

‘Custodians’ of the past: Montville flea market vendors peddle memories



Blaze Schwaller, left, laughs as her daughter Alvina, 8, both of Oakdale, shows her a piece for sale at the Summer Flea Market at The PAST Antiques Marketplace in Oakdale on Sunday, July 7, 2024. (Sarah Gordon/The Day)

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From left, Dominic Villar, 7, looks on as his mother, Patricia Flores, and grandmother Elba Cartagena, all of New London, try on rings for sale at the Summer Flea Market at The PAST Antiques Marketplace in Oakdale on Sunday, July 7, 2024. (Sarah Gordon/The Day)

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Montville — Hillery Errett, a vendor at a Sunday flea market in the parking lot of the PAST Antiques Marketplace, said she appreciates how flea markets can bring out customers' memories.

“Like they’ll see a cup or plate that their grandmother had and it sparks a memory,” she said. “Because they’ll say ‘Oh, my grandma had this!’ and they’ll remember and share the story.”

Errett, a Ledyard resident who works at Mine, an antique store in Mystic, was one of about 10 vendors at the Nature’s Art Village on Sunday for its first-ever summer flea market. Nature’s Art Village on Route 85 includes the Dinosaur Place and the PAST antique marketplace, a permanent antique store.

The village usually only hosts one in the spring and one in the fall, Marketing Director “Dino Dan” Kornegay said.

Errett and other vendors, who arrived as early as 7:30 a.m. to set up, sold clothing, crafts, books, music, movies vintage art and more that they’d accumulated over the years. Their collections, each comprising individual stories, are often a personal or intimate reflection of the vendors themselves.

“It’s a weird mixture of stuff,” Errett said of hers, which included graphic T-shirts and ornate woodwork. “But I like it all.”

Vendor Jessica Constantino likewise appreciated the nostalgic feeling people were getting from her items — a “pretty eclectic mix” of mid-century art, pottery, glass clothing and wooden crafts she’d accrued from thrift stores, and some foreign items she’d gathered while living in Navy housing in Japan and Sicily.

“I made a lot of sales today from people who were really excited about the items,” Constantino said. “Like it had a special meaning to them, or they felt really connected.”

Soon one of her pieces of glassware, a serving dish of some kind, struck a connection with Sharon Langelo of Waterford. After purchasing the glass for \$6, she praised its style and color — white speckled with blues and greens.

Constantino said that item, like others in her collection, she doesn’t buy unless she really likes it. So she said selling the items, and finding a good home for them, is a labor of love.

“It’s really great that I get to be, sort of a custodian for these items,” she said. “I enjoy them while I have them and pass them on to other people.”

Vendor Cecilia Fitzgerald pointed out that highlights of her collection included a print of Abraham Lincoln’s boyhood cabin and a vintage wardrobe case that had belonged to her partner’s grandfather. Other items included badminton rackets, vintage glassware, tools and books and a framed painting of a sad clown in need of some restoration.

They had come from Fitzgerald meticulously cleaning the home of her partner’s mother, who died in 2023. Without enough space to store a lot of the items from her home, the ones that were deemed inessential to the family now made up the collection that was out for sale.

“She was a very cool lady,” Fitzgerald said. “She had a diverse interest and taste.”

Fitzgerald made a deal for the print of Lincoln’s cabin. It was sold for \$20 to Harry Hansen of Amston, who explained he was a history buff and fan of the late president.

“And it’s a beautiful print,” he added. “With this glass cleaned up and the frame painted, it’s just an absolutely gorgeous piece. Plus, it’s signed by the artist.”

Kornegay said the market was a way to advertise and drum up business for PAST antique market, which includes 90 vendors in the basement that sell antiques, too. Thus, he was glad to see lots of people, many of whom came to check out the indoor wares.

“Everybody’s been selling today,” he said. “Everybody’s been having a good time.”

With the addition of a summer flea market, Nature’s Art Village, located at 1630 Hartford-New London Turnpike, now hosts three a year. The next flea market is scheduled for Sept. 14 in the same place.

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Visitors walk past vintage items and antiques for sale at the Summer Flea Market at The PAST Antiques Marketplace in Oakdale on Sunday, July 7, 2024. (Sarah Gordon/The Day)
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