffman said these subtle details are what takes years to master.

"The crafting of the fish is one thing, but the coloring of it is really where the art lies," he said. "You can't achieve that on your first or second try. You have to create thousands of these things to know where the color lives in the metal, and you have to be able to anticipate the color change."

Some might think creating thousands of trophies and plaques using the same medium and featuring the same subject would get old, but Hoffman said the pursuit of perfection and the constant learning involved in his craft makes every new piece something to enjoy.

"Each piece you make you try to achieve a higher level of excellence, and you have an idea of what you want it to look like in your head, but you never get there, so you're always working toward getting better," he said.

Hoffman said while creating trophies is what predominantly makes up his business, he recently began to create larger decorative installations in people's home. It was this desire to expand his business that led to his involvement in the brewery.

"When I moved here I knew that I would be doing my art, but I was looking for something else to get involved with just so I could keep meeting people," he said. "The brewery seemed like a really neat opportunity to expose the community to my art."

After contacting Brevard Brewery owner Kyle Williams, Hoffman created a custom wall piece in the brewery and also started working as a bartender. He said he enjoys the daily interactions he has with patrons.

"It's been a wonderful way to meet the community, and it's solidified all my anticipation that Brevard is what I thought it would be. Good people live in good places," he said.

While Marley may no longer be by his side and he is six hours away from his former home in Wilmington, Hoffman said he is happy with his life and looking forward to continuing this new chapter.

His trophies sales, as well as his commissioned work, continue to grow and he still enjoys hitting the bike trails that he grew up loving.

However, according to Hoffman, the best is yet to come.

"You can be sure adventure, music, art, beer and a puppy are in the future for this artist at peace in these hills," he said.

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