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60-Year Collection Grows Into A Tourist Attraction

Virgil Schwanke was 15 years old when he bought his first car. "I got a 1926 Model T coupe for 15 bucks," Schwanke said. "I thought it was a gem. I fixed it up so it really hummed. A few years later I bought another vehicle and never sold the first one, so I guess that was my downfall."

Within a few years, Schwanke's "downfall" turned into a major hobby. Sixty-five years later, Schwanke has more than 100 vehicles, 200 tractors and hundreds of tools, signs, gas pumps and other collectibles. They're part of the Schwanke Museum, a mini tourist attraction in Willmar, Minnesota. Since the attraction opened in 1996, people from 46 states and 21 countries have been through the doors. His first Model T now sits alongside a rare 1923 Anderson right inside the main entrance.

Visitors see a diverse collection that includes a 1917 Maxwell Overland Touring vehicle, a 1901 replica Olds, a 1929 Hudson with a Big 6 Motor, a 1921 Nash touring car and a Nash Metropolitan. A 1951

Mercury sits next to a shiny 1957 Chevrolet convertible, not far from a 1948 Crosley Hotshot. In another section are eight Model T Fords.

Schwanke is proud of the fact that every one of his vehicles is clean, restored and in running condition. "Buying and selling stuff turned into buying, restoring and keeping," Schwanke says with a laugh.

His rare 1961 Volkswagen Type II pickup truck has prompted one guy to "call me probably 300 times trying to buy it, but I'm not selling."

Schwanke's collection of farm tractors spans years and colors. He has old Thielmans, Masseys and John Deere's. There's an unusual Ford built on a grader frame. A rare Sawyer-Massey cranks from behind for starting rather than the front. It stands across the aisle from a family of three high-boy Farmalls with new rubber and bright red paint. An Army Airborne track vehicle that was parachuted into Europe during WWII is next to a vintage Cat crawler. Steam engines



About 40 old hand crank drills are displayed by make, model and year on one 12 by 20-ft. section of museum wall.



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are plentiful, as are old gas pumps, signs, tractor and auto memorabilia.

Even the large walls have antiques. More than 40 old hand crank drills are displayed by make, model and year on one 12' x 20' section. On another are all the dies and forms used to build a steam engine.

Schwanke found many of the items in his collection during his everyday business dealings. He and his father and brother started a tractor repair parts business in 1958. "We talk to people all across the country everyday, so it's easy to find out if something is for sale," Schwanke said. A few years ago one customer offered him a fire truck, and now he has several, including a 1927 Rio, a 1929

LaFrance and a 1939 International. All are clean and operational. Other acquisitions were even more unconventional, like the time he saw a lady driving a 1930 Willys in a small town. Schwanke followed her for a few blocks until she parked at a store. He introduced himself and said he was interested in her vehicle, which he ended up buying.

"I don't have an allegiance to any one brand," says Schwanke. "If something catches my eye I look it over real well to see if it can be restored."

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Giant Yard Bell, Wildlife Feeders For The Yard

Over the years FARM SHOW has featured numerous "for the yard" items made by Dan Jacobson of Pequot Lakes, Minn. His custom-designed decorations include everything from tow-behind garbage bins to firewood trailers and bat houses.

"I enjoy taking something that was built and designed for one thing and giving it a whole new life," says Jacobson.

Here are three of his latest inventions:

Giant Yard Bell

Cut the bottom off a 2,500 cu. in. oxygen tank and mount a metal dinger inside and a hook on top. Paint the tank in bright colors, and you have a shiny, giant yard bell that can be mounted on a tree or hung from a deck.

Jacobson has made several different bell models. The one in the photo is painted blue and yellow like the Swedish flag and shows a Swedish Dahlia horse.

"It works great for calling the family to dinner," says Jacobson. "You just grab onto a chain at the bottom of the dinger and move it rapidly back and forth. It makes a deep ringing sound that can be heard from several hundred feet away."

"The steel on these tanks is 3/8 in. thick so they'll never rust out. That's why all my yard bells come with a 100-year guarantee."

He starts with old leaking "reject" tanks purchased from a local welding company. A

local steel supplier uses a big bandsaw to cut off the bottom of the tank. It makes a nice, clean cut, which Jacobson then sands down. He also sandblasts the tanks.

The dinger, a 4-in. long, 3-in. dia. steel bar, is connected to a rope that runs up inside the tank and is attached to it at the top. The hook attaches to a bolt-on angle iron bracket.

Jacobson sells the giant yard bells for \$250 plus S&H.

Pots & Pans Bird Feeder

He uses old stainless steel frying pans to come up with what he calls "lifetime bird feeders". "Unlike wood and plastic, squirrels and woodpeckers can't damage or destroy these feeders. They're virtually indestructible," says Jacobson.

Birds feed out of the pan, while the pan's lid forms a roof about 12 in. above. The lower pan is to hold the feed. The upper pan is 2 in. wider and keeps feed dry. The 2 parts are connected by a 9/16-in. dia. eye bolt that hangs from a light chain.

Jacobson grinds the pan's handles off and throws them away. "I've field tested these bird feeders for more than 10 years with amazing results," says Jacobson. "Even after they sit out in the weather they still look nice, and the depth of the pan keeps birds from spilling seed."

"Raccoons and squirrels can't even come



Dan Jacobson converted an oxygen tank into a giant yard bell (left). He uses old stainless steel frying pans to come up with "lifetime bird feeders."



close to wrecking these feeders because they can't chew through or even scratch the stainless steel metal. They can jump on it or do anything they want, but they can't wreck it."

Jacobson sells his bird feeders for \$40 plus S&H.

Bonkers Squirrel Feeder

It's made from an old, hollowed-out oak log and hangs by a strong metal spring from a basket mounted on a tree branch.

"You just put in some sunflower seed and watch the squirrel jump from the tree to the feeder. The log then will bounce all over the place, up and down and in circles with the squirrel hanging on for dear life," says Jacobson. "Even deer like to eat from this feeder."

Jacobson cuts the dead tree trunk to the desired length and then uses a chainsaw to clean out the center. He drills a hole in the



Hollowed-out oak log with feed placed inside hangs by a strong metal spring, causing log to bounce all over when a squirrel jumps onto it.

center of the trunk and screws a metal ring into it, then attaches the spring or a rope to the ring.

The squirrel feeder sells for \$50 plus S&H. "The squirrel feeder comes with just a 50-year guarantee, because it's made from wood that's subject to changing weather conditions," jokes Jacobson.

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