

ParsippanyLife

parsippanylife.com

June 10, 2009

NJ ANTIQUE RADIO CLUB

Tuned in to collecting

BY LISA KINTISH
Staff Writer

An RCA Victor Victrola or a Marv-o-Dyne may not appeal to some in the way an iPod does, yet to Dave Sica and many others, nothing beats an old radio. Much more than antiquated appliances, they represent a piece of history.

Sica, a Parsippany resident, is a member of the New Jersey Antique Radio Club, where he and fellow enthusiasts together enjoy their hobby. "It is nice to share and talk to people whose eyes don't glaze over," he said.

There are many facets to this obsession. Some like to collect old radios while others like to restore them. Both interests

can be satisfied at the club's swap meets. They take place three times a year and in the spring and fall are held at the Parsippany PAL Building.

Sica quickly noted that it is not to be closer to him, but because of Parsippany's central location. As he said, "It is at the crossroads of everything and is easy to get to."

A favorite feature of the swap meet are the appraisals and repair appraisals where people can learn the value of a radio or what it might cost to get it in working condition.

"It seems almost everyone has an antique radio," said Sica. Noting that there is an assumption the radios will never work again, he said, "Most are easy to repair."

Members are able to restore the antique radios and hold repair clinics due to the club's inventory of parts, including a large quantity of vacuum tubes.

"People love [the clinics]. That's how we find new members. We enjoy doing it," said Sica.

Boasting a membership of about 200, the club attracts people from all over New Jersey, New York and Connecticut and thanks to Web casts of the monthly meetings, there are even members from around the world. Sica mused that it is "old guys with a focus on old technology using new technology to keep in touch."

It is not exclusively "old guys" as there are even teenagers involved.

"It is nice to share and talk to people whose eyes don't glaze over."

DAVE SICA

New Jersey Antique Radio Club

exhibits in libraries and presentations for youth and service clubs. Sica noted, "Like most organizations, we know the future of the hobby is in younger people and we reach out to them."

Sica observed that unlike car collecting, antique radios are, for the most part affordable. He said, "Most are worth almost nothing, just the sentimental value."

Although there is the story of the "\$10,000 radio." The name has nothing to do with the radio's worth, but the surprise found inside of it. The club received a bit of press upon the discovery that happened in 2006. Asked to help dispose of a large collection of radios from an estate, club members examined the radios for cataloging. Inside one was \$10,000 in cash, wrapped in a paper towel.

Sica joked, "Now we look inside all radios."

When it comes to what is a collectible, there are differences of opinion. For some, stereos and eight-track tapes from the 1970s are a draw, while other members view such items with "disdain," noted Sica. What is not in dispute is that first generation artifacts from Guglielmo Marconi's days are "legitimate museum pieces, highly sought after and expensive," said Sica.

He listed the various phases of radio's progression: the 1920s, when the broadcasting era began; the 1930s which were the Golden Age and radios became pieces of furniture; and the 1940s when moldable plastic came into use allowing for interesting styles of radios including art deco.

It is the historical side of antique radios that club members are most interested. Sica said that many of them have "some degree of interest in performing as amateur historians to preserve the history of technology."

To this end, the group is curator of the New Jersey Antique Radio Club's Radio Technology Museum, which is part of InfoAge Science-History Learning Center located at the former U.S. Army Evans Signal Laboratory in Wall Township. Included with the museum is the National Broadcaster's Hall of Fame. As stated on its Web site, the museum "traces the development of radio from before spark to beyond cell-phones."

An interesting bonus for the club is that the site also happens to be where Marconi built his transatlantic radio receiver in 1914. In recognition of this, the street name is Marconi Road.

"We lucked into that. We can't imagine a better address for the Antique Radio Club," said Sica.

The fact that we are not too far removed from radio's roots has helped to fill out the museum's offerings. Sica noted that there is access to some of the people who were involved in the business decades ago as well as the writings of some of the industry's pioneers.

Said Sica, "There are a lot of retired engineers and television repairmen who still get a kick out of it. They have a knowledge of it that is hard to get and they pass it on to younger members."

For Sica, who serves as the club's Web site administrator, the interest is actually television, although he also likes radios. Television technology, he said, dates back to the 1920s and became a "big deal" around 1939. Television sets of the 1940s, 1950s, and some from the 1960s are considered collectible.

When asked how many radios and televisions he has, Sica joked that there is an old line that if you know how many radios you have, you don't have enough. However, he estimates that he has between 150 and 200 radios and about 150 televisions.

"I'm in the video production business and am interested in the history of technology," he said.

Sica observed that he was initially curious about what happened in the 1950s and how the industry evolved. Considering his lack of interest in history class when he was a student, Sica is amused that he is now part of a group preserving it. He said, "It is nice to know where it came from to see where it is going."

For more information about The New Jersey Antique Radio Club and the museum, visit www.njarc.org.

Lisa Kintish can be contacted at kintish@northjersey.com.