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Saturday, August 16, 2008

Marge Colborn

'Antiques Roadshow' hits Grand Rapids in search of America's hidden treasures



GRAND RAPIDS -- Jeff Shivel and his son Nathan, 12, of Southgate are simply beaming as they listen to appraiser Ken Farmer of Virginia. They've brought a pair of funky fireplace andirons for appraisal to "Antiques Roadshow's" much-anticipated stop in Grand Rapids on Aug. 9.

"These metal folk-art andirons date to between 1890 and the 1930s," says appraiser Ken Farmer of Virginia. "They're really a piece of sculpture, and I love the freakiness factor -- the faces are very Victorian-looking. I appraise them at \$2,000 to \$3,000."

"Wow!" Shivel exclaims, "and to think the andirons were on the way to a landfill when my dad found them in the trash while out walking the dog."

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Every week, 11 million viewers watch "Antiques Roadshow," PBS's most-watched primetime series, to see ordinary people learn if their old whatever is a treasure or merely a sentimental something. It's true reality TV, minus the snake-eating and mud-bathing.

The show's 2008 tour took nearly 70 top-notch appraisers, including Lawrence DuMouchelle, David McCarron and Caroline Ashleigh from Metro Detroit, to six cities this summer: Palm Springs, Calif.; Dallas; Wichita, Kan.; Chattanooga, Tenn.; Hartford, Conn.; and Grand Rapids. Programs taped in these locations will make up the show's 13th broadcast season, which begins airing in 2009, with specific dates to be announced.

While approximately 27,000 people applied for a free ticket, only 5,000 people were randomly selected to bring two items for an appraisal at DeVos Place in downtown Grand Rapids. People came from Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, even Canada, for the 8 a.m.-5 p.m. event. (Doors closed at 5 p.m., but everyone who was inside at that time got their item appraised; Birmingham-based textile and rug appraiser Ashleigh finished at 8:30 p.m.)

Finding out an item's value is hardly a day at the beach. Several vast exhibition halls are divided into areas -- the holding area has rows of folding chairs labeled in two-hour slots; the standing-room-only "triage" area is where people line up to get a ticket describing their item as, for example, porcelain, collectible, tribal art; the often-lengthy lines leading to the appropriate appraisers; the green room is where people with an item worthy of being filmed are groomed; and, of course, the taping area. There's also a feedback booth where people can be taped talking about their experience.

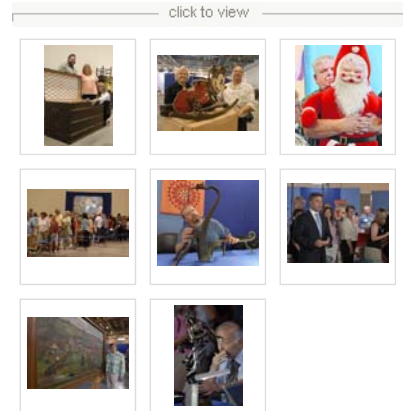
PBS employees at the highly organized event number 60, plus there are an additional 100 volunteers from the host city.

Although there is no food, drink or music, people are patient, happy and friendly.

"People create their own entertainment as they tell each other the stories behind their treasures," explains



PBS' popular "Antiques Roadshow" came to Grand Rapids on Aug. 9, and brother and sister Dennis Weber and Sherry Johns, both of Hartland, brought their vintage Louis Vuitton steamer trunk for appraisal by Caroline Ashleigh, right, of Birmingham. It was appraised for \$10,000. (John M. Galloway / Special to The Detroit News)



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'Antiques Roadshow' finds

The top appraisal at the Grand Rapids event was \$300,000 for an 1881 landscape painting by Hudson River Valley painter Jasper Cropsey. It was purchased 30 years ago for \$7,000. The second-highest appraisal in Grand Rapids was \$80,000-\$100,000 for a 1903-1904 Gustav Sticklev music cabinet by Harvey Ellis

Ashleigh, adding that the event is exhausting but exhilarating.

Once an item is appraised, people get a paper stating the item's importance and value. No money changes hands, but people can contact appraisers at a later date to sell or auction off their item. For the most part, though, people aren't interested in selling, only in learning about their item.

Dennis Weber and Sherry Johns, a brother and sister from Hartland, Mich., for instance, wouldn't dream of selling the Louis Vuitton steamer trunk Ashleigh appraised at \$10,000. The trunk belonged to their grandmother, Beatrice, who brought it with her from England on the Queen Mary.

"It's the Queen Mary of steamer trunks," quips Ashleigh. "These trunks were made from 1888 to 1896. This one is in perfect condition. Every stud has the LV logo embedded in it. If it was for sale at a retailer, it could easily bring \$30,000."

Rick and Sue Holmes of Fort Wayne, Ind., have no plans to part with the bar-height, contemporary table they bought at an auction. Erik Gronning of Sotheby's in New York City appraised it at \$200-\$300 and dates it to the 1970s.

Ditto for Paul and Sharon Korzetz of St. Clair Shores, whose circa 1932 Mickey Mouse rocker, bought at a garage sale for next to nothing, is valued at \$75 by Noel Barrett of Pennsylvania. And a violin in need of repair isn't worth much, but the case it came in is -- \$1,000 to be precise.

"I have an arts and crafts lamp that I purchased for \$800 at a Grosse Pointe estate sale appraised here for \$2,000, but it could be worth as much as \$15,000, if we find out the maker," marvels Paul Korzetz.

Judy Maggini of Grand Rapids is curious if the value of her iridescent Tiffany vase, which she bought for \$5,000 at an antiques show years ago, had increased. But she had no intention of selling it in the foreseeable future.

Owosso resident Tom Runyan clutches a 3-foot-tall stuffed Santa from the 1960s appraised at \$100-\$150. If you have a Care Bear collection from the 1980s, take note.

Valerie Peacock of Grand Rapids clutches her lamp, which has a metal body shaped like a peacock. Lawrence DuMouchelle gives it a value of \$75. That's fine with Peacock, whose friend bought it at a garage sale for \$2.

A borderline giddy Stephen Fletcher of Skinner Inc., in Boston, chats with a show producer. He's pitching a 1924 primitive oil painting by Glen Hale belonging to Laura Beyer of Hart, Mich., for a show segment. It's a large, colorful country scene, and the painting has been in Beyer's family for more than 50 years.

"It's just so cool!" Fletcher gushes, and the producer is convinced. So it's lights, camera, action for Beyer and her painting, valued at \$10,000 to \$15,000.

"This is great fun," says Beyer, with a giggle, "but I know for sure no one in my family is going to part with this painting."

You can reach Marge Colborn at (313) 222-2756 or mcolborn@detnews.com.

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In 1996, the first appraisal tour in Southfield, Mich., revealed a Duncan Phyfe mahogany sewing table dating to 1805-1810 valued at \$100,000.

In 1997 in New Jersey, a teacher's \$25 garage-sale table turned out to be a rare, Federal-style card table made by John and Thomas Seymour of Boston in the late 1700s. It was appraised at \$200,000 to \$300,000, and subsequently sold at auction for \$541,000.

In 2001 in Tucson, Ariz., a Navajo blanket from 1840-1860, handwoven and dyed, and worn by a Ute chief, was appraised for \$350,000 to \$500,000.

Marge Colborn
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Movies
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