BREATHING NEW LIFE into old market

JENNIFER SMITH

Carved solid wood furniture, ornate glassware, vintage jewelry, military memorabilia, Early American toys, tools and other period items fill the booths – and shoppers once again fill the aisles – as Arizona's antique market climbs back to the stature it once enjoyed. Since **Robert and Wanda Jones** extended their involvement from exhibitors to promoters, antique shows in Arizona have experienced a resurgence in booth reservations and customer attendance.

"Arizona was once a strong contender in the antique circuit," explains Wanda, co-owner of **Arizona Antique Show**. "We want that back and we're on our way."

Wanda and Robert have been selling antiques together since they met in 1988. It started as a side business to augment their full-time salaries, but over the past several years, it's become a full-time family business. In 1999, they purchased their first Arizona antique show promotion company and in September 2002 bought another. Both had suffered dwindling interest and attendance. The Joneses knew that in order to rekindle what had been a vibrant local antique market, they had to create an atmosphere that would draw dealers and customers back – and fast.

Under the pressure of having only one month to make a success of a previously scheduled but failing show, they coordinated an all-out blast of advertising while planning a festive atmosphere with live entertainment, door prizes, free wine tasting and even an antique appraisal clinic from which proceeds would be donated to area food banks. The event exceeded all expectations. "We won the hearts and support of the dealers and customers," says Wanda.

"And when they come away from a show feeling happy, we're happy," adds Robert. The Joneses use the same formula to promote shows today.

LESSONS LEARNED

It was while still a teenager that Wanda learned the business of antique dealing. She spent those summers traveling the United States with her parents and siblings, selling antiques at shows along the family's pre-determined route. She passes along some of those lessons learned.

"Smart merchandising is the key to drawing people into the booth," she says. "Splish splash collections throughout the space. Make it 'pizzazzy'!"

She also encourages vendors to share their knowledge about their products. "People want to know the story behind the piece," she says. "It adds to the thrill of the hunt."

INITIATING A NEW BREED OF SHOPPERS

With the renewed interest in antiques has come a younger set of shoppers. "It's a great way to have a 'family day' and bring home a piece of furniture or other item that's going to hold its value," says Robert. "There's a quality built into each item that you don't often see today."

LOOKING AHEAD

In their effort to continue enhancing customers' experiences at the shows, Antique Workshops are planned for future shows so attendees can learn about various collections and ask questions of industry experts.

"Folks ask me how to start collecting antiques," says Wanda. "I say just start with something that tickles your bones. You'll learn the rest along the way."

MORE INFORMATION

On Friday, January 16, the Arizona Antique Show will open in Phoenix, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Come early and have fun with Brad Perry from Channel 3. Brad will be there from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. The show will run for three days.

For more information about Arizona Antique Show and upcoming events, call (602) 717-7337 or visit their Web site at www.azantiqueshow.com.

WANDA JONES

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