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By: Tess Maune



His art was forged with fire and now fire has stolen his studio, taking with it many unfin-

ished pieces, waiting to be brought to life.

The Bronze Horse is where artists take clay sculptures to be molded and cast into bronze.

It's an unassuming shop along Highway 99, just south of Pawhuska, and it works on pieces that end up all over the world.

"It's very unique, especially, people can drive up and down this road and never know what we do out here," said John Free, Jr.

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Free runs the family business his father started in 1980.

He said seeing it reduced to ashes isn't easy.

"You see some of that history go up and it kind of touches in a way that you're not sure how you feel," Free said. "You think about everything that's gone into it and names and people."

Though thick with soot, sculptures already cast in bronze can be saved. But bronzes begin as clay and wax and about 12 moldings were destroyed.

"It's clay, but it's clay that somebody's taken a lot of time and sculpted and put together and spent months on," Free said.



Only a few are salvageable.

One clay piece was part of a 10-foot sculpture for the Chickasaw Nation, made by famed Oklahoma artist Kelly Haney.

The craftsmanship of a foundry is an ancient process that Free said dates back 5,000 years.

News On 6 visited the Bronze Horse Foundry back in 2004

At that time, the shop was set to start casting "The American," a Native American sculpture, larger than the statue of liberty.

Though it's been on hold for quite some time, Free said plans are in motion once again.

Free, who seems to be as strong as the sculptures he creates, said he's ready for tomorrow and ready to rebuild.

"We've got a lot of people that depend on us and we want to try to get back to business and doing what we do," Free said.

Until he can rebuild, Free said he hopes to find a makeshift shop, so he can continue to work.

Firefighters told him the fire was caused by an electrical problem.

Two firefighters were injured battling the fire, one with a broken ankle and the other was treated for dehydration. Both are doing okay now.

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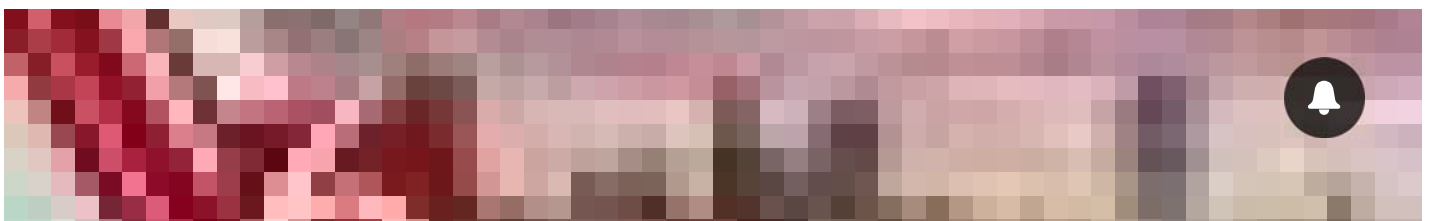
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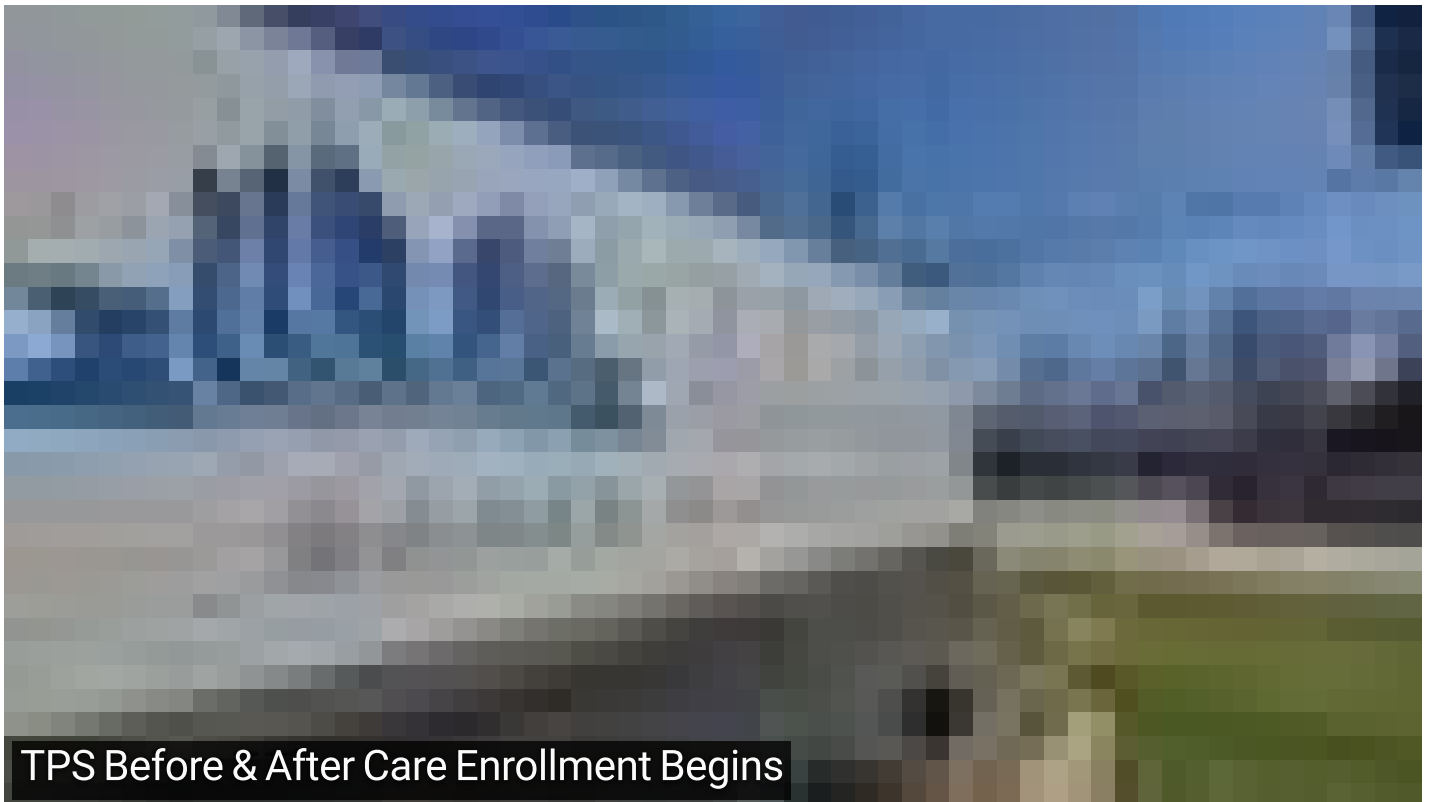




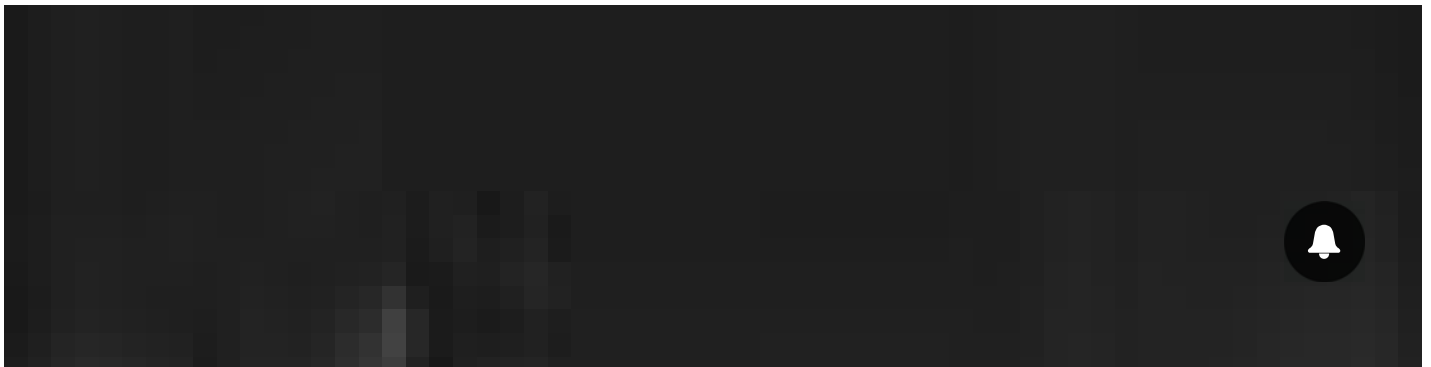
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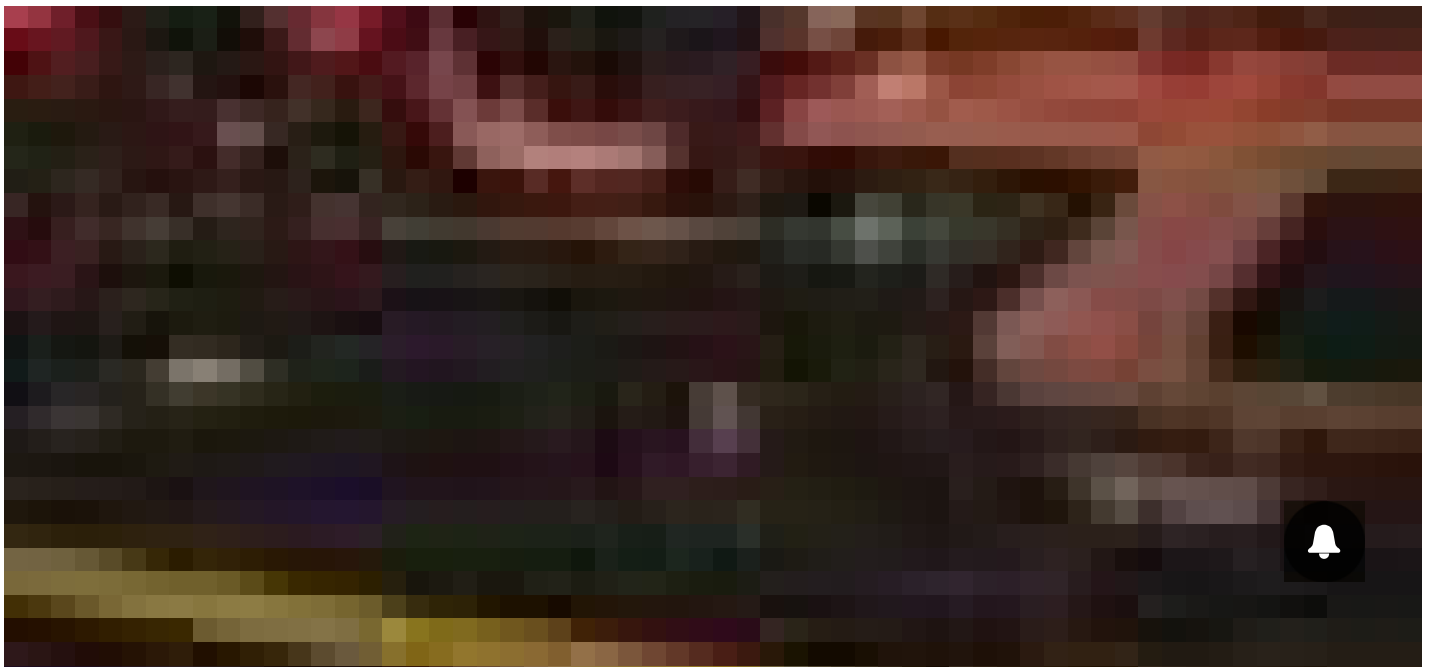





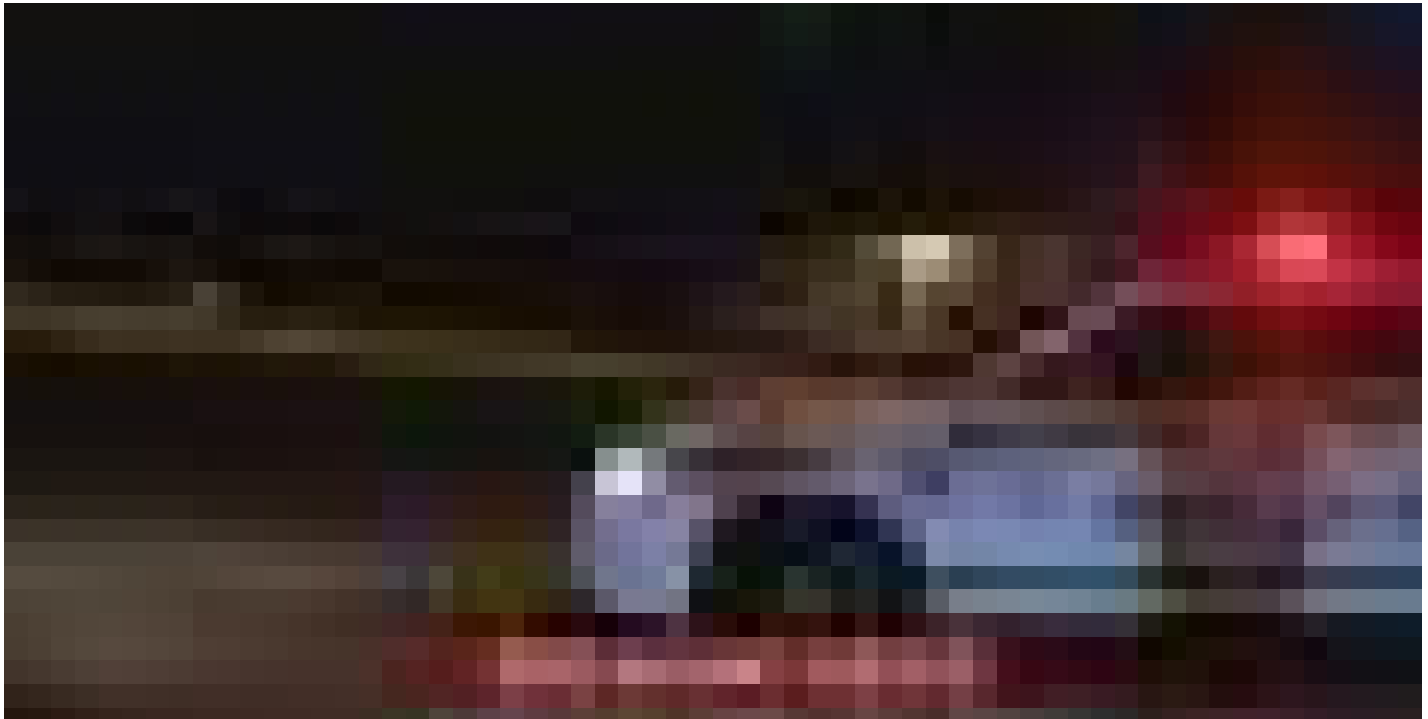
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