

The long and winding garage sale

By JULIE SWIDWA - HP Staff Writer | Posted: Saturday, August 8, 2015 6:00 am

THREE OAKS - Shoppers at Michigan's Longest Garage Sale Friday said the most fun aspect of the event is not knowing what they might find.

"It's amazing. You just never know. Last year we found a potato pitch fork and a boat anchor," said Mark Dean of Valparaiso, Ind. "This year we're looking for an axe for our son for camping and hard suitcases for my wife."

The suitcases are not for packing up and leaving, but for making into decorative shelving units, Dean explained.

The family started the day in New Buffalo and by 11 a.m. had made its way to the yard outside Three Oaks Elementary School, where about a dozen vendors had rented space for the sale.

The annual Michigan's Longest Garage Sale stretches 180 miles, from New Buffalo to Detroit, along U.S. 12, the nation's second-oldest highway. The sale continues today and Sunday along the U.S. 12 Heritage Trail.

A map listing sale locations is available at www.us12heritagetrail.org. Some people take part with a sale outside their own home. Others rent space somewhere along the route.

Paula Hanft of Holland started her trek in New Buffalo and in Three Oaks bought a plastic Santa Claus for \$5. For 11 years, the Santa stood in the window at the Finders Keepers Variety Store in Three Rivers owned by Maxine Creager and her son Robert Creager.

"It's time for him to move on now," Maxine Creager said of the 2-foot Santa.

Joyce Patrick of St. Joseph said she probably overpaid for a 3-foot stuffed carrot. She bought it as a gag gift to send to her niece in South Carolina. The price: \$2.

Tim Mesler of Merrillville, Ind., was on a mission. He was looking for a unicycle.

Why?

"Why not," Mesler, 66, said. "It'll keep me young."

Mesler joked that he has come to the Michigan's Longest Garage Sale every year, "starting this year."

A man who did not want to give his name muttered, "We just got rid of a bunch of junk and now she's buying more," as he paid for a box of furniture sliders he said was for his wife. He bought them from Debbie Kieckhafer of Wheaton, Ill., who was a first-timer at the sale.

"My sister has done it for years. I decided to clean out a spare room. The kids have graduated from college, and I gathered stuff we had cluttering up," she said.

Kieckhafer said she paid \$10 to rent a spot outside the school in Three Oaks and, by about 11 a.m. Friday had made \$22.

Tammy Strickland of New Buffalo and her mother Gwen Strickland of Osceola, Ind., have shared a booth space for the past seven years.

"This is fabulous for Michigan tourism. One of our first customers two years ago was from Canada," Tammy said. "Today we had a lady from Kenosha, Wis. She said she stayed in New Buffalo last night. This brings a lot of people to the area."

She did not want to say how much money she and her mother make from the sale but, she said, "We usually get rid of a lot of stuff. Like, look at this. A rotary dial phone - who doesn't need a brown rotary dial phone?"

Also for sale at the Strickland's booth was a tricycle with no wheels, and a doctor's medical lamp.

Tammy Strickland said someone might buy the tricycle for parts, and the medical lamp may have historical value.

"It's made by Will Ross Inc. from the early 1930s," she said, showing off the engraved bottom of the tarnished lamp. "It was in my mother's family. We don't know why. Maybe someone along the line was a doctor. We don't know."

About five miles north on Spaulding Road in Sawyer, Carol Styburski was participating in the sale with help from her daughter. She said their last yard sale was five years ago and this is the first time they've had a sale connected with Michigan's Longest Garage Sale, always the second weekend in August.

"We were pretty busy this morning. We had a person from South Haven. All the people we had this morning said they were in town for the big sale," Styburski said.

Asked whether the items she was selling held sentimental value, Styburski said, "Oh, no. It's just things I want to get rid of."

She said she sold a lot of board games in the morning, and some baby clothes that were worn by her grandson, now 17.

Her daughter reminded her of the Harley Davidson "onesie" they'd sold earlier.

"Oh, yeah. I guess that one was a little bit sad," Styburski said.

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