

Gary Meyers Preserves a Little Bit of History (continued from page 1)

front window. He added the two cars that are on display in what was once the Chevy showroom: a 1969 Hemi Plymouth Roadrunner that is one of only 194 built, and a 1970 Plymouth Roadrunner Superbird, that is one of only 458 originally manufactured. But the rest of the collection might be even more interesting to some visitors-- old metal signs and gas cans, model cars and neon signs that line the walls and fill the shelves-- making it a most interesting office, and telling the story of days gone by. "Everything has a little story," says Meyers. "People come in from all over and they always recognize something and they attach to it. You can create a friendship around those things, and that's what the town is about, and that's what people like."

Meyers loves to talk about the collection and share it with others. Some of the signs and items on display are originally from the Vernonia Auto Company, like the original Coke machine that sat in the show room and is remembered by local old timers, and one of the original gas pumps that sat on the curb in front of the building. That coke machine still has green paint drips that



Meyers remembers as the original color of the inside of the showroom. And old photos from the 1930's show that same gas pump.

But there's more to the story than what's on display. Meyers has collected all kinds of artifacts that date back to those old businesses that came before him, including an old 1938 brochure from the old dealership for Chevy automobiles that were for sale that year; those old photos of the building from the 30's; the original letter that established the dealership in Vernonia;

and ice scrapers with the business name on it-- even business cards and boxes of matchbooks with the dealership's name printed on them. Most of the items have been brought to Meyers by local citizens who just wanted him to have them, after he began collecting the memorabilia.

"That's just how it started out, just keeping some of

the old history alive," says Meyers. "Just neat old stuff that you don't see anymore. It's stuff that is never going to be made again, never seen again once it's gone." So Meyers just keeps adding to his collection. "It's gone from a few little things and a little bit of history to, boom!, it just exploded," he says.

The accumulation of some items with actual ties to the building and previous business occupants gave Meyers the history bug and he wanted to learn more. Along with Meyers, friends and employees spent hours on research at the Vernonia Library, looking through old newspaper articles and ads to uncover tidbits of information, and develop a timeline for the building. Meyers was able to date the neon Chevy sign that he has hanging in the window to at least 1936. That sign is Meyers' pride and joy.

"We found an article from August 30, 1936, that talks about a night-time burglary, and says 'While in the front office, the men were viewed from the street due to the neon sign that remained lighted,'" said Meyers. Those kinds of small details are what Meyers finds so rewarding and meaningful.

"It's just growing up and being raised here," says Meyers about his interest in collecting the artifacts.

"It's just car stuff," he says. "When you're in the car world, I guess that's what you do-- collect car stuff."

But really, it's much more than that. A lot of the items have stories that go along with them, like the clock over the reception desk. It's not an original from Vernonia, but there's a reason it's hanging in the showroom. "When I would cruise town as a kid, Wally's old 76 gas station had a big neon clock just like this," remembers Meyers. "I never wore a watch back then, and, of course, you didn't have clocks on your stereos in your cars like today. And that clock was how I knew

it was time to go home. It's a heritage I remember-- Wally's station and that old neon clock. It's not his clock, but the station's gone now, he's gone, and you just have to keep a little bit of that alive."

Meyers has accumulated his collection through the internet, at swap meets, has made trades with locals for items of value, or just received donations from people who thought he should have the items for display. And people love to wander around the room and reminisce.

But it's not just old-timers who appreciate the collection. A ten-year-old boy recently came to visit the showroom. He had been told he was allowed to choose to do anything that day, and he chose to come look at the cars in Meyers Auto Body. He knew all about Mopar history and excitedly talked on and on about it.

What was once a dream for Gary Meyers-- having his business in the old Vernonia Auto Company building-- is now a reality, and may plant seeds for future Vernonians. A legacy lives on.



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VERNONIA PREVENTION COALITION

Welcomes our new Drug-Free
Community Grant Director
DeAnna Pearl

DeAnna comes to us from Toledo, OR where she was an Alcohol and Drug Prevention Specialist.



"I was born and raised in Reedsport, a town just like this. Needless to say, I feel at home here. My personal goal as an A & D Specialist is to help youth make healthy choices. What they choose to do now affects the rest of their lives. I want kids to know they have a voice and a choice in how they live. I like to help them find that."