



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

The showroom of the Bryant Stove Museum in Thorndike, where the owners refurbish, exhibit and sell old stoves.

Bryants

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antiques to out-of-state dealers, she acknowledges that she sells to customers who come from both near and far for one of their stoves. In the last few years, those customers have included the Cracker Barrel Old Country Store restaurant chain. Every new Cracker Barrel that is built now includes a stove from Bryant's.

Some of the stoves are so old, ornate or otherwise interesting that the Bryants set them aside in the special stove museum, located with Joe's antique car collection in a Quonset hut connected to the main building.

"Look at these stoves," he said. "Every one of them is excessively fancy."

Some of them date to the 1840s and even earlier, and all the stoves in the museum seem to harken back to a day when decoration seemed to be as integral to a stove as how well it threw heat.

"They wanted to make them pretty so somebody would buy them," Joe Bryant said.

Also featured in the museum are the restored old vehicles that are near to Joe's heart, including a 1926 Ford Model T that was registered in Maine as recently as July 2000. There's also player pianos and other music-making machines he loves to show off.

"It took him a while to really like stoves as much as he likes cars and music," Bea said.

Her husband is a self-taught engineer, who said that he got his education "down behind the barn with a hammer." He

said that at first, Bea's hobby of collecting things was challenging to him, especially during the 17 years they wintered in Zephyrhills, Florida, when she found many flea markets and many dolls to take home.

"I said to myself, no more dolls," he recalled.

But when they had the idea for the doll circus, the collections seemed more interesting.

"I'd automate them and get them working," he said. "I enjoyed it."

The first thing he made was the carousel with its toy passengers.

"I said, 'You can't have a carousel without having a Ferris wheel.' It wouldn't be much of a fair without a Ferris wheel," he said.

The doll circus became a natural fit for the Maine shop and museum, where it is especially popular among visiting

schoolchildren and older folks. The Bryants like making kids smile, and are proud of their own large family. They had eight children and have 19 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

"Life wouldn't be worth a nickel without the children," Joe said.

When asked what the secret was to the couple's long, successful marriage and business partnership, Joe had a quick reply.

"I just say, 'Yes, dear,'" he joked.

But Bea disagrees a little.

"I've got to contradict that," she said. "It's keeping an interest together, so he doesn't go one way, and you go another."

The Bryant Stove Shop and Museum, located at 27 Stovepipe Alley in Thorndike, is open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Accident

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out of their day to help a little bit. We've been a little hesitant to accept the generosity. Our friends just tell us to shut up and take it. And we need help."

Daisy Beal of Belfast said she started the online meal signup sheet because it seemed like the right thing to do.

"It's what people do when somebody needs a hand," she said. "It's social, and it's helpful, and everybody wants to be able to rely on the community when they need it. It's a social insurance policy."

So far, the meal calendar is filled up until the middle of March, with people volunteering to make such hearty dinners for the family as Yankee pot roast, chili and "Polish comfort food." More than that, faraway friends clamored to do something to help, too, and have so far raised nearly \$1,000 in donations for the family.

Tom and Annadeene Fowler of Belfast have helped out a little with child care. They also hired a local photographer to take family photos recently, and when it came time to pay the woman, she told them to tear up the check and instead send the money to the Bahners.

"I want to help them because they're part of what provides for our community," Tom Fowler said. "They provide food. And I know that running a small family farm is a lot of work. If there's something we can do to help this along, they've earned it. They've helped us. And it also comes down to being friends and part of the community. It's not just an exchange. It's a community thing."

Beal, who used to lead backpacking trips, said that whenever someone got in-

jured or had a hard time on the trail, the answer was to take some of their weight.

"Meals are kind of like that," she said. "Whatever the difficulty is, having someone else make you a home-cooked meal is going to help you out."

Mike Bahner said that his prognosis is hopeful. Although his injured thumb and finger still "look like barbecued chicken" and hurt a lot, the doctors said the digits are alive and seem to be healing well. The right-handed Bahner said he's probably going to have to learn to be left-handed, because the best-case scenario involves a loss of dexterity in his right hand. The surgeons fused his thumb and the middle knuckle was lost. Also, doctors told him it might be possible in the future to regenerate a biological joint for him to replace the lost knuckle.

"I think it's a pretty cool prospect," Mike Bahner said.

Since the accident, he's learned that the table saw is probably the most dangerous power tool and that every eight minutes in the United States someone gets injured in a table saw accident. He also has realized that it is very important to use a push stick to safely feed wood to the saw blade.

The farmer said that he works with his hands, so he definitely needs to relearn how to do basic farm chores such as drive a tractor. For now he's concentrating on doing the mobility exercises prescribed by his doctors, and helping his friends finish the renovation project however he can. Right now, that mostly involves simple tasks like sanding and painting wood.

"I've got to take it one day at a time," Bahner said. "All things considered, we're back to having a sense of normalcy, in large part because we have so many friends who are helping us out."

Worms

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"We grow great vegetables. Our kale plants are 5 feet high, they look like little trees," he said. "Brussel sprouts, lettuce, beans, corn, highbush blueberries — they all like the castings." This natural fertilizer

makes plants more robust and disease resistant.

"If you compost with worms, you have a higher amount of microbes, so you get a different product," Robie said. "Plants grow more robustly with more vigor."

More and more green thumbs in Maine are hooked on the results. Is this the secret of organic master gardeners?

"I think there a lot of gardeners looking for new ways to keep gardening healthy without using chemical fertilizer," said Brett Willard, program director at Merryspring Nature Center, who says vermiculture is on the rise on the midcoast.

Beyond great blooms, worm composting cuts down on kitchen waste and reduces waste overall.

A worm den is a plastic 10-gallon tote, which Robie calls a "modified aquarium for worms." People toss plant-based compost from their kitchen — not meat, fish or dairy — and the cycle begins.

"As it's broken down by microbes, they excrete cast, which is worm manure. It's

collected every three or four months and used immediately in your garden," Robie said.

Although many gardeners embraced worms in their gardens, master vermiculture takes skill and practice.

"Many have tried this and failed," Robie said, citing fly

infestations or worse — a parade of worms crawling across the kitchen floor. "I want people to be successful. Through my coaching I have seen more successes than failures."

The worm bin harvesting workshop is 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 18, from Merryspring Nature Center, Camden. It's free to attend.



JULIA BAYLY | BDN

Packaged bees are emptied into a Fort Kent hive at the start of the season.

Bees

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Inside the hives, worker bees — all females — cluster by the tens of thousands around their queen, keeping her in the center, where it will remain a balmy 80 degrees all winter.

The temperature drops toward the edges of the cluster to around 50 degrees, but the bees constantly circulate their positions so everyone gets a chance to be toasty.

According to the bee association, there were 975 registered beekeepers in Maine last year with 9,789 hives and an additional 76,000 hives brought into the state for blueberry pollination.

Overall decline in bee populations due to colony collapse and varroa mite in-



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When packaged bees arrive, the queen has her own first-class accommodations keeping her separate from the other bees until being placed in the new hive.

festations means backyard beekeepers are more important than ever, according to McLaughlin.

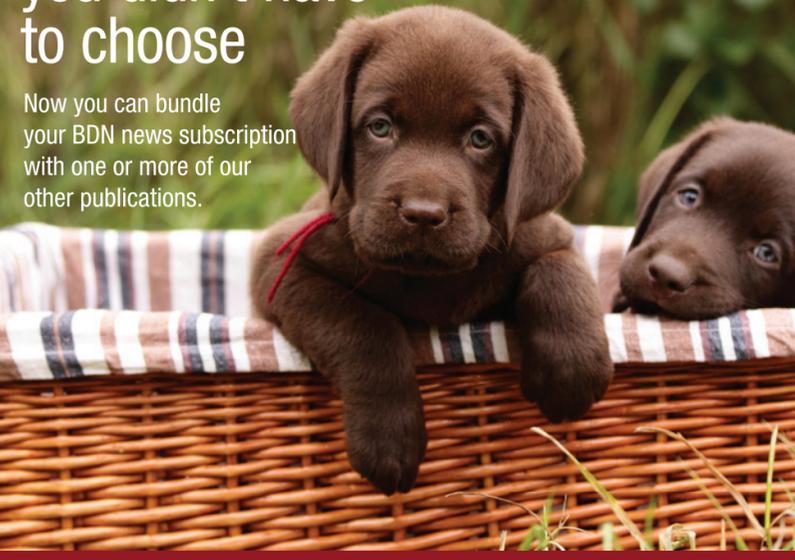
"They help contribute to our local pollinators," he said. "We need them in our gardens, our apple orchards

and our local farms."

Information on giving or taking bee classes is available from the Maine State Beekeepers Association website, mainebeekeepers.org.

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