

Benchmarks



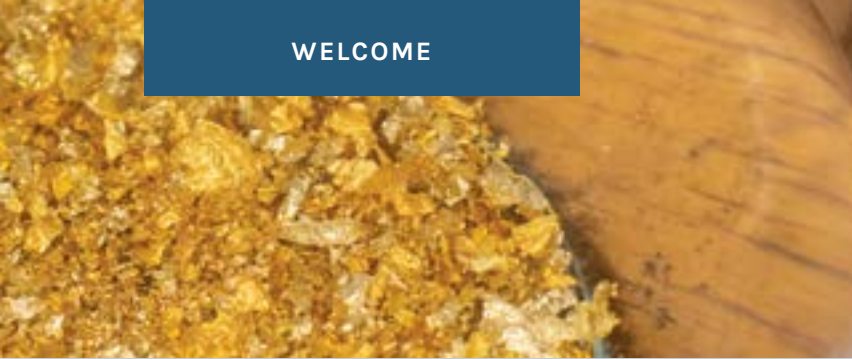
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Meaningful work takes shape every day at NBSS. The stories in these pages highlight the many ways that hands-on work isn't just practical—it's personal, expressive, and deeply rewarding.

One of the great privileges of my time at NBSS—first as an instructor, then as Provost, and also currently serving as Interim President—is seeing how meaningful work takes shape every day at NBSS.

This year's *Benchmarks* magazine is full of examples: students learning new skills, alumni building creative and purposeful lives, and faculty sharing the lessons they love to teach. Together, these stories highlight the many ways that hands-on work isn't just practical—it's personal, expressive, and deeply rewarding.

As always, we begin with Commencement. It's a joyful day, and our photo feature gives a glimpse into that celebration. You'll also find ways to hire and support not just our 2025 grads, but alumni of all years, which reinforces the skill, care, and professionalism our graduates bring to their work. We were proud to recognize this year's Distinguished Alumni Award winner, Daniel Levitan PT '75, an exceptional graduate whose career reflects both excellence in craft and service to the field. Later in the celebration, our commencement speaker, Corey J. Allen, offered heartfelt reflections on family, service, and honoring the trades.

In these pages, we're proud to spotlight five recent graduates, each on a unique path, but all drawn to making with care and intention. Later, you'll learn about five alumni who graduated about a decade ago. Their stories show how an NBSS education continues to shape lives well after graduation. It also demonstrates that meaningful work is not just a career—it's a lifelong pursuit.

Even as our career training programs flourish, we also look at the growth of Community Education at NBSS. With more short-format classes than ever, CE helps people of all backgrounds explore craft at their own pace, whether they're just getting started or deepening an existing skill.

Finally, we're excited to showcase *Meaningful Work*, our annual Student & Alumni Exhibition. The title fits this issue well. The pieces on display are impressive, showing the care, creativity, and commitment our community brings to everything they do.

Thank you for reading, and for being part of NBSS. I hope you find inspiration here, just as I do every day at the School.

Best,

CLAIRE FRUITMAN CF '96
PROVOST & INTERIM PRESIDENT

Graduation

Finishing the requirements for training at North Bennet Street School takes hard work, commitment, and dedication. Please join us in congratulating the Class of 2025 on their extraordinary achievements!

▶ View a recording of the full ceremony and all our speakers' remarks at nbss.edu/news



Distinguished Alumni Award

Honoring Daniel Levitan PT '75



Among the many milestones marked during the 2025 Commencement festivities was a singular honor recognizing one of our own: the 2025 Distinguished Alumni Award. Presented annually, the Distinguished Alumni Award recognizes an NBSS graduate who has demonstrated outstanding professional achievements, contributed meaningfully to their industry, and supported the broader craft community through education and mentorship.

Dan's legacy in piano technology spans five decades, and his influence is deeply felt across the field. A widely respected author, instructor, and mentor, Dan has devoted his life not only to the precision and artistry of piano tuning but also to elevating the standards of the profession.

Throughout his career, Dan published more than 40 articles in *The Piano Technicians Journal*, the flagship publication of the Piano Technicians Guild (PTG). He contributed to—and was frequently featured in—the Journal, and served as its tuning editor for many years. In 2008, he received the Jack Greenfield Award for exceptional writing. In recognition of his lifelong dedication and impact, Dan was inducted into the PTG Hall of Fame in 2021.

A passionate educator, Dan has taught at national PTG conferences, regional conventions, chapter meetings, and seminars across the country. His teaching has taken him abroad as well, and one international teaching experience significantly shaped his acclaimed book *The Craft of Piano Tuning*.

Now considered a foundational text in the field, Dan's book blends scientific rigor with a craftsman's sensibility, offering readers a comprehensive guide to the theory and practice of tuning.



Dan's curiosity and commitment to improving the craft also led him to explore the role of body mechanics in tuning. His research resulted in the design and patent of an ergonomically re-engineered tuning hammer—an innovation that reflects both his technical insight and his practical problem-solving approach.

While his accomplishments are many, those who know Dan speak just as often about his humility, kindness, and generosity of spirit. In his early career, he navigated the busy streets of New York City by bicycle, tuning instruments of all conditions—grand and modest alike—with equal care. Today, he continues to mentor colleagues and support the next generation of technicians, offering his wisdom and encouragement with the same enthusiasm that has defined his entire career.

“My advice to you today, then, isn't the standard advice: Do What You Love. Instead, it's to notice the things that you are impelled to do to improve your world, because those are the things that you're likely to get good at; and that, in turn, is going to make you love what you do.”

Dan's example reminds us that craftsmanship is not only about mastery of technique, but also about how one shows up in the world—with integrity, generosity, and purpose. For all he has achieved, and for the ways in which he continues to inspire, teach, and lead, NBSS is proud to honor Daniel Levitan with the 2025 Distinguished Alumni Award.

Please join us in celebrating this extraordinary alumnus whose work exemplifies the best of our School's values.



Careers & Craft: Tapping NBSS Talent

NBSS alumni put their training to work in a wide range of settings. Some run their own businesses, while others work at companies large and small, in addition to nonprofits, government agencies, and schools. Many are hired even before graduation, bringing disciplined skill, respect for materials, and a commitment to excellence that sets them apart.

There are two key ways you can connect with and support our talented community:



Hire an NBSS Student or Grad

Looking for exceptional craft and trade professionals? Post full- or part-time roles, commissions, or one-time projects on our **Jobs & Commissions Board**. From piano tuning to home renovation, custom furniture to historic preservation, you'll find the right talent for the job.

nbss.edu/hire



Become a Partner in Craft

Support the next generation of craftspeople by joining a network of companies that value mastery, tradition, and a strong workforce pipeline—while gaining year-round recognition in NBSS communications for your generosity. Make an unrestricted gift and amplify the impact of craft education.

nbss.edu/pic

Signature Projects

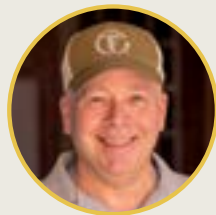
Where Craft Comes into Focus

At North Bennet Street School, the journey from novice to craftsman is marked not only by skillful repetition, but also by the singular moments when everything just clicks. These “aha” moments—when a tool finally feels like an extension of the hand, when a tolerance is truly understood, or when a student’s confidence shines through a challenging project—are embedded in every program’s curriculum.

Their answers offer a behind-the-scenes look at what makes NBSS so unique: a deep commitment to process, precision, and transformation—both of materials and of people.

WE ASKED OUR FACULTY:

What is one project, lesson, or turning point that defines your program? What stands out as a signature learning experience, both in meaning and in impact?



Steven O'Shaughnessy PC '99
Department Head,
Preservation Carpentry

The Story Stick

One of the real “aha” moments in the PC1 program is the Story Stick. It's a simple-looking tool, but students knife in razor-fine, precise locations for mortises and tenon shoulders. Up to this point, they've relied on drawings, tape measures, and rulers. But the Story Stick represents a shift—building to the edge of a razor rather than to a number on a tape. This mid-year project changes how they think about accuracy, and for many, it's the moment they really see what precision carpentry is all about.



Hillary York PT '12, PA '13
Instructor, Piano Technology (Advanced)

The Final Bridge Setting

Late spring is my favorite time in the program. That's when students work on setting the bridges to their final height—a step that's critical to a piano's finished sound. The tolerances are tight, and while the process is intimidating at first, it's all done with the same hand tools and techniques they've been practicing all year. At some point, nearly every student says, “I think I finally understand how sharp a ‘sharp’ chisel really needs to be!” That realization changes everything.





Ellen Kaspert CF '03
Instructor, Cabinet & Furniture Making

The Chair Requirement

Most people might think it's the toolbox, but for me, the chair requirement stands out. The way we teach chair making really sets us apart from any other trade or craft school. It's a huge milestone. Students navigate complex joinery, balance aesthetics with function, and bring a three-dimensional object to life. It requires vision, patience, and an entirely new level of precision—and once they complete it, they've crossed into a different realm of skill.



Tracey Jenkins Darji JM '05
Department Head
Jewelry Making & Repair

The Hinged Bracelet

We don't have just one "aha" project—our students encounter many turning points across a range of topics. But one recent moment stands out. A student who had struggled through much of the program—often starting projects over—finally hit his stride with one of the most difficult assignments: the hinged bracelet. He was thoughtful, asked questions, and stayed focused. The final product wasn't perfect, but it showed a level of skill and confidence we hadn't seen from him before. I insisted he include it in the show. We were so proud. It's not always that visible with every student, but it's great when it is.



The Cabinetry Lesson



Peter Smith PC '04
Department Head, Carpentry

For me, the standout is the Cabinet Making lesson. It's often a "eureka" moment—some students realize they've found what they love in this work. For others, it's overwhelming—they admire the finished product, but didn't expect the level of organization, visualization, and endurance it demands. Milling parts for days, holding tight tolerances—it can be energizing or frustrating. But either way, it reveals a lot about who a student is and where they're headed.



Brock Leiendecker PC '16
Instructor, Carpentry

I totally agree. Cabinetry combines everything we've taught up to that point: drafting, framing, trim, milling, architectural details, tolerances, and reading construction plans. Students must visualize the final result and work backwards to execute it—all while solving problems and adapting along the way. It's a challenge that reveals whether they're ready for this trade. Even if they never build another set of cabinets, the skills—and mindset—they develop here carry forward into any future they choose.



From chisels to chairs, cabinets to custom tools, these signature projects mark real turning points for our students—where skill, confidence, and craft come into focus. Learn more about our hands-on approach, immersive curricula, and intensive training at nbss.edu/programs

Futures Found

How five of our recent graduates followed their passions to North Bennet and embraced the School's philosophy of a good life, built by hand.

Bound book by Annie Ujifusa BB '25

ANNIE UJIFUSA Age 31, Boston, Massachusetts Bookbinding '25

'I had finally found my career path'

For a decade, Annie worked seasonal jobs outside national parks across the country. She loved it, but knew it wasn't sustainable for her in the long run. While making a box to hold the tickets, maps, and other paper items she'd collected on her travels, Annie stumbled across the field of bookbinding and knew she had found her calling.

Why did you choose to invest in training for a new career? The more I researched North Bennet and looked into the Bookbinding program, the more I knew I had finally found my career path. It was one of those life-altering moments that I'll never forget.

In what ways have you felt supported during your time at NBSS? I have been supported in every possible way! Financial aid and scholarships made it possible for me to attend. My instructors have been there for me when I needed advice and mentorship. The friends that I made in the program have been incredible—we encourage each other, offer advice, and constantly ignite each other's curiosity.

Esther Tutella-Chen, Director of Student Support & Career Services, has been wonderful. She does everything from stocking the free pantry at School to listening to concerns and coordinating mental health support. The Marketing team does so much to promote our work and share it with the world. Plus, the Facilities team made it possible for me to quit my two other jobs by offering a position that covered my needs financially and gave me access to the building as a student worker. Everyone here is the best!

What's next for you? I was hired as a full-time Conservation Technician in the Conservation Lab in Special Collections at the Boston Public Library. I'll be practicing hands-on book conservation every day. It's my dream job. It's unbelievable. Book conservation is where I want to be—it is magical.



ALANA SCHWARTZ Age 35, Cambridge, Massachusetts Cabinet & Furniture Making '25

'I'm in the right place, doing the right thing'

While attending an architecture master's program, Alana realized she loved architecture, but wasn't going to love being an architect. Before pivoting to graphic design and marketing, Alana took a woodworking Community Education class at North Bennet—and never shook the feeling it was where she was meant to be. Eight years later, she returned to North Bennet.

When/how did you discover your discipline/field?

I always thought designing and making furniture would be a cool thing to do. In architecture school, I remember saying that I don't think at the scale of a building ... I think at the scale of furniture. A few years ago, I decided to take the Three-Month Furniture Making Intensive at North Bennet. Walking to the train after one of the classes, I realized I was thinking creatively again. That felt like such a gift to me, and I thought, 'I can't let this go.'

How do you feel at the end of a full day in the shop today compared to before NBSS? Doing office work felt like I was fighting how my brain wants to think. I used to come home exhausted from sitting at a computer all day, and would need to knit, craft, or do something to quiet my mind. Now, working with my hands all day, there's nothing to wind down from, and it feels amazing. I'm doing the kind of work that my brain wants to do. I would love nothing more than to do what I'm doing now for the rest of my life.

What's next for you? I was hired as a Teaching Assistant in the CF program and will also continue working in Community Education. It is my dream situation. I'm very proud of myself when I think about where I'm at now, doing this work. The School changed my life.



RORY MACNEIL Age 35, Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Basic Piano Technology '24 and Advanced Piano Technology '25



After studying jazz saxophone performance at the University of Texas at Austin, Rory enjoyed a thriving career as a freelance musician. When the pandemic hit, the disruption to the live music industry pushed him to diversify his skill set, leading him to piano tuning and ultimately North Bennet.

'This mystery that I wanted to learn'

How did you discover your discipline/field?

I always thought piano tuning would be cool because the piano is a complex instrument—it was this mystery that I wanted to learn and felt I could be good at. My fiancée and I were thinking about moving back to the Massachusetts area, and I read the book, "Pianos Inside Out," by Mario Igréc, who taught at North Bennet and is head piano technician at Juilliard. The book said North Bennet is the place to go if you want to learn this field. It worked out that the best school happened to be right in my backyard.

In what ways have you felt supported during your time at NBSS? I was lucky to receive financial aid and scholarships, which I'm extremely grateful for. That made it feasible for me to take two years to do this.

I live in Rhode Island and have a long commute, but it's been easy to put in the time and the hours to learn because it's the perfect place. You could spend more than two years here and still get better and learn.

How do you feel at the end of a full day in the shop today compared to before NBSS? I'd never built things before North Bennet. That's new for me, and it's an awesome feeling. In the Advanced program, my classmates and I rebuilt a piano. We spent months on the project: building up to the point when the bridges were on, fitting the sound board to the rim, and capping it off by gluing in the sound board, which will be there for 50 years.

‘What it takes to build a house from the ground up’

JORDAN KOUNTZ Age 32, Chelsea, Massachusetts Carpentry '25

How do you feel at the end of a full day in the shop today compared to before NBSS? It's nice to be doing something physical. Driving a truck, I was sitting for 11 hours, driving 500 miles a day, sometimes waiting at shippers overnight. It's great to work outdoors and stay active. I got used to doing a lot of physical labor in the military, and I've realized I need that at the end of the day. Carpentry is also more of a mental challenge. It's challenging, in a good way. You get to see what you're made of.

What's your favorite thing you've made during your time at NBSS? For our second group project, we built an insulated chicken coop for a client. We

installed pine walls and a pine floor, nesting boxes, access doors to collect eggs, and a little chicken door for the chickens to go in and out. It was a lot of details, but it was well worth it to take a picture next to the finished project and know that before, there was once nothing. And now, there's this big structure that we all built together.

What's next for you? I was accepted into the Preservation Carpentry program, so I'm continuing on at North Bennet! I'm looking forward to coming back next year and seeing the same faces. This summer, I'll be working on our house in Maine—plastering and flooring.

Jordan served in the U.S. Marine Corps, driving trucks for four years. After the service, she continued to drive as a civilian. Self-described “nomads,” Jordan and her wife had a blast taking their young son adventuring cross-country on the road, but eventually were drawn to settle in Maine, where they purchased an older home. Facing renovations, Jordan decided to learn the carpentry trade for herself, and found a new career and passion.



BAILEY NAPOLI Age 27, Boston, Massachusetts Jewelry Making & Repair '25

‘To make art, I had to get over that perfectionist mindset’

As a parachute rigger in the U.S. Army, Bailey perfected what it means to attend to detail. When an aptitude test at the end of his service pointed him toward jewelry making, it felt right. Hailing from a long line of steelworkers, Bailey would get to work with metal. He would also learn to put an artist's spin on perfection.

Why did you choose to invest in training for a new career? North Bennet was so receptive when I reached out, and I felt very comfortable given the high number of veterans here. Later, I found out North Bennet is the oldest trade school in America and some people call it the ‘Harvard of trade schools.’ It was a shot in the dark, but it has turned out to be such a blessing.

If you could sum up your NBSS experience in one word or phrase, what would it be—and why? Joy. My teachers and my jewelry making classmates are so cool. I have also loved working with students in the other programs. I asked a Carpentry student to make me some tools and a frame, and I asked a Bookbinding student to repair one of my brother's family bibles. I love making those connections.

What's your favorite piece of advice you've received while at NBSS? ‘Perfection is the enemy of the good.’ Packing parachutes all day, you have to pay attention to every detail because it is life and death. In the Army, I took something called the Rigger's Pledge, basically vowing perfection in every way. That was a hard hump for me to get over after leaving the service. Jewelry making is still about precision, but no lives are at stake and there is room to be creative. To make art, I had to get over that perfectionist mindset.

▶ View the full collection of stories at nbss.edu/news



Where Craft Meets Community

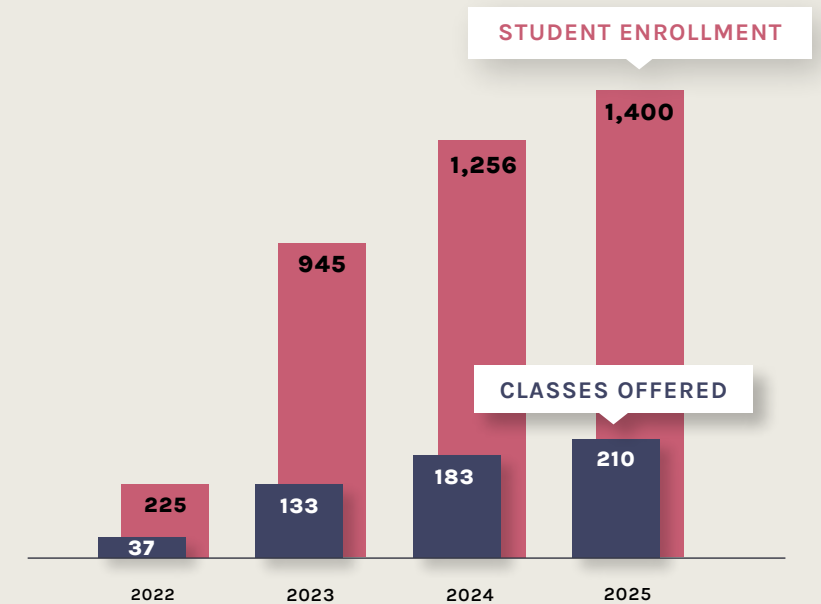
Expanding CE Offerings at NBSS

In just a few years, Community Education (CE) at North Bennet Street School has transformed from a post-pandemic reboot to a thriving, high-impact part of the institution. With record-setting enrollment, a wave of new classes, and expanding partnerships, CE is engaging more learners than ever—while staying true to the School’s mission of providing meaningful, hands-on training in traditional trades and fine crafts.



Numbers That Tell a Story

After a complete pause in 2020 and 2021, CE cautiously resumed in 2022 with just 37 classes and 225 students—well short of pre-pandemic levels. But the rebound came quickly. In 2023, the School offered 133 classes to 945 students. In 2024, that number jumped to 183 classes and 1,256 students. Now in 2025, CE is on track to serve over 1,400 students across 210 classes—a record on all fronts.

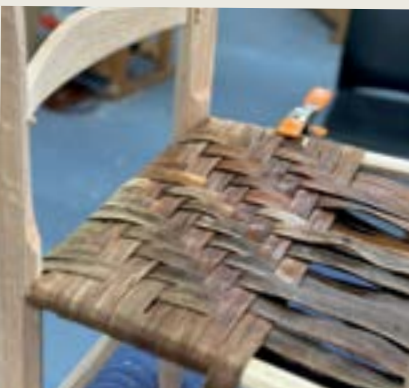
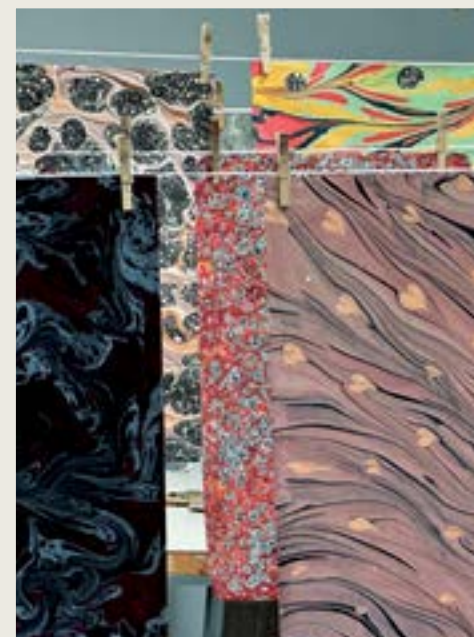


A Broader, Deeper Curriculum

Over the past two years, CE has expanded not just in size, but in scope. In addition to longtime favorites in woodworking, jewelry making, bookbinding, and musical instruments, the program now includes more than 40 new offerings that reflect growing interest and demand.

Courses like **Historic Sewing Structures**, **Build a Fan Back Windsor Chair**, and **Bezel Ring Fabrication** are designed for students looking to deepen their skills and take their craft further. Others, such as **Paper Marbling** or **Spoon Carving**, are perfect for those just starting out.

“We’re creating entry points for all kinds of learners,” Brittany Carlson, Director of Community Education explains. “Whether someone’s looking for a new hobby, an expansion of their skills, or an introduction to a new career path, there’s a place for them here.” With many courses selling out just days after registration opens, it’s clear the momentum is strong.





▲ Some classes—most notably the Three-Month Furniture Making Intensive—have become stepping stones into NBSS Career Training programs.

Expanding Impact

One of the most exciting developments has been CE's growing community impact. The launch of **Teen Craft & Trade Intensives** this summer brings weeklong classes in carpentry, preservation carpentry, furniture making, jewelry, and bookbinding to high school students from around the region.

"We've always believed in the power of craft to bring people together," says Claire Fruitman CF '96, Provost of the School. "With CE, we're creating more access points than ever before—whether it's a one-day workshop or a deep dive into a traditional skill."

50%

of students in our **Teen Craft & Trade Intensives** will attend on full or partial scholarship, made possible by generous donors to NBSS.



Laying the Groundwork

Behind the scenes, the program has grown its infrastructure, added new instructors and teaching assistants, invested in space upgrades, and improved systems to support online registration and class management. It has also welcomed new team members and begun laying the foundation for further expansion.

"None of this would be possible without the dedication and talent of our CE instructors," says Brittany. "They're skilled craftspeople—many of them NBSS graduates—who bring deep expertise, passion, and creativity to the classroom. They're key to creating great learning experiences and helping us grow to meet the demand."

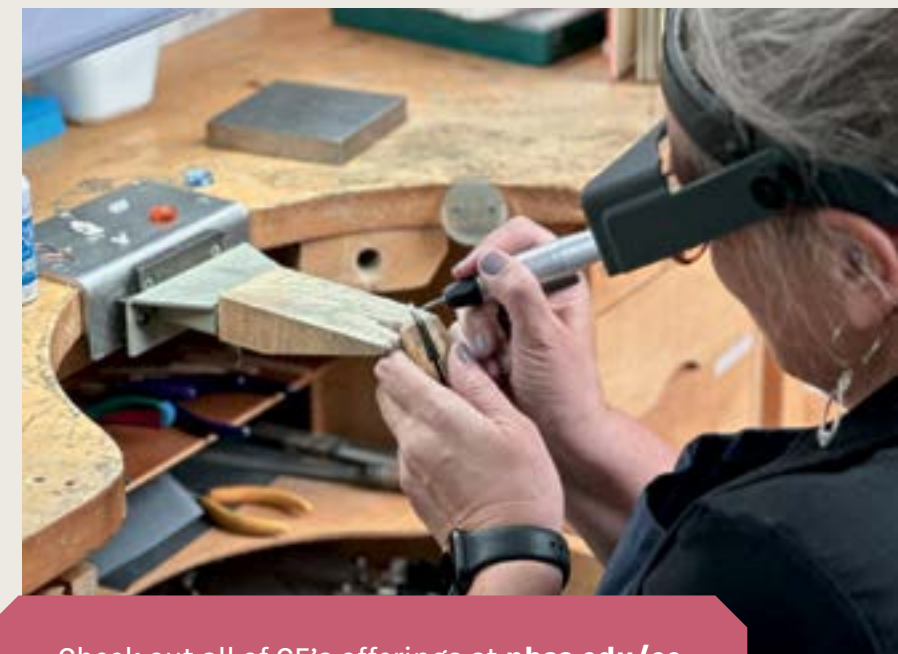
"The demand is incredible. We're seeing returning students, newcomers, and professionals all eager to build skills with their hands."

—BRITTANY CARLSON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Listening, Learning, and Growing

As CE continues to grow, student feedback plays a vital role in shaping what comes next. One-on-one conversations, course surveys, and enrollment trends each play a role in ensuring CE remains relevant, welcoming, and inspiring for all who take part.

There's always more to do—constant adjustments, new ideas to explore, and a growing list of opportunities to consider. But it's all part of the ongoing evolution of CE, and of the School as a whole. "We've only just scratched the surface," says Brittany. "And I can't wait to see where we go next."



Check out all of CE's offerings at nbss.edu/ce

2025 Exhibition: Meaningful Work



On display through July 3, 2025.
Learn more and view the exhibition at
nbss.edu/2025exhibition.

At North Bennet Street School, we believe in the transformative power of meaningful work to shape lives, build community, and reflect the values that guide us. Our 2025 Exhibition asks the question, “*What does Meaningful Work mean to you?*” In response, our community of NBSS students and alumni shared work that celebrates their range of skills, experiences, and aspirations.



“I find that when I am in the midst of a project, the work itself continues to impart a sense of purpose and meaning in all the small details. This recent project with my oldest son was especially meaningful—being able to collaborate on the design and then the final piece brought me immense joy and deep meaning in this craft. I have chosen to spend my life pursuing.” **John Heveran CF '25**

“Over the years, meaningful work has come to include using my skills to give form to the vision and intention of other people, creating something deeply personal and symbolic. Custom jewelry design requires attention, respect, and empathy, in addition to technical knowledge. With each project, I learn something new about a person, an event, a place, or an ideal. It's an opportunity to connect with something outside myself while contributing to another person's story.”
Geraldine Kish Perry JM '00



“The beauty, content, and the time invested in [embroidered devotional books] made them deeply meaningful. I think often about time—how we use it, and what it takes to master something. These books reflect those thoughts.”
Marie Oedel BB '02



▲ “Meaningful work is the difference between speed and quality. It honors the past and has lasting power—foregoing the easy route and taking the time to make it endure. There is craftsmanship in meaningful work. My hope is that my meaningful work will be enjoyed for many years to come.” **Alex Schmidt PC '23**



▼ “Beginning my career in a field where my work products were legal contracts, ‘meaningful’ has come to mean creating something with my hands—something that is pleasing to me. North Bennet Street School gave me the opportunity to do just that, and to make objects that are also pleasing to others. What more can you ask for?” **Charles Kline CF '05**

► “Meaningful work to me means creating pieces that people wear on a daily basis. My forward intention is to make everything as ubiquitous as possible. Everything has a function without intentional waste.” **Riley Freitas JM '25**



Investing in NBSS Together

Meaningful Work

At North Bennet Street School, we transform ideas into achievements—from the plans and materials of our trades to the aspirations and ambitions of our community. Since 1881, our School has been a beacon of excellence, dedicated to creating opportunities that shape each student's journey and ensure the success of our graduates. At NBSS, we nurture talent, hone skills, and transform lives.

The worlds of education and employment are at a crossroads, and we are meeting the challenge through meaningful work. Our students boldly forge new pathways for themselves at NBSS, and we are deeply committed to their journeys. We embrace diverse talents and experiences, fostering a training environment where every individual can thrive. Our dedication extends beyond the classroom, ensuring that each student receives the mentorship and resources needed to reach their goals. In doing so, we fulfill one of our most important responsibilities: empowering the skilled workforce of tomorrow.

Since our founding, we have trained generations of individuals who quite literally make, build, preserve, and repair the world around us. We recognize the importance of these hands-on efforts as a cornerstone of human intelligence, enterprise, and culture. And we value the dedication, creativity, and expertise that each student brings to their trade. With our distinguished reputation as a school, legacy of fine craftsmanship, and global community of leaders in their fields, our impact is enduring.

By investing in NBSS, you join a legacy of optimism. Together, we can broaden access to our education, uphold the highest quality instruction, and continue to serve our community for generations to come. United in this vision, we will advance and preserve craft and trade disciplines, ensuring NBSS remains a place where every individual can reach their fullest potential.

Join us in our commitment to meaningful work and transformative education. Support NBSS today at nbss.edu/give.

Start a Conversation →



Colleen Walsh Powell
Director of Development
development@nbss.edu
617-227-0155 x170



Annie Hayes
Director of Institutional Support
development@nbss.edu
617-227-0155 x175

How five NBSS alumni carved
their own unique careers

Skilled Hands Around the World



JUAN PABLO BLANCO CF '12
AGE 43 | BOGOTA, COLOMBIA

Quality above all

Why NBSS and how did it impact you? I decided that I still had a lot to learn about woodworking, even as an instructor. I began looking for trade schools in the U.S. and in England, and North Bennet seemed like the best option for me, and it did in fact turn out to be. Every expectation I had of the school going in was surpassed once I got there.

I had visited the U.S. as a tourist before, but my years at North Bennet as a student were the first time I had ever lived in the U.S., and the two years I spent in Boston greatly influenced my career today. What impressed me most was the level of quality in every single aspect of the school: the instructors, the equipment, the pieces the other students were creating. I was familiar with so much of what we learned because I had been in the industry for some time, but the level of quality at North Bennet was something I'd never experienced.

Do you have a favorite memory from your time at NBSS? My favorite memory was the day we actually started our first project. In the beginning, it was almost a month of classes and instruction to prepare us, but we hadn't even touched a piece of wood. I remember so well the day that we went to the lumber yard to select the wood and brought it back to the shop, then finally got to turn on the equipment and begin the work.

What are you doing now? Within the past year, I've started my own custom furniture business, which has been a dream of mine for a long time. I make everything you can think of, but my favorite thing to make is any project that challenges me. Recently, I submitted my first piece to the annual student and alumni Exhibition. It's a globe made entirely of wood, with every country carved out of it. It took me about a month to make, and it was such a fulfilling project.

Left: Wooden Globe by Juan Pablo Blanco CF '12

A need for something tangible

What were you doing before you came to NBSS to train? While I was in grad school after a degree in mathematics, it became so evident that this wasn't the path for me. Everything in the academic world seemed too abstract. Everything was on the computer or sitting behind a desk.

All of those numbers didn't quite mean anything until I had a tape measure in my hand and I was building something; until I had the tangible reward of seeing a finished product that I made.

Why NBSS and how did it impact you? I had always been interested in carpentry, and I finally decided to commit to it. It was a bit of a tough sell to my family because none of them are in the trades. I think people have a misconception of carpentry that you just "fall into it," that you don't intentionally pursue it. North Bennet gave me an option that was professional and intentional and prevented me from learning only from on-the-job training. I was able to study the actual craft and set myself apart from others with that level of training.

What advice would you give to current NBSS students? Take advantage of your time there. Ask as many questions as you can and really pay attention. I've been going back for the past several years to help with the cabinet project in the carpentry department and I've gotten to interact with a lot of current students.

I try to let them know that they won't have these resources at their fingertips in this kind of setting once they're out working. One thing that I love about NBSS that I see often when I'm back is that they very much teach at the intersection of artistry and on-the-job training. You learn to appreciate both the craft and creativity, and the functional basics.

ERIC ZANKOWSKI CA '13
AGE 37 | MANSFIELD, MA

Hitting the right notes

Why NBSS and how did it impact you? I approached one of the technicians I had been watching at the Marlboro Music Festival and he gave me an overview of the paths available in the field. He actually went to North Bennet and recommended it, so I began looking into it. I met with a piano technician back in Connecticut who was so helpful and kind. She ended up bringing me to North Bennet for a tour, and I fell in love—it was such a magical place.

I loved piano, but I never wanted to be a performer because I had the worst stage fright. So I used audio engineering as a way to still embrace music in my life. I went to college for the first time to learn the theory and study the instrument so that I could be better equipped to communicate with professional musicians about the music they're creating.

At North Bennet, I gained a completely new relationship with the piano as an instrument—how pianists approach the instrument and actually sound in general—completely blossomed and changed during my time at North Bennett.

What are you doing now? I work in the Music Technology and Media department at Steinway & Sons. From the moment I decided I wanted to be a technician during that summer at the Marlboro Festival, I had my sights set on working at Steinway. My career with them began as an internship, and now, 10 years later, I'm grateful to still be with the company, living out my dream. I've helped develop their catalog of player piano music as well as working on the pianos themselves, and I'm about to transition into a new management role that will allow me to keep my hands and ears in all the things I love but allow me more time to be strategic and manage others.

LAUREN SCLAFANI PT '14, PA '15
AGE 34 | GALES FERRY, CT



Unlocking a next-level career

What were you doing before you came to NBSS to train? I was in the Marine Corps for many years and was in the middle of a foreign service contract for private security in Iraq. My life changed, and I needed a stable job stateside. I was looking for an entry point to a sustainable job field that wouldn't involve sitting at a desk. I knew from my time in the military that a sedentary role like that would never work for me.

Why NBSS and how did it impact your career?

Starting an entirely new career at 33 was daunting—I didn't have the time or desire to pursue a trade that required licensing. Locksmithing seemed like a great option because it's a very niche form of finish carpentry in many ways. That was intriguing to me.

North Bennet has a great reputation, and it was convenient for me with a growing family. I completed the Locksmithing & Security Technology program first using the G.I. Bill®, then I worked at night and completed the Carpentry program during the day.

What are you doing now? I own my own company, Bolt Lock and Key, that provides residential and commercial locksmith services all over the Boston area. The bulk of my business is commercial service calls—a storefront has been damaged so we repair it and ensure it's safe and functioning again—but I really love the larger residential jobs that involve an aspect of restoration and the carpentry side.

For example, we recently did a job in a historic home in Brookline that was moved from its original lot. Because of the shifts that happened during the move, we had to address every door opening—whether it was ripping out the openings and rebuilding them because they were so uneven or just adjusting them—and installing new hardware on each one. We also worked on most of the windows to be sure they were functional and fit the style of the home.

JONATHAN NIR LK '17, CA '18
AGE 41 | BOSTON, MA



A foundation to thrive

Why NBSS and how did it impact you? I've always known deep down, even when I first came here and I didn't speak a word of English, that I had in me to be my own boss and to own a business. I just never knew when I'd be able to do it. Once I got a taste of restoration, I realized I had a passion for the history of buildings and architecture. One of my coworkers suggested NBSS, and I was intrigued.

My training at NBSS awakened something in me that I didn't know I had. When we did tours of historic buildings, I fell more in love with it every day. While I learned the skills and the craft, it gave me the confidence to actually realize what I was supposed to be doing.

What are you doing now? I own my business, Ferreira's Restoration LLC, in Newton, NJ, that specializes in restoration and painting. About half of my business is restoration work—windows and doors in historic homes—and the other half is painting. While I was at NBSS, I worked as a painter on the side. I ended up falling in love with painting and learning so many tricks of the trade during that time, so that part of my business is also a result of NBSS.

Whenever I see historic homes being torn down so someone can build a box with windows—because that's what many new homes are—it kills me. So whatever I can do to keep the history alive, whether it's one window of the whole house, that's what I've now set out to do.

How do you feel at the end of the workday now compared to before you attended NBSS? A million times better. In the early days I was making things work, but deep down I was insecure. I hadn't had the training to know if I was doing things correctly or good enough. Today, with the knowledge that I acquired from North Bennet and the support that I have from my teachers to this day, I feel confident enough that I can do anything.



LUCAS FERREIRA PC '15
AGE 40 | NEWTON, NJ

Read the full interviews of these alumni and learn more about our grads at nbss.edu/alumni

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