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The hunt's the thrill for Livonia-based club

BY TOM LANG • FREE PRESS SPECIAL WRITER • MAY 4, 2008

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Whether young or old, members of the Michigan Treasure Hunters all seem to be kids at heart.



A display with some items found by Ray Koski and his wife, Alice Koski, of Westland. The two have been hunting treasures for 35 years.

You see them walking the beaches, searching through fields -- sweeping their metal detectors back and forth just inches above the ground -- hoping for a strike.

"It's just the thrill of the find, the thrill of the hunt, looking for buried treasure," said David Picard of Livonia. "It's just something the kid in you wants to do. I've had the feeling all my life."



Picard, 61, and retired, is the MTH board president in his sixth year of membership. He proudly proclaims being member No. 73 in the 35-year-old group, which meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month at Faith Lutheran Church on 5 Mile in Livonia.

His favorite find is a 14 -karat-gold cross with a carat of beveled diamonds, which he said is valued at about \$500. Picard has also collected coins since he was 12 years old.

"This is just an extension of that -- finding the coins just makes it all a little bit better," Picard said.

At its annual open house last week, the MTH welcomed members and visitors to see some recent discoveries.

Some of the items on display for the find-of-the-month drawing included a Civil War token, an Arizona Mining token (found in Ann Arbor), an 1898 Barber half dollar and an 1889 Indian head penny. There also was a 100-drachma Greek



coin, a Tootsie Toy car (Chicago), an old Buick car logo and a horse saddle buckle adorned with a heart (found in a Detroit park).

The Michigan Treasure Hunters was started by Al Temple when he helped finance his son-in-law Bill Kennedy's metal detector store in Plymouth.

"I told him we should lay out a piece of paper on the counter for people to sign up, and the first time we reached 11 names I said we should hold a meeting," Temple said of the founding.

The first meeting was held at East Middle School in Plymouth.

"We had so many people at the first meeting, I said we'd better get us a bigger place," Temple added, because by the time a second meeting was held, 163 people showed up.

Kennedy was killed in a car crash one year after the store opened in 1973, but the club continued.

Temple said that at its largest, the group had about 180 members; on average there are at least 100 regularly involved. Members come from all over metro Detroit and there's one from Windsor.

Temple, 78, the former owner of an automotive supply business, said he doesn't hunt much these days. In his prime, however, he would put in about six hours a day.

"Somebody is always thinking about, 'What if I could find this?' " he said. "The never knowing what you're going to find, whether it's good or junk or whatever, just knowing that you'll find something that has some worth -- especially with the price of gold and silver these days. It's a big hobby."

His favorite hunting ground was an old camping area at Whitmore Lake, from where he claims to have hauled in more than 2,000 coins, ranging from recent years to Barber coins from the late 1800s.

The MTH holds regular events, such as the Fall Hunt, where all proceeds go to the National Kidney Foundation. In October, they have an autumn weekend away, at different locations in Michigan. Typically, it's held at old government-owned camps. At last year's event, Picard found a padlock from the Civil War. His dream is to search in Pennsylvania or Virginia for more Civil War artifacts.

Most MTH hunts are family-focused and kid-friendly. That's good news for rookie hunter Madison Pargoff, 10, of Livonia. She received a metal detector as a Christmas gift.

"My sister got one for her birthday and it got me interested," she said of Zoe, 8. "I've used it just once -- we found a lot of old bottle caps and some pennies."

Her desired find is gold or a piece of a meteor from space. Pargoff said her interest in treasure-hunting comes partially from reading mystery books, adding that she wants to find things and try to figure out where they came from.

The Pargoff girls were helped into hunting by family friend Jerry Wickens, 36, of Livonia.



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"I've always enjoyed, growing up, the thought of finding something exciting," Wickens said. "It was a boyhood dream to get a metal detector.

"The stuff I find that is old or unique, I'll keep those. If it's newer, I'll save it up for the year and turn it in, maybe buy some old coins with the money, or I'll put it back into tools for the detecting trade. Doing the detecting has really got me interested in collecting coins.

"Just driving around town, you start looking at places you never noticed before and I think, 'You know what, that looks like an old spot. That ... might have some potential there.' "

Virtually all hunters agreed they keep the things they find unless there are clues to the original owner. School class rings are the easiest to track down, as the school name and year are engraved in the design. Temple added that some rings also have names or initials carved inside.

"When someone finds a school ring and we find the person, we bring them to one of our meetings to present it back to them," Temple said. "There are so many stories, and some tears."

The Michigan Treasure Hunters is open to new members. New member dues are \$25; annual renewal dues are \$20. For more information, go to <http://mth.greatlakesmetaldetecting.com/> or call Picard at 734-464-6366.

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