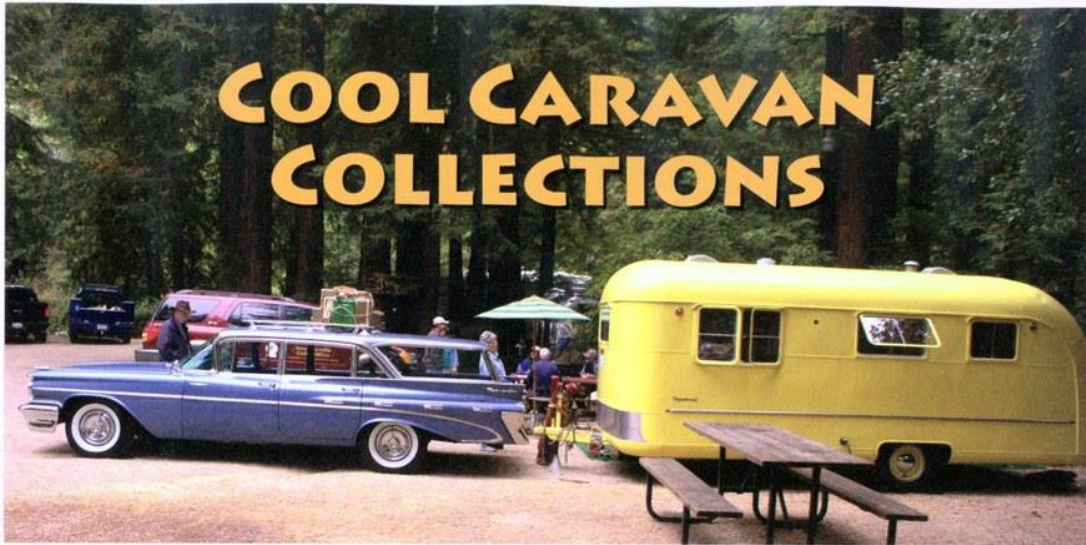


COOL CARAVAN COLLECTIONS



Vintage travel trailers are alive and well in the Santa Cruz Mountains

By Jeanette Prather

"I've been collecting old trailers for over 40 years," said Steven Kay, a home designer and remodeler who became "obsessed" with collecting and restoring cars and vintage trailers.

"I grew up next to a gas station in Detroit and then moved to California," the Ben Lomond resident said. "I'm sure that had to do with it."

Kay started out collecting old cars and then added a few other vintage items from friends' garages. Eventually, he accumulated a veritable museum of cars and trailers.

"Over the years I've sold some stuff, but I have a really great wife of 48 years who puts up with all of this," Kay said, referring to his large and thorough collection of vintage trailers. Every piece in Kay's collection is perfectly preserved, allowing admirers to leap back in time to the 1960s, the 1940s, or even as far back as the 1920s. Kay's vision in restoring these vintage trailers does not stop at the trailers' physical structures, but takes on an entire life its own.

"All the pieces in here are time period accurate," he said. "The fun part is getting to accessorize the cars and trailers with decorations from whichever year [the car or trailer] is from. There's only one trailer that I broke this rule on: a 1961 original Holiday House." Kay

did duplicate the exterior of the trailer exactly as it was manufactured, but he redecorated the interior in a swanky mod, retro futuristic Jetsons style. He keeps all of the other cars and

"It's like being on the rollercoaster at the Boardwalk," he said. "Driving that car is definitely up there, but so is just watching peoples' reactions when they first walk in (to the Museum)." In addition to frequently taking his Model A out for a spin, Kay regularly drives his other vintage cars, including his 1949 Plymouth Special Deluxe Woody Station Wagon. "I take all of the cars out often," he said.

Every piece in Kay's collection has a fascinating human-interest story behind it, but his oldest trailer, a large 1927 Holt prototype, is his rarest find.

"This has a really cool story behind it," Kay said. "This trailer was never taken out of the Pennsylvania barn we found it in." According to Kay, he and his wife, Jenay, were on a long camping trip towing another vintage trailer when all of a sudden Jenay yelled, "Pull over!" She actually had seen an old trailer 45 minutes

earlier, but hadn't said anything. She felt guilty about it, and yelled out. They turned

(Top) Steven Kay, owner of the Vintage Trailer Museum, is a regular at Trailers in the Trees. Shown here is his 1959 Pontiac Bonneville Safari Station Wagon with a 1950 Vagabond Trailer Model 19.



(Above) The interior of the Museum's 1951 Vagabond Trailer-Model 232 is accurately decorated in 1950s collectibles.

trailers true to their era, and brings them to life by adding a variety of period pieces such as vintage cooking materials, postcards, magazines, and blankets.

Kay's favorite part of maintaining his exceptional collection is driving his 1930 Model A Ford, he said. It was the first-ever piece in his collection, acquired at age 15.

PHOTOGRAPHS MICKEY CARROLL



(Above) The 1961 TrailorBoat Trailer is a small teardrop trailer with a boat attached to the top and an outboard motor stored on the front for easy use.

around and discovered that the trailer was indeed a rare find.

"This was built as a prototype but then the Great Depression hit and it was never finished," Kay explained. "It ended up sitting in the family's barn and being used as a playhouse by Holt's grandkids. It took me one year to finally convince the granddaughter to sell it to me. I got a call one day. It was the granddaughter. She said, 'It's getting ruined. You promised me that if I sold it to you my grandfather's folly would get restored, finished, and possibly into a museum.'"

Kay promptly rescued the trailer, spent diligent time and energy restoring it, and then was approached by the Petersen Automotive Museum in Beverly Hills, California, where he kept it on display for months. Kay's entire collection and history of each piece is available to view on his website (vintagetrailemuseum.com), but there's nothing like seeing his vast and stimulating collection in person.

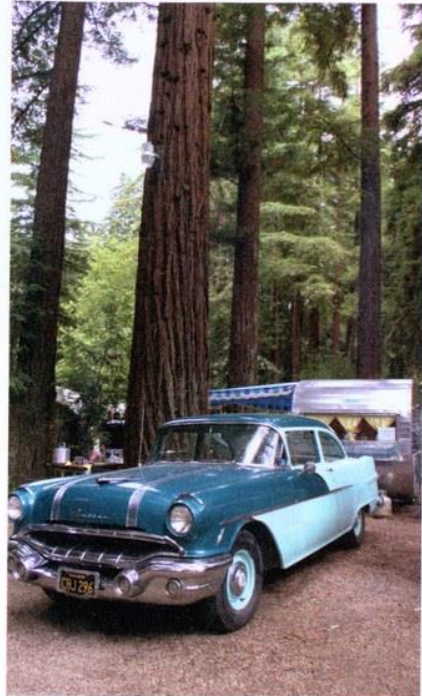
"I welcome any individual or group who makes a donation to charity, preferably Habitat for Humanity, to come up and visit," said Kay. "Habitat for Humanity has done so much for people over the years; it's nice for them to get support."

In addition to taking interested parties on tours of his collection and taking his vehicles out for spins in the city, Kay regularly attends an annual event called Trailer in the Trees at Smithswood RV Park in the Santa Cruz Mountains (Felton). The vintage trailer rally, which started as a small group of 12 trailer campers nine years ago, has grown to almost 80 trailers and a healthy waiting list. According to Cotter, the RV Park only holds

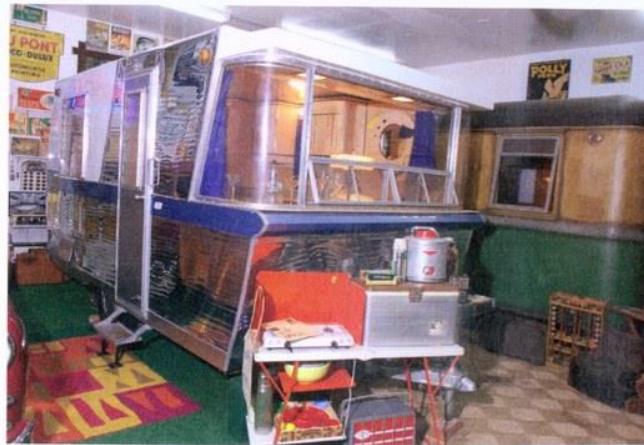
about 85 trailers.

"Trailers in the Trees is a bunch of trailerites who love trailers and vintage style camping," said the event's creator, Penny Cotter. "We're a group of friends who have the same love of rescuing trailers and restoring them. Steven (Kay) is a good friend of mine. He takes groups of people over to see his collection by appointment during the event."

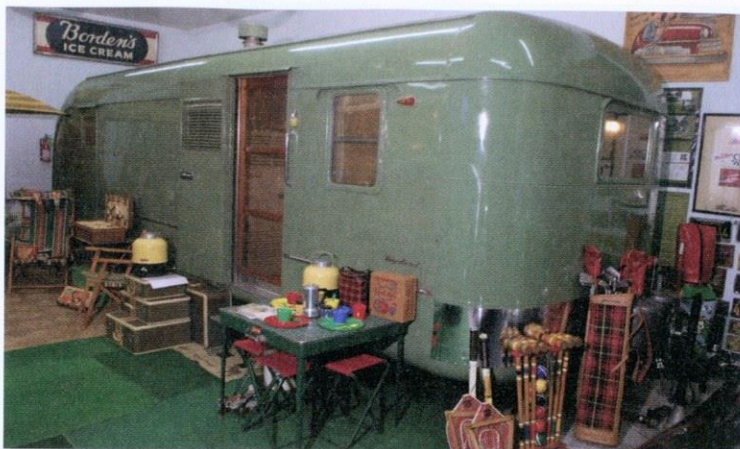
Trailers in the Trees is always held during the first weekend of August; this year it's on August 5-7.



(Above) Richard and Debbie Hershey's 1956 Pontiac and a 1955 Roadliner Trailer parked under the redwoods at Trailers in the Trees.



(Above) A futuristic 1961 Holiday House Trailer, created by Harry and David packaged fruits, on display at the Trailer Museum. In the background is a 1927 Prototype-Holt trailer, covered with a canvas skin (rather than sheet metal) which could be the oldest travel trailer in the United States.



(Above) Discovered in a barn in upstate New York, this 1951 Vagabond Trailer-Model 23 is the only Vagabond trailer that contains a bathroom.



(Above) One of the Trailer Museum's several classic cars, this 1949 Plymouth Special Deluxe Woodie Station Wagon was originally owned by the Grumbacher family who produced Venus art pencils.

Trailers from all over the nation will convene to show off their wheels as well as the time-period accessories that accompany them. But Cotter warns people to arrive on the Friday before to ensure the full experience. "We've had many people show up on that Sunday, and everyone's packing up to get ready to leave," said Cotter.

Join Cotter and Kay in the redwoods for a vintage camping experience. You may be able to view Kay's collection between his jet-setting schedule of lecturing on cruise ships, guest starring on ABC-TV, appearing on radio shows, and being interviewed for newspapers and magazines nationwide.

"It's a great life," Kay said. 🐾

IF YOU GO

Tenth Annual Trailers in the Trees Vintage Trailer Open House

WHEN: First Weekend in August
Friday-Sunday;
Public tours of the trailers are
10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday
(\$5 parking fee)

WHERE: Smithwoods RV Park,
4770 Highway 9, Felton

INFORMATION: 335-4321
or www.smithwoodsrvpark.com