

# Suburban Life



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Jon Abbott stands behind a Daniel Mullor-horse stands in Abbott's basement family carved horse with an "amateur paint job." The room.

## Childhood joys turn into big kids' toys

By Louise Okrutaky staff writer

Jon Abbott came to Farmington Hills to sell a few painted ponies. When it came time to auction off his prized carousel animal in the shape of a cat holding a fish in its mouth the crowd at the Holiday Inn held its breath and its bids.

The gloomy economy managed to cast a shadow even in a room filled with flamboyantly painted antique carousel animals.

But Abbott, of Clarkston, isn't a man to be deterred by the something ever changing like the state of the economy. After all, here's a man, who while on his honeymoon, spent most of his savings and the rent money on an antique car.

Years later in 1975, his wife, Barbara picked out an old carousel horse at an auction. While Abbott picked through the antique slot machines he collected at that time, his wife bought the 1880's wooden horse for \$925. They had \$1,200 in their savings account at the time.

It's a story that Abbott's told and retold many times. Last Saturday morning in the ballroom of the Holiday Inn, he's telling it one more

time, cajoling people in a born salesman's honeyed tones to bid on that same horse. He runs his hands along the horse's blue saddle, caresses the two parrots carved behind it.

"It's been in the family for a long time but a couple of the good things have to go," he croons, looking at his wife in her front row seat.

"There are only nine of them in the first place," chimes in auctioneer Gordon Riewe.

No one takes the bait. The bidding ends at \$20,000, shy by \$5,000 of Abbott's minimum asking price.

Abbott returns to the horse to his stable of carousel animals, patient enough to wait for a collector who simply must have the piece at Abbott's price. One of a handful of carousel animal brokers in the country, he assembled the auction with parts of his own collection as well as that of others.

After 16 years, he's still smitten by the creature. Some of his wooden animals appear in the coffee table sized collectors' Bible, "Painted Ponies," by William Mann.

The more he's collected, the more he's learned about the history of the animals. There's a respect

for the immigrant carvers who worked on them that comes through when Abbott says, "I'm just a temporary caretaker of the things I've got here."

To walk through Abbott's collection is to wander through a concise history of the American carousel. The couple's first horse turns out to be an example of the flamboyant, colorful Coney-Island style. Its tone was set by carvers Charles Carmel and Marcus Illions.

In the Abbott's living room, stands a elegantly carved, subtly colored reindeer that exemplifies the Philadelphia style as practiced by Gustav and William Denzel.

Finally, in his barn are a couple of horses made to be easily packed and moved by a traveling show. Called country-fair style, they're smaller and less expensive.

"It's sculpture," is the way Abbott describes some of the animals. It's one-sided sculpture at that.

Most of the work on American carousel animals is done on the right hand side, the romance side. That's the side exposed to by standers as the carousel whirls around in a counterclockwise direction. Engagements from the donors to fill 10 baskets. If they hadn't suspended applications, they were expecting about 200 requests for Thanksgiving dinners.

It's history that gives even more romance to the animals. That's why Abbott held particularly high hopes for bidding on two Illinois produced horses that carried generations of children on Bob-Lo Island.

"Illions did a lot of gold leaf, silver leaf. When AAA restored the merry-go-round (after buying Bob-Lo in the 1980's) they didn't replace the gold leaf. It would have cost them \$300 a horse," Abbott says.

He's not disapproving. "If I had a park today, I'd put fiberglass horses on," he said.

His high hopes for a Detroit crowd bidding for the Bob-Lo animals don't exactly come through. Neither are they dashed.

Bidding on the first Bob-Lo animal, a lively looking circa 1905 black horse with a gold mane and jewels falls short of the \$22,000 minimum. Abbott surprises few onlookers by not accepting the high bid of \$18,000.

"In another five or six years, these animals are going to double, triple. It's better than a CD. You can walk around it, pet it. Your wife will love it. I'll do wonders for your home life." Abbott sweet-talked to no avail.

He has better luck with the second Bob-Lo horse, an equally dashing animal painted white with ea-



Denzel carved cats such as this one were popular. Between 35-40 of these were made. Some carried birds or frogs instead of fish. A fish was the most popular catch for this cat because it was thought to be the least distasteful.

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## Salvation Army fights to meet larger demands

By Louise Okrutaky staff writer

The Salvation Army, which has long helped people in Farmington, Farmington Hills, Livonia and Novi, needs help this holiday season.

Recently, its representatives met with those of 25 other charitable agencies and utilities to come up with ways to compensate for state and federal budget cuts and rising unemployment. The most critical problems so far concern a growing number of utility cut-offs. In addition, the Salvation Army is grappling with a rise in requests for food assistance.

"We basically realized there was no solution," said Cheryl Carter of the Salvation Army. "A lot of people left very depressed. They realized it was bad but not that bad."

Many people turn to the Salvation Army when they need food. There's been a 25 per cent increase in food program requests over the summer. Another 55-65 per cent increase is expected this winter, according to Carter.

Friday, the Farmington Hills office gave out 50 bags of groceries between 8:30-11 a.m. and expected to dispense another 20 during the afternoon.

Increased demand necessitated opening applications for the annual Thanksgiving and Christmas programs three weeks early. The Salvation Army suspended taking applications for the Thanksgiving food basket program because they need 100 baskets and have only enough donors to reach between 300 and 400 people, according to Carter. As with the Thanksgiving program, donors are asked to call first. Sponsors and families don't meet. However sponsors are provided with a list of new items the family's requested.

Most of the time, those wish-lists don't include the parents' needs. Instead they list necessities like boots and clothing for the children. The Army includes a few toy requests for the children, too.

"Many times the parents won't ask for anything because they feel they're taking things away from their children," Carter said.

Corporations, individuals, clubs or small offices can become Christmas sponsors. People are free to spend as much or as little as they can afford. Gifts run the gamut between super-generous corporate contributions to small but heartfelt ones given by individuals who want to share what they can, according to Carter.

"I'm scared we won't have enough baskets," Carter said.

Donors pick up canned and non-perishable items needed for a Thanksgiving dinner for four and supply gift certificates for turkey and fresh produce. Donated items should be at the Salvation Army office by Monday, Nov. 25. Individuals or groups can donate baskets. To sign up as a donor call the Salvation Army at 477-1153. Since the office's two phone lines are often busy, callers need to be persistent, Carter said.

Also suffering is the Army's annual Christmas program in which donors "adopt" a family and supply them with presents. Requests for this program have risen dramatically in the last four years. Four years ago, it served 25 people. This year it's expected to reach between 300 and 400 people, according to Carter.

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SHE'S FIELDING AN average of five to 10 phone calls a day from people who were once helped by state utility assistance. Now they've received shut off notices on back owed balances ranging from \$50 to \$1,900. When state aid for utilities was active, the state paid half of the bill and the other balance would be considered in arrears. When state aid stopped, those balances came due.

Sometimes, the Salvation Army can help. Other times, it's forced to turn down the requests. In the past, the Army would split the bills with other sources. "Now, those sources are strapped for funding," Carter says.

"All the agencies are in the same boat. Nobody's hoarding anything," said Capt. Homer Smith of the Salvation Army branch at Inkster and Shilwaukee, Farmington Hills.

"It's placed more responsibility on the client and that's not necessarily a bad thing but utility money ends up going for rent or to pay for a medical problem," he said.

Consumers Power and Detroit Edison indicated to the Salvation Army they're willing to work out a way to restrict cut-offs in severe weather but haven't formally announced any plan.

All of the Farmington Hills' office's clients come from Farmington, Farmington Hills, Novi and Livonia. "This is one of the most generous communities," Smith said. "But we have a difficult job in this area because when you think of (the area) you think affluency. We had a phone call from a gentleman who though we were helping people outside of the area."

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