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Plenty of local shops on Alabama antique trail

By Loretta Gillespie The Cullman Times

The Alabama Antique Trail was the brainchild of Marcia Arnold, a retired Information Technology Manager for Boeing. Arnold was also a contractor for NASA and Configuration Management for Raytheon in Kwajalein, an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Arnold's oddessy in antiques began when she was just a teenager. But four years ago, right here in Alabama, she had an inspiration on the spur of the moment that has created a new career for her, and has been instrumental as a boon to many antique shop owners and antique lovers.

Arnold lives in Auburn now, but hails from Tennessee. She says that she was often frustrated with the varying hours, vague and remote locations, and lack of information that could be found on the Internet. She knew that she was missing some good sales and important finds by not having a good map, or even the knowledge of where all the shops in the state were located. So one day, on the spur of the moment, she decided to do something about it.

"I was in an antique shop in South Alabama talking to the owner, but my husband kept rushing me. The shop owner asked him what his hurry was and he told her that he had a tee time on the trail," recalled Arnold.

The proverbial light bulb went on over her head. She realized that a "trail" for antique shops could be a great thing for everyone involved.

She immediately called Bruce Pate, a friend who owns LakesOnLine.com(LakeMartin.com) and also knows a lot about software. The two became business partners in a venture that has astounded even the creators, and been a wealth of information to antique lovers across several states. To date, there are now more than 130 shops and malls onAlabamaAntiqueTrail.com and over 500 on all of the sites, which now covers five states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi and Tennessee. She expects four more to be added this year.

"Each member has a website to show the merchandise in their particular shop," explained Arnold. "There are also brochures which are distributed by each state's welcome centers, and various other places like antique shows and festivals. Every shop is unique in some way," said Arnold. "Most started with what was of particular interest to them, then expanded to include other types of antiques or collectibles."

Arnold says that March and September are the optimum months for shoppers on the Antique Trail. "There are a lot of great finds from Southern families who have had estate sales, often people are able to find original artifacts from antebellum homes, or European and Oriental antiques brought to America by the early settlers."

According to the Alabama Antique Trail press release, Marcia Arnold's original vision was, and is, "to unite the antique shops, the state and local government, travel and visitors' organizations, Chambers of Commerce, and other interested parties in helping promote and elevate the southeast as a destination for antiques. Our mission is to promote and advertise the member antique shops via the AntiqueTrail.com website and brochures and our goal is to 'brand' AntiqueTrail.com as the 'source' for locating antique shops in the southeast."

Participating Alabama Antique Trail shops in Cullman County:

Past & Present Antiques, Hanceville

Tammy Kirkendall, owner of Past & Present Antiques in Hanceville has been a member of the Alabama Antique Trail for almost three years. She says that it has definitely increased the traffic flow in her shop. "It's the best advertising that I have done," she said enthusiastically.

Kirkendall, who has been in business for 16 years, first heard of the Alabama Antique Trail from one of her customers who suggested that she join. "When I found out the details, I signed up immediately," she said.

Many of her customers have made the comment that they found her shop by visiting the Alabama Antique Trail website.

Past & Present Antiques specializes in primitives, but they also carry a wide variety of antiques of all kinds. "We hear people saying 'Oh, my gosh!' all the time as they wander through the shop," laughed Kirkendall. "They are amazed to find Victorian-style furniture, shutters, and even architectural pieces here."

There are also armories, pie safes, Hoosier cabinets, china cabinets and Victorian sofas, as well as a variety of glassware, including Fenton Glass.

Past & Present will be celebrating the Mud Creek Festival on October 20th, and will serve hot cider and refreshments at Christmas Open House, the first Saturday in December.

Past & Present is open Wednesday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. 256-590-8004.

Yesterday's Antiques

Roy and Shirley Gardner opened Yesterday's Antiques in 1993 with lots of help from sons, Brandon and Scott. Since then, Yesterday's has evolved into one of the best kept secrets in the Cullman area.

"Customers are always amazed at the quality and selection they find here," said Roy Gardner. Comments like "This is a real antique shop" are often overheard.

They can also be found on the Alabama Antique Trail, and since joining the group they have had several customers come in because they found them in the Trail's literature.

"The Alabama Antique Trail makes it easy by providing brochures with all the info you need to find the best antique shops in Alabama," Gardner commented.

Yesterday's Antiques has a wonderful selection of the most interesting items including early 1900s hand-painted porcelain by globally-recognized names such as Limoges, Nippon, Meissen and Dresden.

Vintage collectibles like lunch boxes, fishing reels, advertising signs, thermometers and clocks are popular items with Yesterday's customers. There is also a large collection of sewing notions, candy containers, toy trucks, barber shop memorabilia, and even a vintage barber pole.

You'll want to be sure to see the fabulous inkwell collection from the late 1800s, and the Vendo 44 Coke Machine, which Gardner says gets a lot of attention.

The Gardners make it a point to stock hard to find items for their customers.

"Some of the unusual items that most people have never seen include pickle castors, country store coffee grinders, a hat stretcher, Hickory Shaft golf clubs, a 1902 Spalding baseball bat, an Arrow Collar display case, and a 'Tussie Mussie' which gets a lot of comments," said Gardner.

The newest member of the Gardner family gets the most attention, "Abbie is a Shih Tzu that plays the piano," Gardner laughed.

You can find Yesterday's Antiques at 105 2nd Ave SW (Highway 31). 256-739-3972. Hours of operation are Tuesday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Check out some of Yesterday's merchandise on Ruby Lane: www.rubylane.com/shops/yas1

Easy Pickens Antiques in Trimble

Easy Pickens is one of Cullman's newest antique shops. In business for almost a year, they have been delighted with the Alabama Antique Trail's success.

"It seemed like a good way to get our name out there," explained owners, Wayne and Kristy Day.

"We get a lot of out of town business, and have had several people come in and say that they found us on the Alabama Antique Trail," Kristy commented.

Easy Pickens occupies a 5,000 square foot building, circa 1906, located near Smith Lake, at 6474 County Road, 222, just 6.2 miles from Cullman.

Because of their proximity to the lake, Easy Pickens specializes in nautical antiques and memorabilia. They also carry primitives, rustic and vintage items, antiques and retro, which has become very popular. You'll also find World War II items at Easy Pickens, which collectors will find interesting.

The Days travel extensively, collecting interesting items to bring back to Easy Pickens, so there is always something new and exciting to see here.

They will celebrate their first anniversary in November, and will be a part of Christmas Open House.

Easy Pickens hours are Thursday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. 256-734-9118, or www.easypickensantiques.com

Water Valley Flea Market

Located near Jones Chapel, just outside Cullman, 13 miles west of Interstate 65, on Highway 278 W, Water Valley Flea Market is another stop along the Alabama Antique Trail that is worth the trip.

Not really a flea market anymore, Water Valley deals primarily in memories. Here you can find vinyl records, hard to find glassware, furniture, tin items, and wrought iron pieces.

In business since 1980, with 90+ booths and 80 vendors, this is a place along the Alabama Antique Trail that you'll want to make extra time for because there is so much to see. Under the roofs of the two buildings which span approximately 20,000 square feet, you'll find untold treasures. The ladies say that lots of times their customers spend a whole day going through the two large buildings.

"We never know what's coming in here," laughed owner Lorene Waldrop. "We get in new merchandise every day."

"Some people come from as far away as Texas," added her business partner and daughter, Heather York. "There are also Texans and people from Florida who have booths here."

"The tin Christmas trees are one of our best sellers," said Waldrop.

Water Valley Flea Market is opened Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and on Labor and Memorial Day. You can find them with your GPS at 13076 US Highway 278 W. or call them at 256-747-4496 for directions.

Southern Accents Architectural Antiques/Cullman

Perhaps one of the most unique, and well-known, shops on the trail is Southern Accents Architectural Antiques, located at 308 2nd Ave S.E., in Historic Downtown Cullman.

Since 1969, Dr. Garlan Gudger Sr. and his son, Garlan Gudger Jr., have specialized in architectural antiques and salvage. They have amassed a vast collection of various hard-to-find items ranging from front porch plantation columns and heavily carved fireplace surrounds, to cast door knobs, antique windows and doors from historic homes throughout the nation.

Garlan Gudger Jr. says that the Alabama Antique Trail has been a huge asset to his business. "It's amazing to see the number of people who come into Southern Accents who follow the Alabama Antique Trail," said Gudger.

Winner of the 2011-2012 Southern Living "Heroes of the New South" award, Southern Accents is divided among several of Cullman's historic buildings with a total square footage of approximately 35,000 square feet. It is filled with amazing architectural finds that have been obtained from New York to Alabama. "Shop our showroom, browse our clearance or sale area, and walk through our outdoor garden lots to find the perfect items for your project," suggests Gudger.

Their restoration woodshop can also custom build doors to your specifications. You are sure to find one of the most diverse and unique collections of architectural antiques and salvage lumber available throughout the Southeast. They will gladly ship anywhere. Call or e-mail for merchandise information and availability.

Visit their website www.sa1969.com or follow them on FB.

Showroom Assistance: 1-877-737-0554 or info@sa1969.com

Tuesday through Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Closed on Sunday. Monday by appointment only

For information on becoming a member of the Alabama Antique Trail, contact Trailmaster Marcia Arnold/Auburn, Alabama at Marcia@AntiqueTrail.com or ring her up at 256-797-5640.