

Saturday, February 23, 2008 • Gene Fox

A BIG LURE

Collectibles Show may lure some away from Bass Pro's big opening

Outdoor enthusiasts have an interesting - if not tough - choice to make Saturday.

This being the inaugural weekend for the new Bass Pro Shops store in Independence, they can either shoehorn their way into the new, high-tech hunting and fishing supermarket - or they can go back in time when lures and decoys were carved by hand.

Isn't it ironic that the seventh annual Hunting & Fishing Collectibles Show is being held this weekend at the KCI Expo Center?

Just goes to show you that everything old is new again. Also tells us that hunting and fishing has an enduring value that extends from grandparents to grandchildren.

In fact, just seeing antique lures can sometimes be more meaningful than actually catching a lunker on the latest Blue Fox Super Vibrax spinner.

"I stared at your August cover for half an hour before even opening the magazine," wrote one reader of the Missouri Conservationist back in 2003.

Cliff White's rich photograph showed a treasure chest of antique lures, obviously touching a heartstring in many of us.

"Your cover photo of the old fishing lures brought back memories for me of what was in my father's tackle box when I was learning to use a casting rod," also wrote Jim Caplan of Columbia.

"This was the summer after Eisenhower's second inaugural. We were floating a river in southern Missouri, probably the Jack's Fork, and he snapped a big Dowagiac Minnow onto his line. These are shown in the bottom row ... I don't have any, but a lot of the other lures are in my tackle box, which might be worth a fortune if I could just find it."

Jim's nostalgia - and angst - is not uncommon.

I've been carrying around my dad's old (and now rusty), green tackle box since he turned it over to me. What's it been now, 50 years?

The best part, though, is that the colorful, horsehair jigs we made together are still in very good shape. Some, in fact, are still in the now antique and yellowing Saran wrap we put them in. Of course, the best news is that my dad, Roy Fox of Lee's Summit, has gotten just a little white - not yellow - over those years. And, yes, he's still as cranky as an old crankbait.

As exciting as it will be to visit Johnny Morris' new mega tackle shop, my first stop will be at the collectibles show. Peter Marsh is the organizer. He's a youngster compared to antiques like my pop and myself. And although Peter was not brought up in a household of anglers or hunters, he got hooked on both while attending Kansas State.

And it wasn't long after that he got snagged hook, line and sinker by the outdoors heritage. Today he supports his family in the sporting collectibles biz.

"The Hunting and Fishing Collectibles Show is a group of individuals who come together to buy, sell, trade old hunting and fishing stuff - anything that might have been used 20 to 100 years ago," Peter explained.

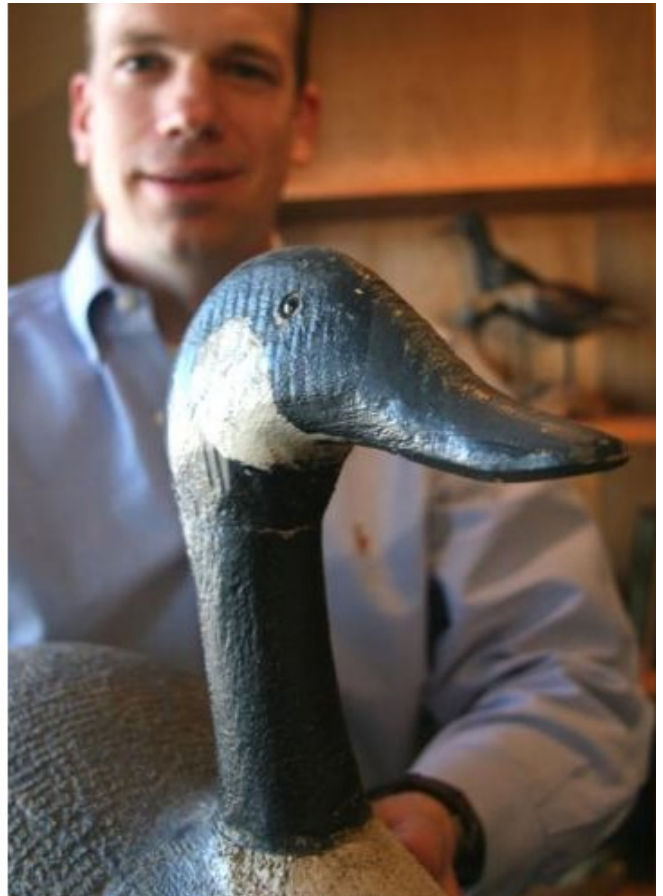
"The value and price of these things have gone up tremendously, which in turn has sparked a lot of interest. But there is a lot of historical value as well. A lot of people want to preserve maybe something that their grandfather - or father - had. There's even a couple guys here in Kansas City who put on a fishing tournament every summer and they only allow the vintage lures to be used."

Peter admits that sometimes it's a little tough trying to balance the financial and intrinsic.

His personal collection ranges from everything to an old "Smitty's Boats and Motor" shopping bag from the long-gone Kansas City, Kan., outdoor shop to gun oil cans to rustic, hand-carved wooden decoys. His favorite is a large Canada goose that is in excellent condition (see photo). It is worth about

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Organizer Peter Marsh will be at the seventh annual Hunting and Fishing Collectibles Show Saturday, but not his rare Benz goose decoy. It's his favorite in his personal collection and was made in Jefferson City in the 1930s.

\$1,500, but that's not what makes it worthy in his mind.

"It was made in Jefferson City in the 1930s by the Benz Decoy Company and was barely used, which is really unusual. It has 100 percent original paint, glass eyes. A very rare item and I was very lucky to stumble across it a couple years ago."

He also picks up a nearby small cardboard box, pulls off the lid and proudly displays a colorful, yellow lure.

"This particular lure was manufactured by Virgil Ward," he said. "It was one of his early enterprises. This one that I have is really neat because it's unused in the box. It's pretty hard to find something like that."

"The box is probably worth more than the lure. You might be able to find the lure, but the box would be real difficult. Men would buy the lure, put it in their tackle box and throw away the cardboard box - so it's kinda neat to find something like this."

The Hunting and Fishing Collectibles Show is Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the KCI Expo Center. Admission is \$6 and children 12 and under are free. For details go to www.huntfishshow.com.

Gene Fox, a media specialist for the Missouri Department of Conservation, is a longtime area journalist and an avid outdoorsman. His column appears weekly in The Examiner. Reach him at gene.fox@mdc.mo.gov.