

RESTORATION CONTINUED

year or re-engraving the eagle and shield are sometimes done if a former student requests it, but Lancaster said extra care is always taken.

"Hand engraving is like handwriting," Lancaster said. "They have a certain script, a certain design, that you're supposed to do the exact same way, but some people make it skinnier, some people make the lines deeper or wider or thinner."

Right across from Lancaster is Leon Mercer's workstation. Mercer holds two distinctions — he is the longest-working craftsman at the factory with 47 years of employment that started in Massachusetts before moving with the factory to Austin. He is also the oldest.

"I'm 78 years young," joked Mercer as he took the ring from Lancaster. Mer-

cer smooths, cleans and waxes the ring repairs. After the previous restorations, the ring's sides are typically sharp enough to cut the wearer, and Mercer must dull them to avoid wearer injury. Despite the ring's edges and the heat that dulling and polishing generates, Mercer only began wearing thin plastic gloves a few years ago to better stay clean.

"It's the feeling you've got to have, and with your fingers you get that feeling," Mercer said to describe why he doesn't use finger guards.

The Final Cut

Lancaster and Mercer send the rings to get re-antiqued or to have diamond repairs if requested before they end up back at Hebert's desk after two to three weeks. The ring returns to its owner exactly as they requested it — some look completely new, while others still showcase a lifetime of wear. For Carter, the

work done on his Aggie Ring after the fire made it look new again.

"When I got it I just couldn't believe it," Carter said. "I thought some of it would have melted down, but it almost looks like the day I got it. I was just so ecstatic to see what they could do with that ring, because it was charred black."

Carter's restored ring again joined those of his son and daughter as symbols of a time on campus that they will always remember.

"It's a lot of work to get an Aggie Ring," Carter said. "It doesn't come cheap. It's a lot of work to get there, a lot of hours, a lot of classroom, a lot of course study, and it's one of those things you drive through because once you know you got there you know you — you're pretty well rounding third base heading for home because you only have another two semesters or so to finish out."

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