

Local man's collection becomes passion

Erl McLaughlin has 35 restored antique tractors

By ANN BLOOM
For the Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — For most people, having a collection of something is a hobby. For Erl McLaughlin it's a passion. McLaughlin collects and restores antique tractors.

"It's gotta be a passion," he said.

McLaughlin has 35 tractors in his newly expanded warehouse on Sunrise Road. He's been collecting and restoring tractors since 1983. All the tractors are nonmotorized, and horse-drawn with a few dating back to the Civil War.

Each tractor has a story. "There's a million stories at Sunrise Iron," he said. "Most all my tractors run, and I've painted them and put decals on them with colors and font so they look finished. It's dirty, hard, expensive work to make them respectable and put them on display — (they) need TLC."

McLaughlin said he got into restoring tractors because the winters are long and cold in Wallowa County. He has 600 acres of cropland, all irrigated, but since he doesn't run cattle and doesn't spend time feeding them in the winter, he needed something to do in the winters.

Sunrise Iron has also expanded to include antique sewing machines, washing machines, an assortment of



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Erl McLaughlin recently expanded his Sunrise Iron Museum by 72 feet so it's now 40 feet by 300 feet west of Enterprise. Inside, he has more than 100 years worth of tractors and other farm implements many of which he's restored over the past 40 years while not farming. He reopened the expanded museum Saturday, Aug. 6, 2022.

antique vacuum cleaners, butter churns, lithographs depicting turn of the century domestic activities and agricultural motifs. Besides a way of broadening his horizons, McLaughlin said the additions to his collection keep the women and girls who come to see his collection from "not being totally bored, just partially bored," he said with a smile.

McLaughlin held an open house earlier this month featuring a new addition that adds 72 feet to his warehouse. The addition enabled him to show off tractors that had been in storage and a

spiral staircase that provides a bird's eye view of everything.

"I'm indebted to my good friend, Al, for letting me store stuff in a building east of Joseph, on a no cost basis," for the last 20 years, he said.

The building is now 40 feet by 300 feet. It is the third expansion McLaughlin has added to the structure to accommodate his "really cool stuff," he said, and "when the time is right," there will probably be another addition.

The open house was "above average (in atten-

dance). Even with the price of fuel. I met a lot of people, down to earth people. People were pretty impressed," he said.

The tractors in McLaughlin's collection hail from British Columbia, Troy, Idaho, Baker City and Ellensburg, Washington, and other places throughout the United States and Canada. He said the group of collectors is not large, but it can be competitive. Collectors may share information on where to get parts for a tractor they are restoring, but not where to get a rare or unusual tractor they don't have in their

collection. That information is not shared. He does appreciate tips from people if they know of an antique tractor that he may be interested in. "People need to help me," he said.

He has been contacted by the producers of the show "The Pickers." He put them off before, but says he may encourage them to see his collection if they contact him again.

The rarest tractor in McLaughlin's collection is a 1915 10-20 Three Wheel Case B. It's the only tractor in his collection that he doesn't operate, due to its

IF YOU GO

Sunrise Iron is open any day of the year for tours. Owner Erl McLaughlin asks that anyone interested in a tour call ahead to set one up. He can be reached at 541-263-0755. Admission is free, although donations are welcome to help with ongoing projects.

rarity, but it is fully restored and is operational.

"It's only two of any in existence. The other is in Harrisburg, Virginia. The serial number (located on a plate on the tractor) authenticates it," he said.

A lot of people may put out the money required to purchase an antique tractor, but few want to put in the required hours it takes for the restoration, McLaughlin said.

"(The tractors) just set out in the elements and the weeds grow around it. (The people) get it home and there it sets. They get overwhelmed," he said, adding there are a lot of hours required to make a tractor presentable.

McLaughlin sees the educational value in his collection as a way to preserve a piece of agricultural heritage. He explained that not that long ago 98% of the population was involved in agriculture to feed 2% of the population. Now, he said, the numbers have flip-flopped.

"I just am trying to provide this stuff a good home and extend its life," McLaughlin said. "It was used to raise food to feed (people) and their neighbors. It's important to me."



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CLUES ACROSS

1. Encyclopedia contents, casually
5. What comforters cover
9. Bracelet bangle
14. Hen's house
15. Warhol who said, "Making money is art"
16. Camel's rest stop
17. Polish, as prose
18. Name within "Constantine"
19. Camera giant
20. Obstetrician's quote for assisting in childbirth?
23. ___ slicker
24. Like some museum tours
28. Not outdoors
31. Pitcher's gift
32. Outback bird
33. Orthodontist's quote for making an appliance?
36. Brief moment
37. Pizzeria hot spot
38. Small battery size
39. Employee benefit
40. Toddler's break
41. Bookbinder's quote for attaching the exterior?
45. Wedding words
46. Blvd. relative
47. Went the distance
48. Appetizer whose name is French for "sofa"
50. Alphabetize, e.g.
51. Electrician's quote for getting electricity flowing?
57. Pesto herb
60. Provo's place
61. Affirm
62. Lime or rust
63. Make cookies
64. Horse hair
65. Bread ingredient
66. It goes down in the winter
67. Calligrapher's supplies

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CLUES DOWN

1. Chilled
2. Connection point
3. Light weapon in fencing
4. Frame job figure?
5. Decimal system
6. Contest submission
7. WWII turning point
8. Coordinate, as a Mac and iPhone
9. Devour
10. Caribbean country where Vodou is a recognized religion
11. Pose a question
12. Kia model
13. AOL alternative
21. "Veni, ____, vici"
22. Fairy-tale fiend
25. Gobi or Sahara
26. Come into sight
27. Dropped out of sight, say
28. Having a twist
29. Sparks' setting
30. Squish with a shoe
31. Miles away
34. Roof overhang
35. Singer Carly ____, Jepsen
39. Deli meat on rye
41. Juliet's surname
42. At an end
43. Attired
44. Heavenly strings
49. Etching solutions
50. It goes down the drain
52. Massages
53. List shortener: Abbr.
54. Tennis legend Lendl
55. Hit on the head
56. Woolly mothers
57. "Man!"
58. Lumberjack's chopper: Var.
59. "Chandelier" singer



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