

ENTRANCE

Rob Templeton, Crossroads West gun show manager, in front of the entrance on opening day. Showgoers lined up an hour in advance, some with carts in tow, to buy preferred reloading components, ammunition, and firearms at nearly wholesale prices before they were sold out. Almost 20,000 attended the three-day event.

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IT'S SHOWTIME!

Gun Shows Provide a Lot More than Guns and Ammo

By Richard Maclean

What makes attending a gun show such a blast (pun intended) is finally finding a firearm or accessory that we have sought after for years. Buying hard-to-get ammunition or a new gun at affordable prices enriches the fun. For some, such as myself, an even more satisfying experience is chatting with extraordinary individuals. Veteran dealers have spent decades collecting and researching what they sell, and that knowledge is just waiting to be tapped if you catch them at the right time (i.e., when they are not busy negotiating a deal).

Magazine articles that review gun shows focus almost exclusively on new product releases at major venues such as the Las Vegas SHOT Show (Shooting, Hunting and Outdoor Trade) or the annual

N.R.A. Meeting and Exhibits. This article is different. I'll start with some background perspective on gun shows, highlight the December 2022 SAR West Show, and finally transition to show-related stories that might interest or amuse readers.

NOT ALL SHOWS ARE EQUAL

Nearly 5,000 annual gun shows support our quest for a fair price on firearms or ammunition. Most are very similar: Offering an array of items for sale at regional market prices. They vary in size and sometimes focus on specific types of guns or accessories. The Wanenmacher's Tulsa Arms Show claims the distinction of being the biggest in the world. It fills over 4,000 tables that would stretch over five miles if lined

up in a row. Big is not because it is a jumble of non-gun-related items; those are restricted to just 2% of the show. If you hustle, you might get through it over the twice-a-year, two-day event.

The Great Western show Fairplex in Pomona once claimed bragging rights as the biggest for over 20 years. But the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors killed it in 1999. My friends still grieve over the demise of the Pomona show. Even though no positive benefits were gained from Pomona's closure (does anyone feel safer in LA?), similar efforts to close or restrict what's sold at gun shows are ongoing throughout California.

The January Las Vegas SHOT Show is not a gun show in the traditional sense. Instead, it's a commercial



Some gun shows limit merchandise to firearms-related items. Knickknacks, perfume, and Christmas ornaments at SAR West were few and far between. One of the more interesting was jewelry made by Off Target from the ends of actual cartridge shells. For those anticipating some grief from their significant other, it's a perfect peace offering.



Darren Conant calls himself the "Chief Book Officer" of Liberty Lives Books, Laguna Niguel, CA. Over 5,000 titles were on display. He exclusively sells these books through eBay and gun shows, including hard-to-find first and collector editions.



“Flash My Brass” (shown) and Miwwall Corp were two of the larger wholesaler ammo and component distributors that SAR West gun show attendees rushed to buy from before inventories ran out. Some brought wagon carts to haul out their heavy purchases.

trade show which is not open to the public. Only pre-approved manufacturers, dealers, military, police, media, and others in the shooting, hunting, and outdoor industry attend. Sponsored by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (N.S.S.F.), it is mindboggling in size and scope. Nothing is bought and taken out of the show besides trade literature, but buyers and dealers may contract for their upcoming inventory at this show. The N.R.A. Annual Meeting and Exhibits are open to the public to view products, and, similar to the SHOT Show, weapons are not sold directly.

Aside from the mentioned Tulsa Arms Show, there are other major national shows, such as the Central Florida Arms Show in Lakeland and shows organized regionally by the Midwest Arms Collectors, the West-

chester Collectors, and Crossroads of the West. The combined Small Arms Review and the Crossroads of the West Gun Show in Phoenix or “SAR West” each December is not the world’s biggest, but it is undoubtedly one of the best. It is an outgrowth of the *Small Arms Review* magazine, founded by Dan Shea in 1997, who also created the publishing house Chipotle Publishing in 2012.

The Las Vegas Antique Gun and Knife Show follows the SHOT Show. It’s a show where the rich and famous can be found perusing half-million-dollar engraved Holland & Holland cased antique shotguns. The engraving is akin to works of art. Indeed, there are simultaneous displays and competition events among national engravers.

I watched Sean Rich, the gun expert on the T.V. series *Pawn Stars*, peel off hundred-dollar bills at the Las Vegas show to buy a gun he fancied. I told him about my very modest, in comparison, purchase of a C96 Mauser Broomhandle at an earlier December SAR West Show. “Great score!” he responded with a big smile that made me feel like I knew what I was doing, which I did not, of course. But even the inexperienced get lucky on occasion—part of the fun.

BIG BUSINESS AND BIG CROWDS

The Wanenmacher show reportedly brings in more than nineteen million dollars annually to the Tulsa region. However, SHOT’s impact is much more significant: an estimated \$88 million, not including gaming revenues from around 60,000 attendees. Similar numbers for the annual N.R.A. meeting.

That said, the smaller shows are not insignificant regarding their combined attendance and financial impact. For example, Crossroads of the West is the dominant organizer of gun shows in the West. Tracy Templeton, President of Crossroads, explains, “My parents, Bob and Lynn, founded the business in 1974 as an outgrowth of their gun store in Salt Lake City, Utah. Originally, they sold guns at shows to promote their store, ‘Guns Unlimited,’ but soon realized that organizing gun shows would be a better business model. They were correct!”

The Crossroads shows attract nearly half a million show attendees to nearly sixty shows across Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. Some of the pictures taken for the article are misleading since many were taken before the gates were open to the public. According to Tracy, attendance approached 20,000 over the two-and-a-half-day event. Tracy explains, “Since 2000, when we partnered with Dan Shae of *Small Arms News*, it has been our largest show.”



IS IT SAFE?

The movie *Marathon Man* immortalized the probe, “Is it safe?” Struggling for the answer sought by his torturer, Dustin Hoffman, responds, “Yes, it’s very safe, it’s so safe you wouldn’t believe it.” Then, promptly followed by, “No, it’s not safe at all, it’s...very dangerous,” hoping that is the answer sought. But, of course, anti-gun organizations do not even bother to find the right answer. To them, gun shows are very dangerous, a big loophole in current gun laws. But if rigorously analyzed, they might reveal the number of guns bought at gun shows at affordable prices that prevented crimes or saved lives. But I digress.

Tens of thousands of firearms in one place, how can that possibly be safe? Statistically, driving to and

A few minutes after the gates opened, this is what the SAR West building looked like: a mob scene. Most of the pictures in this article were taken after vendors finished setting up and had the opportunity to talk with the author.



The Arizona Military Vehicle Collectors Club displayed a collection of meticulously restored vehicles from WWII forward in front of the SAR West building. Impractical but fascinating to view, this Humvee bristled with (front to back) an M2HB 50, an M60, an inert AT4 Anti-Tank Weapon, an M240, and a III Модернизированный (a.k.a, Russian PKM).

several uniformed officers from the state D.P.S. (Department of Public Safety).”

Theft is, however, always a risk. Some vendors pass wire cables through trigger guards or display only in locked glass cases. Even in display cases, every gun’s action is banded by a nylon zip tie. Show management is very focused on safety. For example, I ran into Dan Shea, the SAR West co-creator with a fist full of zip ties, who was personally checking guns.

Much more elaborate precautions are taken at the SHOT Show. All weapons have their firing pins removed. Every gun is tagged, and all display ammunition is inert. Even BBs and pellets are cemented in their display boxes. If you think cementing BBs is over the top in terms of safety, I witnessed the ultimate at the Phoenix Crossroads show in 1996.

Pat Buchanan was on the presidential campaign trail and looking for headlines. Instead, he got them as national photos of him holding up a rifle, a scene later immortalized in 2000 by Charlton Heston’s quote, “From my cold, dead hands.” Shelley, his wife standing alone and far off to the side, looked bored, so naturally, I avoided the mass of onlookers and media surrounding the campaign stump and chatted with her. Soon an order came, allegedly from the Secret Service,



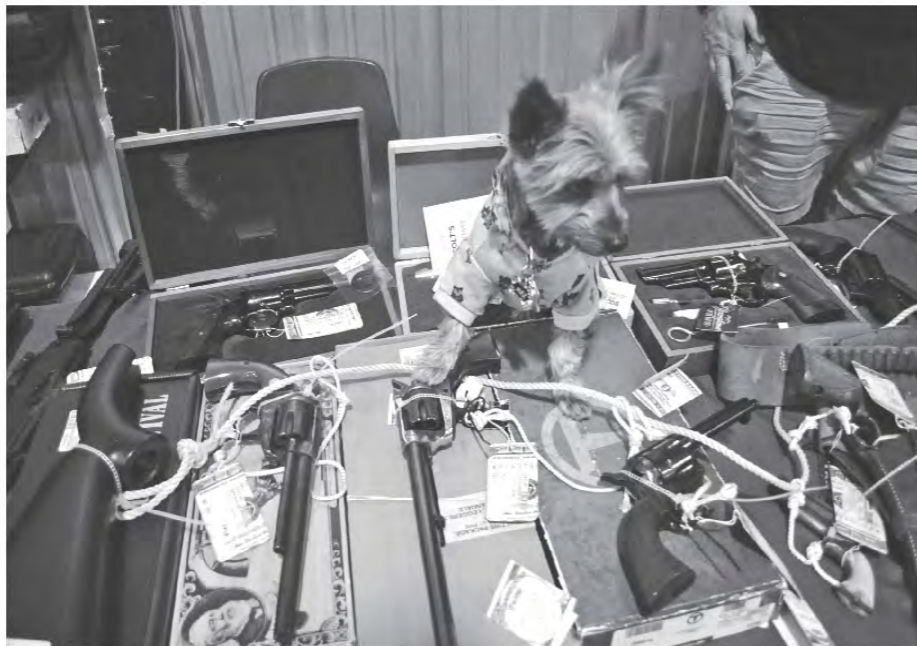
At the Phoenix Crossroads gun show in 1996, Presidential candidate Pat Buchanan held up a rifle and attracted national attention. To gun enthusiasts, it gave a whole new meaning to open iron sights. To the amazement of onlookers, pointy wooden sticks holding campaign signs were barred, allegedly ordered by the Secret Service. At a gun show? You figure. (Shutterstock)

from a Crossroads West show is much riskier. The media have attributed two deaths to gun shows (e.g., 1995 Kentucky, 2008 Massachusetts). These were, in fact, children participating in firing demonstrations running concurrently with shows. In the long history of shows, there have been less than a handful of accidental discharges that injured anyone.

I was in the SAR West building in 2015, where one of these rare accidental discharges occurred. Instantly the dull roar of a thousand conversations went so qui-

et that “you could hear a pin drop,” as another person described the aftermath. Why? First, no one started debating if a car backfired or a firecracker went off. And second, we were surrounded by weapons — no stamped to the exits.

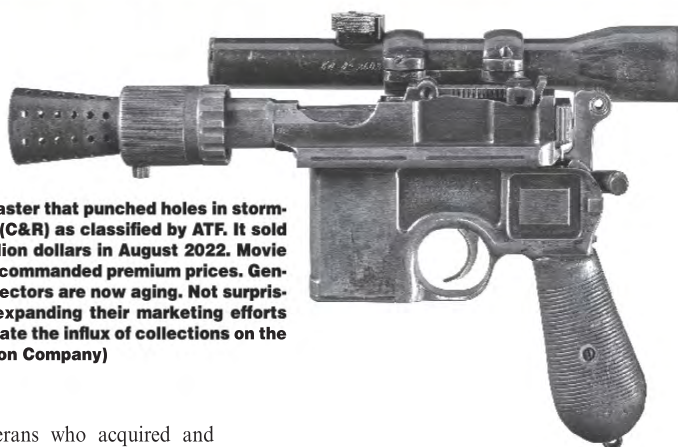
I spoke with Pete, one of several plain-closed security agents under contract with Crossroads, “Only P.O.S.T. (Peace Officer Standards and Training) officers are allowed into the show with loaded weapons. Not even badged correctional officers. There are also



Security was tight. Here is Max, the guard dog, protecting firearms sold by Youngtown Pawn. Touch one, and he’ll nibble your fingers off.



Movie geeks have attempted to analyze when the Star Wars Trilogy took place. They cannot, other than a long time ago in a different galaxy. But the DL-44 Heavy Blaster Pistol used by Han Solo can be precisely dated. It is a tricked-out Model 1896 broomhandle Mauser. Stormtroopers used modified Sterling L2A3 submachine guns and MG34s, and Lewis machine guns. Gigi Gangel, President of Reata Pass Auctions, holds an “inexpensive” Model 96 Mauser priced at less than \$2,000. Inexpensive?



that no campaign signs on sticks would be allowed. Pointy wooden sticks among us! Oh My! Thousands of guns and tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition were within easy reach. I cannot recall if Shelley rolled her eyes in amazement. I certainly did. On the positive side, Pat got his photo op and did not get so much as a splinter.

AUCTIONS BOOM

I was astonished to observe the dramatic increase in auction companies present. Two of the biggest were there: Morphy Auctions and Poulin Firearms & Militaria Auctioneers are based in Pennsylvania and Maine, respectively. Rock Island Auctions of Illinois was not; they are invariably at the Tulsa and Las Vegas shows. The smaller, regional ones were present: Bradford, Pot of Gold, Orange Coast, and Reata Pass. One or two auctioneers might have bought a table or booth in the past. Why the unprecedented surge?

John Keene, Morphy’s Class III firearms consultant, states, “World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam pro-

Ironically, this Star Wars blaster that punched holes in stormtroopers is a Curio & Relic (C&R) as classified by ATF. It sold at auction for over one million dollars in August 2022. Movie prop auctions have always commanded premium prices. Generations of serious gun collectors are now aging. Not surprisingly, auction houses are expanding their marketing efforts at gun shows to accommodate the influx of collections on the market. (Rock Island Auction Company)

duced generations of veterans who acquired and brought back weapons that were by today’s standards unbelievably inexpensive. The manifestation of inflation over the years is very apparent in the firearms collecting hobby. In the case of NFA (National Firearms Act) weapons, the cost of \$200 registration (tax stamp) was a hurdle to returning Veterans relative to the amount of income they were receiving at the time. Many NFA weapons were registered as ‘deactivated’ as a result, thus exempting the owner from the \$200 registration tax.”

“These personal gun collections grew in both size and value to once unimaginable heights fueled by this

inflow of largely foreign-made guns. Many of these guns are now surfacing for sale as even the children of WW II Veterans are in their 70s and 80s. These firearms owners realize their family members may have little interest in maintaining all or part of these collections. These collectors are also reaching the end of their lives and do not want to burden subsequent generations. Auctions are one of the best ways to liquidate collections at a fair value and shield family members from potential liabilities from direct sales to the public.”



The author was on a mission to meet old friends and make select purchases. To that end, his biggest “score” was to talk again to Dolf Goldsmith, the author of numerous books on Browning, Vickers, and other crew-served machine guns. At 94, he is among the last of the “Generation One” Arizona machine gun shooters, respected worldwide for his expertise.

crew-served machine guns. At 94, he is among the last of the “Generation One” Arizona machine gun shooters, respected worldwide for his expertise. Dolf is featured in 2022 in my three-part *Firearms News* article, “Shooting Arizona.”

After the gates opened, lines instantly formed in front of the bulk ammunition and component dealers. Some brought not only wads of cash but carts to carry off the heavy cases. I imagine this scene is repeated at all gun shows. Miwall Corporation of Grass Valley, CA, and Flash My Brass of Orem, UT, were among the largest discount suppliers. The former has been around for decades, and the latter, just two years, already sells hundreds of cases per month.

There were a dozen firearms, military history, and assorted collectible booksellers. *The Small Arms Review* table had a large assortment from Chipotle Publishing and was handing out free magazines to promote *Small Arms Review* and *Small Arms Defense*. The previously mentioned Dolf Goldsmith was there to autograph his classic books. However, the mother of all booksellers, including hard-to-find first editions, was Darren Conant, who calls himself the “Chief Book Officer” of Liberty Lives Books, Laguna Niguel, CA. Over 5,000 titles were on display. He exclusively sells through eBay and gun shows.

Speaking of magazines, the mother of all magazine and clip sellers (yes, I know the difference) was there,

Gigi Gangel, the owner of Reata Pass Auctions, further explains the upsurge, specifically at SAR West, “The Arizona demographics are changing. Many wealthy retirees are moving into this state and bringing their collections. Migration from the West Coast, especially California, is a factor, but other areas, such as the Northeast and Midwest, are involved. We have been around regionally for decades, and the word gets out that we are good at what we do and can be trusted. The internet is also a factor since we are connected globally to bidders. We took on 500 additional firearms at the SAR Show alone.”

Yet another factor in the growth of the SAR-sponsored events is the closure of the Knob Creek Show

in 2021, which catered to NFA weapon collectors. Although you could barely carry on a conversation when firing was underway, it had an unprecedented supply of hard-to-find NFA parts and accessories. As a result, vendors are shifting to the SAR shows, East and West.

GETTING AROUND SAR WEST

Most attend to purchase firearms, accessories, or ammunition at fair prices. But instead, I was on a mission to meet old friends and check out the show for *Firearms News*. To that end, my biggest “score” was to meet and talk again to Dolf Goldsmith, the author of numerous books on Browning, Vickers, and other



If your thing is unusual memorabilia and hard-to-find accessories, there is no better place than a gun show. At left is a British South Africa Police jacket and hat. The left breast pocket ribbon was for operations “combating terrorism or enemy incursions into Rhodesia.” At Right is a typical display of medals, rank insignia, buttons, pins, and ribbons boxed according to country and period.



According to owner Larry Foster, *Hard to Find Magazines and Clips* had sixty-eight tables set up in four show locations displaying around 50,000 magazines in about 8,000 various calibers, capacities, and configurations. The ultimate clip joint.



Ron Smith, the owner of Smith Enterprise Inc., has displayed his products for decades at the Crossroads shows. His reputation grew from producing quality M1 Garands, M14s, and M1A (Semi-auto M14) receivers. He has expanded his product lines to include flash hiders, suppressors, scope mounts, and rings. Most of his products manufactured are under the strict requirements of military contracts.

Hard to Find Magazines and Clips. Owner Larry Foster states, "We have sixty-eight tables set up in four show locations. We bring around 50,000 magazines in about 8,000 various calibers, capacities, and configurations." Wow!

As mentioned, the Wanenmacher show restricts the type of merchandise sold to firearms-related items. Knickknacks, perfume, and Christmas ornaments at SAR West were few and far between. One item that I found interesting is jewelry made by Off Target from the ends of cartridge shells with Austrian Swarovski® crystals where the primers once occupied. John Davidian was a designer in the jewelry industry for over forty years. Now retired, he markets his products at

gun shows and on Amazon Handmade. "Others do this, but my jewelry is rhodium or gold plated." For those anticipating some grief from their significant other, it's a perfect peace offering. Been there; done that to some success.

SOME ODDITIES AND COLLECTABLES

Stocking gun stores display rows of guns but rarely have the oddities. Gun shows are where these are at, and then some. Here are a few examples.

Swiss Bicycle

The Swiss are famous for their army bicycles called Ordonnanzfahrrad Modell 05. Used from 1905 to the

1980s, one of the rare bicycles was on sale, complete with a dummy MP40 submachine gun. They have become so rare that modern versions are made and passed off as authentic. This one had the appropriate large carrying case, headlight, bottle dynamo, and a cable-operated rear drum brake. The owner claims it is WWII vintage because of the frame serial number. The license plate style is correct for the army, but it is attached via pop rivets to a wooden mount and is of the rectangular shape of 1962. Nonetheless, Swiss army plates are rare. The Swiss are obsessive about their bike plates; there is even a "virtual online museum" devoted to them.

German Gravity Knife

Ask someone to describe a switchblade, and the push button Italian stiletto is conjured up. But this is not the only automatic, one-handed opening knife. An original WWII German paratrooper knife in excellent condition caught my eye. This Flieger-



Switzerland is famous for its bicycle army, which used these bicycles initially as courier vehicles in 1891. By 1905 they created mobile infantry units, which existed into the 21st century. The bike, army license plate, and rusted German helmet are real; the German MP40 is not.

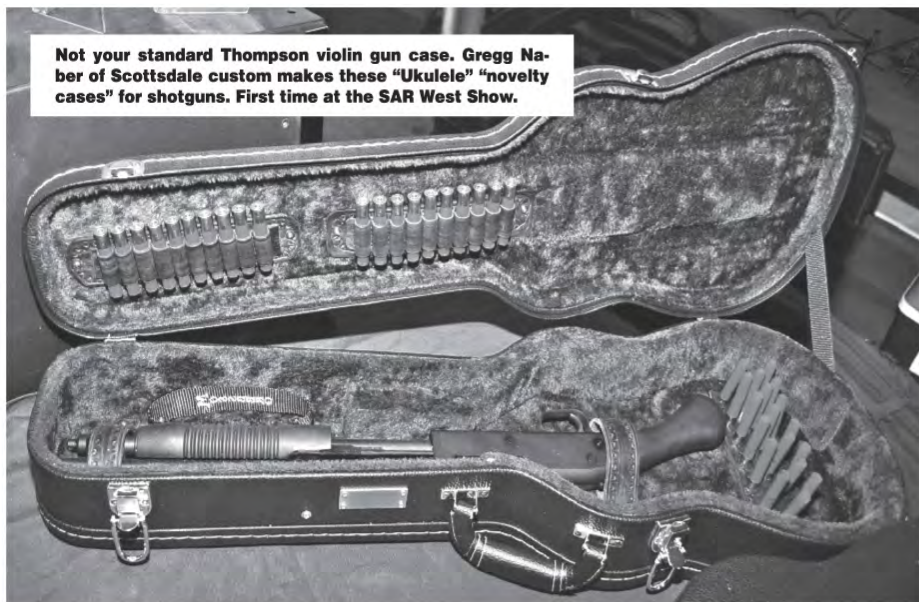


This Flieger-Kappmesser (i.e., flyers-cutting knife) is distinguished by its wooden handle, lever side catch, and spike; they open with a thumb flick, and gravity does the rest. The spike is used to untie knots while packing the parachutes. Post-war, green-sided knives are more common at gun shows at a fraction of the cost of this genuine WWII knife.

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In some states, it's illegal to possess gravity knives and the more common spring-activated knives. In 1958 Congress passed the Federal Switchblade Act that prohibits manufacturers and vendors from commercially selling automatic knives across state lines. But why? In a word: Hollywood. What?!

The seller enlightened me, "Popular films of the late 1950s such as *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle* and the 1957 Broadway musical *West Side Story* fixated on the switchblade as the symbol of youth violence sparking demands for Congress to "do something." State restrictions followed. Sound Familiar?



Not your standard Thompson violin gun case. Gregg Naber of Scottsdale custom makes these "Ukulele" "novelty cases" for shotguns. First time at the SAR West Show.

B.B. Guns

Continuing with this movie-style genre, if marijuana is a gateway drug for opioid use disorder as characterized in the 1940 movie *Reefer Madness*, BB guns are most certainly the gateway path to big-boy gun collecting. I challenge you to find an adult that did not start his gun collecting, hunting, gunsmithing, or target shooting passion with a BB gun at a tender age. For me, it was a Daisy Model 25 pump in 1954, the best Christmas present I ever got. I hand-carved a wooden stock to make it the bee's knees, as one would say back then. Boost it and prepare for a knuckle sandwich.

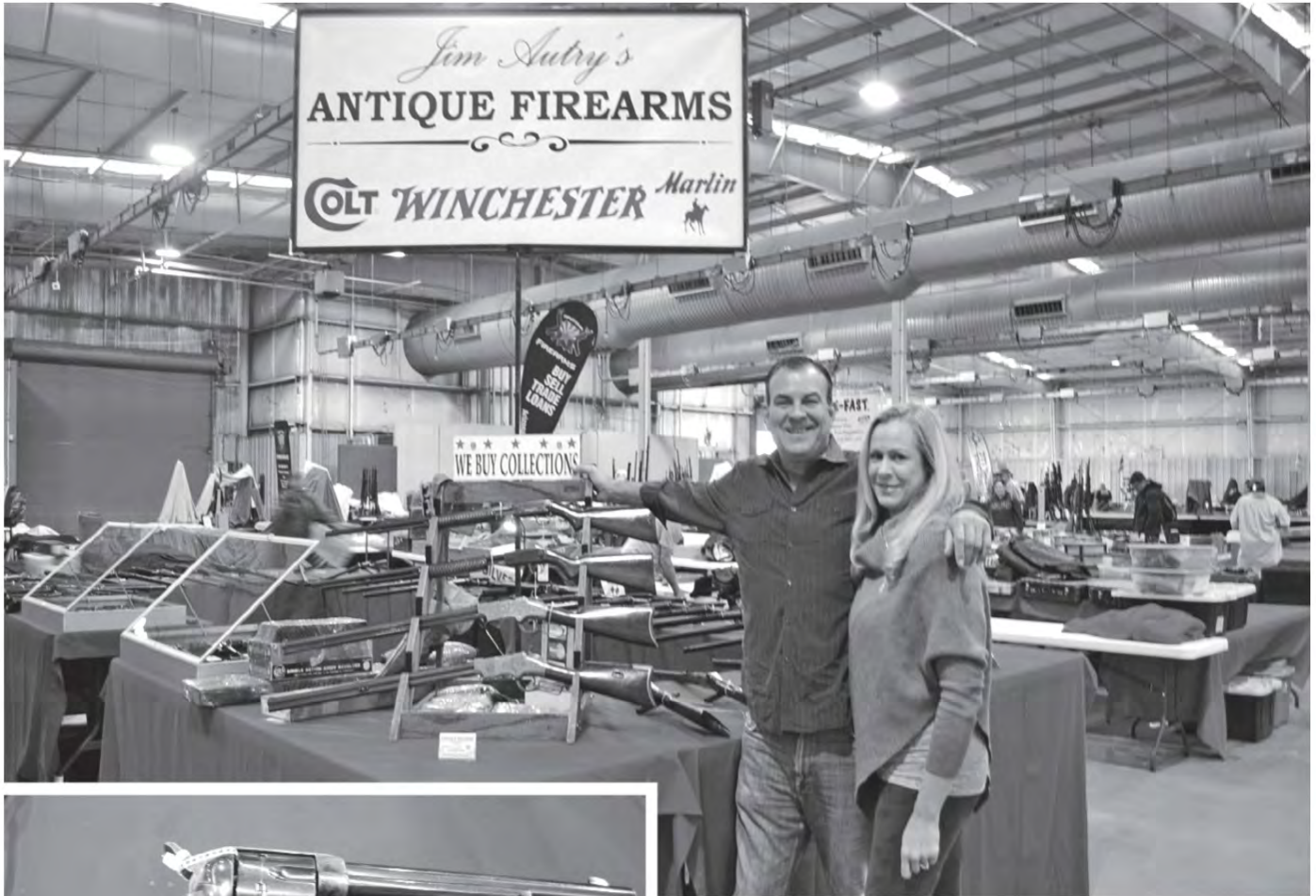
In keeping with the period genre, Jim Janke had a fantabulous collection of BB guns that blew me away (pun intended and genre consistent). The most eye-catching gun on display was an appropriately named Daisy "Golden Eagle," made to commemorate the company's 50th anniversary. It sold for a whopping \$1.69 back in its time. They are now about \$300 if you can find one.

Memorabilia, Historic Firearms, and Accessories

If gun-related memorabilia collecting is your passion, there is no better place than a gun show. You



Jim Janke (left) shows off his collection of BB guns. The most eye-catching was an appropriately named Daisy "Golden Eagle," third down from the top, made to commemorate the company's 50th anniversary. It sold for a whopping \$1.69 back in its time.



At a gun show with the name “west” in its name, one would expect a lot of authentic “western guns,” and Jim and Candice Autry had one of the larger displays of western guns, including the 100+-year vintage single-action army that looked like it just came out of the Colt factory.



Browning 1919 cloth belt loaders were a few hundred dollars not that long ago. Unfortunately, they are well over one thousand dollars today and nearly impossible to find in the original wooden transport case.



Big boy collectibles: a row of vintage crew-served weapons. A Vickers followed by three Maxims. Each is about \$25,000.



Dennis Delzer of Dalton Gun Co. provided another stunning display of western guns. Here he is showing off a Model 1860 Henry made in 1865, offered for sale at only \$37,000.

IT'S STORYTIME

As mentioned in the opening, my favorite time at gun shows is meeting people and swapping stories. Here are a few.

Checkpoint Charlie – Gateway to a “Democratic Republic”

One of the great tragedies of a growing number of today's youth (and adults) is that they have never experienced so much as a brief visit to a truly authoritarian regime. Trashing the U.S. is cool within this naive group. I've been to several such countries, and they leave lasting memories of what a “Democratic Republic” is in today's Orwellian world that misguided individuals envision.

In my travels down the show aisles, I spotted an East DDR Naval Sailors Hat with a Volksmarine Tally. DDR is the Deutsche Demokratische Republik: German Democratic Republic. The seller was a military veteran during the 1970s at the height of the Cold War. On leave in West Berlin, he decided to go through Checkpoint Charlie, an infamous entry point into East Berlin. Today it is a tourist spot to mug for selfies. In the Cold War, it was deadly serious.

Essentially it was a small booth with locked doors at each end that the guard could only open. The guard demanded that he leave all his military IDs at the checkpoint, one must suspect for some nefarious copying and future use. As he turned to exit, the guard shouted, “Halt!” His heart skipped a beat. Fortunately, it was a minor issue quickly resolved.

Six months before the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, I gave a speech at the Reichstag building near the Brandenburg Gate. Pockmarks on the stone from

never know what you will find. A rare British South Africa Police jacket and hat? Not a problem. For me, it is gazing through the glass-paneled boxes of medals, rank insignia, buttons, pins, and ribbons. My uncle brought some German artifacts back from Europe, claiming, “I won the war in Europe. Others helped me.” I know these are genuine. The issue with rare war-time artifacts is that prices have reached the point that reproductions that are very hard to distinguish are showing up at shows. See sidebar, “Do's & Don'ts of Gun Shows.”

The same applies to accessories such as the Brownning 1919 cloth belt loader. In the distant past, they were scrapped, and a decade ago, the remaining ones were sold for a few hundred dollars. Today with the advent of semi-automatic side plate Brownings, the

price soared. You are looking at well over a thousand dollars to find one in its original wooden storage box.

For classic collectible firearms such as Colts, Winchesters, Maxims, and Vickers, the sky has not been the limit. It's the stratosphere. For a show containing the word “west,” one would expect some finer, period western guns. Dennis Delzer provides an example of how early collecting led to his business, Dalton Gun Company, “I ran a gravel company forty years ago, and some customers had problems paying and offered to trade guns for gravel. Since I was already interested in collecting vintage shotguns, I started to make trades, which grew from a side hobby to the business I have today. I only deal in pre-1899 antique guns.” Pre-1899 guns are exempt from federal gun laws as far as dealing in them and owning.



A vendor selling military memorabilia from the German Democratic Republic (DDR, Deutsche Demokratische Republik) prompted stories of passing into East Berlin through this portal, Checkpoint Charlie. Escapees were shot right up until 1989, when the author entered this booth. The vendor entered at the height of the Cold War in the 70s and had a more harrowing experience.



Today what's left of Checkpoint Charlie is a tourist attraction in front of McDonald's. Sandbags give the illusion of tight security in the Cold War. But, no, it was armed border guards and doors operated by remote switches. Left-leaning politicians, professors, and the media gush Orwellian-speak of the glory of a “Democratic Republic” as they are guided on supervised VIP tours. (Shutterstock, Keleny)

DO'S & DONT'S OF GUN SHOWS

1. Bring cash, a checkbook, and a credit card. Some vendors will only accept one form of payment.
2. Resist impulse buying, particularly if you are unsure about the item's authenticity, quality, and market price.
 - a. On the other hand, go with your gut. Don't wind up saying, "Could have, should have, would have" for now and evermore.
3. If you are looking for a firearm that will cost thousands and where the subtleties dramatically affect the price, do your homework in advance and, if possible, find an expert at the show willing to look at the gun and render their opinion. Collectible Lugers, Mausers, Colts, and Winchesters, to name a few, fall into this category.
4. Shop around before you buy. For example, at SAR West, a vendor priced a brick (i.e., 500 rounds) of .22 CCI Stinger at \$180. However, outside the adjacent building, the identical ammunition was \$85 at Milwall Corp.
 - a. Prices can vary by how much a seller wants to sell. It's traumatic for some to part with favorite items.
 - b. It does not hurt to negotiate, but do not be obnoxious about it. Ridiculing the price and quality of an item is not the best practice. Yes, point out specific flaws, but don't dwell on them.
5. Filling a vehicle with your purchases in view and returning to the show is risky. Instead, store your purchases securely and out of sight.
6. If you plan to buy large lots of ammunition, consider bringing a cart or hand truck. Some major dealers will let you borrow theirs if you make major purchases. Ask.
7. Caveat Emptor, a.k.a. Buyer Beware!
 - a. Know the laws and the trends. FFL dealers know the laws, but private individuals may not, or they may outright lie and obfuscate the legal requirements to make a few bucks. This also applies to items that may not be prohibited individually today but could easily or unwittingly be "converted" to something illegal.
 - i. **Example 1:** Form 1Z of Cedar City, UT, was selling its inventory at SAR West of so-called "80%" suppressors and the tools to convert them to a functioning suppressor after receiving an approved Form 1. I asked to see their ATF letter stating that these were 80%. None was forthcoming. ATF will not approve these products. Buyers were buying an expensive paperweight.
 - ii. **Example 2:** A vendor sold so-called "solvent traps" at several earlier SAR West shows. They are adapters that screw onto a threaded barrel at one



Markov-style and caliber pistols are common at gun shows, but the original East German ones carried during the Cold War by guards at Checkpoint Charlie or the notorious Stasi are becoming scarce and pricy. This East German Makarov was made in 1961 and is in a leather police holster. Ammunition was doled out in non-descript 16-round boxes – just enough to fill one magazine and its spare, an indicator of the trust level given to even the police.

I later joked that it was the only time a border guard ever closely compared my passport picture to my face. Guards with Makarovs on their hips and the Stasi (i.e., secret police) were among the most trusted, yet ammunition was still issued in sixteen-round boxes, just enough to fill a magazine and its spare.

Makarov pistols are invariably available at gun shows, but the East German originals are harder to find. The example photo is of a Markov made in 1961 with the correct markings (e.g., AU before the serial number). Very rare in the West during the Cold War, they cost around two thousand dollars. East Germany unloaded thousands to raise hard cash after the Wall came down, and the price plummeted to under \$200. Prices are pushing \$1,000 today at gun shows, partly because of their Stasi history.

Holsters are the main accessory seen for East German Makarovs. The military, police, and traffic police used several variations of leather holsters in brown, black, and white, respectively. Near the end of the Cold War, the army used canvas "raindrops" or "splinter" pattern holsters.

Bear Arms – A Business Success With a Strange Déjà Vu Twist

Jeffrey Parks was a Phoenix-area high school teacher who got an FFL in the early 1990s. He was a regular at

WWII were still visible. The Wall ran adjacent to the building, and near it was a row of white crosses erected in memory of those killed attempting to cross from worker paradise to capitalist enslavement. One cross was only a few months old. Deadly serious, indeed.

I walked along the Wall to visit Checkpoint Charlie and was a "prisoner" for a few minutes in the same locked booth until the guard buzzed out. The contrast between West Berlin, a vibrant city I likened to Paris, and East Berlin was startling. For example, all the racks in a grocery store I visited looked like the toilet paper shelves in US stores during Covid.



Bear Arms Firearms started in the 90s with a charismatic high school teacher with an FFL and two tables at Crossroads West gun shows. The business is now one of the largest sellers of firearms in the area, with a new Scottsdale storefront. But, unfortunately, the first owner's "American success story" ended in tragedy – a rumored assassination in Vietnam in 2017.

the Crossroads shows with a table or two selling mostly handguns at fair prices. Tall, he stood above the crowd wearing his French military, foreign legion kepi (i.e., hat). I liked the guy, and so did hundreds of other buyers. The business expanded to the point where he quit his day job and opened a stocking store in Scottsdale.

The store grew so successful that he cashed out while still in his 50s and used the windfall to pursue his passion: long-distance bicycling worldwide. He has achieved the American dream. This much is fact. The story that I was told is while on a bicycle excursion in Vietnam in 2017, he had a lady acquaintance who was also friends with influential people who did not like the intrusion. One day while bicycling in Ho Chi Minh City, a truck, possibly military, intentionally veered off, killed him, and kept going. No one was ever prosecuted. True? Hard to tell since all attempts to track down friends and relatives led nowhere.

end and an oil filter at the other, costing less than \$20. Get caught with one of these attached to a filter with a hole shot through the end, and it's thousands in legal bills and/or a free stay at Hotel Gray Bar.

- iii. **Example 3:** Inserts that convert a 26.5mm flare gun into a pistol are available. Depending on the state and your right to own firearms, it may be another free stay at Hotel Gray Bar.
- iv. **Example 4:** A vendor at the flea market (i.e., not a gun show) was selling a live commercial flashbang grenade. He was clueless and could have been arrested.
- b. If you buy two or more pistols or revolvers at a gun show from an FFL dealer, the sale must be reported to the ATF. The same goes for certain rifles sold in southern border states. ATF may follow up to verify that you still own these guns.
- c. If you buy firearms from private sellers. Be especially cautious of sellers walking around with guns and signs. Crossroads prohibits this, but it happens. Private sellers with tables are generally dependable, but even those may unwittingly sell stolen guns. Always ask for and record the seller's ID. Those with concealed weapons permit IDs are the most reliable. If they refuse to provide identification, forget about it.
- d. Be suspicious of background stories as to a firearms province. I spend hours shopping for a WWII Luger that was *not* taken off a dead German SS officer and brought back by a decorated veteran. I finally had to settle for an East German Markov used by Vladimir Putin while working with the Stasi. Auctioneers are exceptionally good at verifying authenticity. **FN**

Roger and son Kurt Stanel bought Park's business in 2008 and greatly improved on Parks' business model. As a result, not only did Bear Arms become one of the largest firearms sellers at the Crossroads shows, but the original storefront doubled in size to 4,800 square feet at a new, nearby location. Kurt, who directs operations, states, "Many Phoenix-area gun shops have closed over the past fifteen years, but we just continue to grow." Déjà vu the American dream.

Signal and Flair Pistols Come of Age

Bob from Nevada specializes in signal and flare guns and had an impressive display that caught my eye. He took the time to explain the history of their development since there are essentially no definitive books on these pistols today. Only three exist; one by Robert Gaynor (virtually a picture book of his collection), another exclusively on German guns by Lorenz Scheit, and finally, a two-volume set by Kafka & Thielbörger on European guns only published in German.

Bob explained, "They were initially called signal pistols since wired or wireless communication was uncommon and unreliable in WWI and were used to signal from observation balloons and between trenches. By WWII, communication had improved, but radio silence was sometimes needed, and signal pistols could communicate simple commands among tanks, ships, or aircraft. Bombers might have their radios knocked out and need to alert ground crews. Subsequently, they were used to deliver tear gas, set smoke screens, or illuminate the battlefield. Riot control with non-lethal and tear gas rounds was the next step, especially during the turbulent 60s.

"Collecting these pistols has dramatically increased for several reasons. First, there are hundreds of varieties produced by dozens of countries. And, of course, many are very substantial and intriguing, especially the older brass pistols. Since they are technically not firearms or guns, they are not tightly controlled with all the associated restrictions. Plus, they are relatively inexpensive in comparison to firearms. However, WWI and other rarities are now selling for thousands of dollars."

Many of these pistols are just plain impressive, especially the large brass ones. My favorite is the WWII 37mm M8 Pyrotechnic Pistol flare pistol that is



Collecting signal and flare pistols such as these has dramatically increased for several reasons. First, there are hundreds of varieties produced by dozens of countries. And, of course, many are very substantial and intriguing, especially the older brass pistols. Naval pistols are generally brass or alloy. WWI signal pistols are in the upper right, and WWII in the lower section.

often found at gun shows. Bomber crews used different colored flares to communicate emergencies such as wounded aboard, radio out, gear malfunction, and so on. The latches at the front mated with locking ring on bombers and tanks. The WWII vintage ones are stamped "EVCC," which stands for Eureka Vacuum Cleaner Company. They indeed do not suck: M8s appear in nearly 20 movies, including cult classics such as *Tremors* (1990) and WWII films such as *Twelve O'clock High* (1949) and *Tobruk* (1967).

Now get out there and enjoy a show! Many gun shows are listed right here in *Firearms News*. **FN**



The 37mm M8 Pyrotechnic Pistol flare pistol can usually be found at gun shows. WWII vintage pistols such as this are stamped "EVCC," which stands for Eureka Vacuum Cleaner Company. They do not suck, however: M8s appear in nearly 20 movies. The locking mechanism on the front is for mounting in a mating mechanism in airplanes and tanks.