

“Town And Everything In It” Sold At 3-Day Auction

When Balster’s Implement and Parts, a 137-year-old business in Scotch Grove, Iowa, sold out this past September it drew national and worldwide attention. The reason? Nearly the entire inventory, stored in 14 buildings that comprised the whole town, was 70 to 120 years old. And much of it was in mint-like condition or in original packaging.

“This was a once-in-a-lifetime auction, a fair-like event that attracted buyers who arrived by horse and buggy and corporate jets,” says Judd Grafe, president of Grafe Auction Company, the auction manager. “We had buyers from just about every state and several foreign countries.”

More than 2,000 buyers were on the grounds and another 2,200 were online to bid on items sold in 4 rings that operated for 3 days. Some of the most rare items people had never heard of, such as the Never-Fail 5-gal. kerosene can (patented May 9, 1893 by the JH Hayes Mfg. Co. of Greenfield, Ohio). The 4-color original label didn’t have a scratch on it.

Another rarity: the Martinware fuel can, made in 1905 by the General Metalware Co. of Minneapolis and Portland. It too had the original label.

Collectors also drooled over a 1-gal. can of French Auto Oil, made by the Marshall Oil Company. The can held the original contents, had a screw-on oil spout and original labels. It sold on the internet for \$1,800.

Hundreds of catalogs and manuals were sold, including an original instruction catalog for the Stationary low cut attachment (#XMB52) for a Moline Milwaukee regular Corn Binder. It included a parts list with illustrations. The family also sold several antique tractors and a mint-condition 1942 Packard.

Balster’s Implement and Parts started in the 1870’s and grew to include groceries, hardware, a gas station, implement sales, a lumberyard, a blacksmith shop, a mercantile and a tire shop. “The business became the town, and the town never grew beyond the business,” Grafe says. “The amazing part of this family venture was that they never threw anything away.” When 88-year-old Les Balster passed away in 2009, his family decided to sell the business because there was nobody to run it.

Grafe organized a staff of more than 50 people to catalog the contents and promote the sale. “We had 20 semi trailers full and hadn’t started with things in shelves, bins or pallets,” Grafe says. The auction sold thousands of parts for old mowers, swathers, binders, blowers and wagons. There were hundreds of mower sickles and cultivator shovels, pallets of bearings and belts, boxes of unopened spark plugs, racks of hay slings, spools of ropes and rolls of corn planter check wire.

People came to buy the ball bearings, belts and binder parts, the canvases, umbrellas and combine parts, boxes and pallets of chains, pulleys and tools, spare parts for long-gone brands such as Avery, Hume, Minneapolis-Moline, Wood Bros., Advance Rumely, Deering and Electric Wagon.

“The sale was almost like a fair, a real celebration,” Grafe says. “That was the family’s wish, and that’s what we worked toward.” His company promoted it to collectors, to farmers, and to the Amish and Mennonite communities. During the event, they had a live radio broadcast hosted by a retired 85-year-old announcer who had done a weekly remote program from Balster’s many

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years ago. A vendor sold malts for 9 cents. “We think there were 5,000 to 6,000 people in attendance during the three days,” Grafe says. Cars were parked in fields up to six miles away.

Amish and Mennonite farmers from ten states were there to buy parts, tools and equipment that may never be for sale again. Brand new parts made in the 1800’s and still in their boxes were coveted by farmers who still need them and collectors who want to keep them. Parts for hay rakes, binders, cultivators and grain cleaners were especially valuable.

Grafe says, “When we cataloged for the sale we were amazed that the buildings were dry, there was no mold, water or heat damage. Yes, there was plenty of dust, and we sold that too. We had 4 rings set up for three days. Each ring sold 1,000 to 1,500 items a day. There were more than 20,000 lots.”

All 4 rings sold for 10 to 11 hours a day. “We’d finish at 7 p.m. one day and work all night to stage for the next day’s auctions,” Grafe says. “Basically it was a 4-ring circus. Everyone was busy, everyone had fun and the family was very pleased with the results. It’s the most labor intense sale we’ve ever done.”



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Everyone involved considered the event a real success. “When we first met with the family, they had a purchase price in mind for the merchandise and the buildings. After the sale was complete and everything was tallied up, they received three times what they had expected,” Grafe says.

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Animal Training Helps People With Disabilities

Unlike other people who use animals in therapy, Josef Rivers doesn’t train animals to work with people who have physical disabilities. He teaches people with disabilities to train animals like camels, yaks and even exotic chicken breeds. Without realizing it, the trainers receive a therapeutic benefit. They build muscles, develop fine motor skills and balance, and best of all grow in self-confidence as they concentrate on things like getting a donkey to jump a rail or train chickens for a “chicken circus”.

It’s all about focusing on something other than the disability, Rivers says. He understands. The 74-year-old has lived with polio since he was 8 months old. As a boy he was shy and awkward, but fortunate to live in exotic places like Bolivia where his best friends were baby jaguars, monkeys and macaws. His mother died when he was young, and Rivers’ father, Walter, recognized his son’s connection to animals. He told Rivers that everyone has a “dragon to slay” – something that holds you back from loving yourself and, therefore, others.

That insight became the force that drives Rivers. For nearly 40 years, he has directed the Dragon Slayers therapy program on 24 acres in a beautiful state park among California’s redwood trees. He provides a free animal therapy program for people with physical disabilities. Financial support to feed 60 animals or more and maintain the facility comes from donors, tour fees and the sale of some of the animals.

“These are animals that are rescued or donated,” Rivers says. “It takes so many to find one that makes a grid therapy animal.”

Within a year he can tell if an animal is suitable. If not, he has people that will take them. He went through 13 camels before he found Kubla, a Bactrian camel that often accompanies Rivers as he travels about in

his powered wheelchair. Rivers loves to tell the story of meeting a 6-year-old who never focused on anything, until the camel nestled its head into the boy’s chest. The boy’s eyes lit up, he squealed and held the camel’s lips in each hand and kissed the camel. His parents wept with joy.

Supporters have donated some impressive animals for Rivers’ program including a watusi calf that is the son of the largest horned bull in the Guinness Book of World Records. There are zebras, yaks, llamas, emus, tortoises and macaws. And there are several of Rivers’ favorite therapy animals – donkeys.

“They are so intelligent,” Rivers says, noting he has everything from miniature to mammoth sizes. A couple of them are extremely valuable. One has French ancestry, and another is a direct descendant of Royal Gift, a donkey that George Washington bred to his best carriage horse mares.

Students listen to Rivers as he tells them how to teach the donkeys to perform or pull a cart. The students learn that being kind and gentle works on donkeys – and people, too.

“They learn you’re nobody until you can help someone else. Every student has to help another student. They teach one another. Because I am in a wheelchair, they listen to me,” Rivers says.

Students work with small chickens that Rivers bred from Seramas and Frizzle chickens.

“They are unusual, beautiful and perfect for little hands,” Rivers says, and he’s started to give them to facilities and organizations that work with people with disabilities. He also uses them in his own program. As the chicken sits on a hula-hoop, for example, the trainer rotates it 10 times. While focusing on the bird, the trainer gains strength to push his manual chair.



Instead of training animals to work with people who have physical disabilities, Josef Rivers teaches people with disabilities to train animals.

Following physical therapists’ directions, Rivers works with as many as six students a day – for free. He requires that they commit to a year, usually twice a week. Some students have gone on to start similar facilities.

People with disabilities or who are terminally ill or residents of senior communities are welcome to tour the property for free. Other groups pay a fee to help support the work of Dragon Slayers.

And new this year, Rivers invites siblings and their parents who have lost a child to spend a free day at Dragon Slayers to ease their pain.

Rivers continues to believe that animals

help people slay whatever dragons are holding them back.

However, with the difficult economic times, it’s become more difficult to keep the program going, so financial contributions for the 501(c)3 organization are welcome.

“I’ve got these kids depending on me, and I can’t close my doors,” he says.

Check out the Dragon Slayer website for more information and how to contribute.

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