

## Retiree Turns Scrap Metal Into Art

By Dee Goerge

Welding steel into a giant foot with a swollen toe is a far cry from the elevators, feed mills and fertilizer plants Ken Nyberg helped build in his 42 years of construction work.

But it was a lot more interesting, and it has led to an interesting new hobby/career.

Nyberg's sculptures - all welded from scrap steel - are displayed in an outdoor gallery in a park named after him in his hometown of Vining, Minn. Commissioned works dot other area communities including an otter in the city of Ottentail, a panther in Parkers Prairie, a sunflower at a seed business in Breckenridge, and a stethoscope for a nearby medical clinic.

His favorite subjects are mundane - a clothespin, a doorknob, a tipped coffee cup held up by the metal coffee pouring from it.

Through his construction job, Nyberg became a good welder and learned how to improvise to make things work without detailed plans. He also had access to lots of scrap metal.

In 1983 he made his first metal sculpture - a family tree for a wedding gift. For his next project, Nyberg planned to weld a foot with a swollen toe, based on something he'd whittled out of wood.

"I thought, 'there won't be many of them around,'" he says. After 2 1/2 years the foot was finished, and in 1991 Vining citizens gave it a choice location along Highway 210, not too far from the town's Purple Palace restaurant. The town's landmark inspired the name for a new gas station - Big Foot Gas and Grocery.

Since retiring in 2000, Nyberg has had

more time to weld his creations. His process is always the same. He starts with a small figurine or a drawing and uses rebar and mild steel rod to create the basic shape.

Occasionally he recycles items, such as the boatlift used for the foundation for a lion that Nyberg created for the Henning Lions Club. Once he has the shape, Nyberg welds scraps together "like making a crazy quilt."

"I still use the old stick welder on most of the stuff," Nyberg says.

Details require bending and cutting to get the pieces to form legs or faces, for example. Nyberg finishes most sculptures with good enamel paint.

He revised his technique a bit a couple of years ago when he tackled a full-size elephant using a different material.

One day, over coffee someone asked Nyberg if he was interested in a pile of worn-out lawn mower blades. Before thinking, he said, "yes" and then decided to make something really big - an elephant.

The top of the elephant's head is 9 1/2 feet off the ground. Because the blades can't be tightly fitted together, Nyberg spot-welded the sculpture with a wire-feed welder. Light can be seen between the blades and in the circle- and star-shaped holes on the blades. It took 955 lawn mower blades to complete the pachyderm, and it required a small crane and trailer to move it to join his other creations in Vining's Nyberg Park. The elephant fits right in with the alien, the astronaut, the elk, the square knot and the cockroach in a pair of pliers.

But when winter blows in, Nyberg likes to



Nyberg used 955 lawn mower blades to create this life-size elephant.

tackle bigger projects inside his shop. This year he's working on a 6-foot-6 Viking for the local Sons of Norway group. And he's collected about 1,200 more lawn mower blades.

This time, Nyberg says, there's a rhino in there waiting to come out.

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Nyberg didn't paint this giant chain and hook so it would rust just like a real chain.



## Record-Breaking Meteorite Found Beneath Farm Field

By Dawn Throener, Associate Editor

Steve Arnold didn't have much time to hunt for meteorites on Allen Binford's farm near Haviland, Kan. "When I called him up, he said 'Yeah, but you need to hurry because I'm going to be planting wheat on that land in a couple of weeks,'" says the professional meteorite hunter, who knew meteorites had been found on the land in the past.

Fortunately, after two weeks of hunting on the 320 acres of leased land, Arnold found a record-breaking 1,430-lb. oblong meteorite buried more than 7 ft. under a field.

The meteorite is the largest of its kind ever found in the U.S. and the third largest in the world.

What makes the meteorite unique, aside from its size is that it's an "oriented pallasite". Oriented means it didn't tumble while entering the earth's atmosphere but kept its conical shape. Pallasites also have crystals inside.

So he uses an ATV-mounted heavy-duty metal detector. On Binford's fields it picked up wrenches, horseshoes, broken plows, pitchforks, barbed wire and even two big wagon wheels. "I pulled about 100 lbs. of scrap iron out of those fields," he says, laughing.

When Arnold searches farm fields, he can't use a hand-held metal detector because he knows any meteorites he finds are likely to be buried deep. If they were shallow, they would have already been pulled up by plows or other tillage equipment.

When he detected a strong signal, Arnold dug 7 1/2 ft. deep and at first didn't find anything. But the metal detector kept signaling something. His backhoe operator dug a trench around the unknown mass. By then, Arnold realized he had a big one but didn't know how big. Only when the meteorite was in a sling being pulled from the ground did both

Arnold and business partner Phil Mani understand what they had. Now, Arnold and Mani are trying to sell the meteorite, nicknamed "King of the Pallasites."

Determining its value is difficult because it's so rare. But they've got an idea. "We're pretty confident it'll be in the 7 figures," says Arnold. Other meteorites found in the same area are for sale on their website.

"This is one of those things we'd like to see in a museum but we're open to all offers," says Arnold, adding that they're not in a hurry to sell it. "I suspect it'll eventually be sold at an auction."

Now, Binford doesn't mind if Arnold destroys some of the crop. "He said, 'You know, Steve, I'm only going to make about \$100 an acre on this wheat. You've got to do a lot of digging with a backhoe to destroy an entire acre of land. Go ahead and hunt as long as you want and don't worry about tearing up a little bit of the crop'."

"The Binfords' have a nice new cash crop this year and they're having as much fun with this as I am," he says, noting that the farm family will receive a percentage of the profits after the sale of the meteorite.

Arnold is continuing to hunt for meteorites on Binford's land and neighboring farms on which he has exclusive hunting leases. He hopes to find more pieces of the big meteorite.

For now, the meteorite is in a secure lockup in San Antonio, Texas where visitors can view it by appointment.

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Steve Arnold found this 1,430-lb. meteorite buried 7 ft. under a field on Allen Binford's farm. It's the largest of its kind ever found in the U.S. and the third largest in the world.



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