

Bollinger has rebuilt and restored more than 100 sleighs to mint condition over the past 30-plus years.



Childhood Memory Launched Sleigh Business

When a major stroke left Jack Bollinger unable to perform his given line of work more than 30 years ago, a reflection back to his early childhood spurred a new hobby and, eventually, a thriving business.

"I was confined to a wheelchair and couldn't return to my regular work," Bollinger says, "then one day, I recalled being at our church when the pastor arrived in a beautiful sleigh during a big snowstorm. Somehow, that memory spurred me to try my hand at creating replacement sleigh runners. It was a hobby at first and then a business. I've restored more than 100 sleighs in 34 years."

Bollinger searched periodicals for sleigh restoration instructions and eventually developed his own method for creating replacement wood runners. First, he slices a 1-in. piece of ash, oak or similar hardwood slightly longer than the original runner into 8-in. strips. He glues them together and puts clamps a few inches apart to hold them in place. Then he spreads a thin stream of glue down the length of each strip, then across the strip with a spatula. After letting it dry overnight, he removes the clamps and planes about 1/16 in. off each side. He paints them and says they look like original wood runners from the manufacturer.

"I've worked on some very dilapidated sleighs for people all over the country over the years and turned them into almost 'like new' originals," Bollinger says. One was a Portland Cutter that'd sat outside for over 40 years. Another was for the Ralph Lauren company. He also recalls the picture of

broken sleigh parts sent by a man whose grandfather had driven him in that sleigh when it was in perfect shape. While the man served in the military, his grandfather had died, and the sleigh was sold. Eventually, the man got it back in pieces and wanted it restored. Bollinger told him the restoration would be very expensive, but the man didn't hesitate to give him the go-ahead.

With more than 30 years of experience, Bollinger is a bona fide restoration expert. His knowledge of sleigh availability, pricing, restoration cost and construction has helped his business thrive. He charges for photo and in-person appraisals so owners know their values when placing them in an estate or offering them for sale. His business does custom restoration, putting sleighs in excellent usable condition, including paint detailing. They'll also build new sleighs using traditional designs and styles.

"Some sleighs we restore are probably close to 100 years old. We put a lot of tender care into bringing them back. All of our new sleighs are made from the finest wood available, no fiberglass anywhere," Bollinger says. "When we sell a rebuilt or new sleigh, we give the owners complete instructions on how to care for and maintain their keepsake."

The company also buys non-repairable sleighs for parts and can help people locate specialty sleighs such as 4-passenger Bobs, Racing, Albany and Russian sleighs.

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Northern Gardeners Can Plant Okra, Too



Okra is actually a hibiscus that blooms with yellow flowers in August.

If you want something new to grow in your garden this year, consider adding okra to your seed list. Jeffrey Miller has proven that the popular southern food can be grown in northern gardens. However, convincing his North Dakota neighbors to try okra has been a little more difficult.

"It's an acquired taste," he says, noting he became interested in okra when he traveled

with his work as a geologist and tasted good fried okra at a Virginia restaurant. He enjoys it fried, baked, pickled and raw.

Paying \$8 for a small jar of pickled okra inspired him to grow the plant, typically grown in the South, in his half-acre garden.

"Okra is the last thing I plant in early June to make sure the ground is warm," he says, noting that black woven landscape fabric is also helpful. He cuts a slit to expose a 3 in. width of soil to plant seeds 1/4 in. deep every 8 or 10 in.

Still, germination is challenging, and it can take three weeks before plants appear. However, they thrive in hot weather and can grow up to 6 ft. tall on sturdy stalks similar to sunflowers.

Okra is actually a hibiscus that blooms with yellow flowers in August. By the middle of the month, the okra pods start to mature, and Miller harvests them about every other day when they're about 4 to 6 in. long.

"They go from tender to wood, and you can't chew it," he says, noting that he often samples raw okra in the garden to make sure it's still good with a fresh green flavor. To ensure continued harvest, he also picks over-mature pods that he feeds his chickens. Plants produce until the temperature drops to 32 F. Miller has tried several varieties and has



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Special Day And Postmark Honor Kansas Antique Tractors

Michael Hinton's passion for agriculture and tractors took root in his boyhood Kansas home and flourished through a lifetime of agricultural-based interactions. Sixteen years ago, he began his collection of antique tractors with three Farmall tractors. From there, he expanded his gathering, developed "Talking Tractors," an antique tractor website, became a member of the Great Plains Antique Tractor Club, and spearheaded several local and national events spreading awareness of how the tractor transformed American farming.

Because of Hinton's tireless efforts, Kansas Governor Laura Kelly proclaimed August 22, 2024, as 'Antique Tractor Preservation Day' in Kansas. The announcement was also mentioned and marked in the congressional record.

"This day is about preserving agricultural history and knowing our agricultural background in farming and crop production," Hinton says. "It's about the stories and connections made. Tractors help generate national awareness of American farming transformations. They're more than just imperative farm machinery."

On the special day, antique tractors were parked around the Hutchison post office, and the Thresher Museum in Bird City, Kan., held

an open house commemorating the event.

A U.S. Postal Service commemorative pictorial "Talking Tractors" postmark was made available from the Hutchison, Kan., post office. Interested parties could send a postcard or letter to be stamped with this limited postmark.

Hinton is already planning 2025 events. He's sent formal letters to the President and Secretary of Agriculture to assign Antique Tractor Preservation Day an ongoing national rather than State recognition. He hopes a larger-scale appreciation will inspire tractor clubs nationwide to host special events.

"Antique Tractor Preservation Day is important because it was issued by the State of Kansas where my family's story and agricultural heritage resonates, and to the people of Kansas, many, if not most, having farming ancestors or current relations to farmers," Hinton says. "Tractors are part of our core heritage. They're cherished family keepsakes handed down and engrained with acres of stories, creating friendships that span fields near and far and memories that last beyond one's lifetime."

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had success with Clemson Spineless, which is less prickly than some. Cow Horn okra is an heirloom that produces longer pods and has a good flavor.

He likes to try different varieties, but he notes that the weather is the biggest factor in success.

"Every year, you have things that do better than others. So, the more diversification you have, the better," he says. For example, plants like okra and peppers don't do as well in cool summers.

When it's hot and they do well, Miller sells his surplus harvest through his Facebook page, where he also sells other garden bounties, Aronia and elderberries. So far,

his only interest in okra is from people who have moved from the South to North Dakota.

In addition to eating it fresh, Miller freezes okra to bake, fry and add to soups during the winter. He also pickles and cans many quarts.

Okra's reputation for being slimy is true, he admits, especially when it's pickled or in soups. But when fried or baked correctly, okra is something northerners and Midwesterners may want to try.

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