

July 14, 2006

AHEAD | Giant Outdoor Sales; Biggest Yard Sale? Take Your Pick

By JOHANNA JAINCHILL

FROM cars to malls to corporations, being the biggest is an American ideal, not to mention a time-honored American marketing device. Cross it with another American staple, the garage or yard sale, and what treasure hunter wouldn't be lured? The idea is so appealing, in fact, that the country has several of these sales claiming in one way or another to be the largest -- with challengers closing in. Judging by the crowds they draw, the shoppers love them all.

Probably the best known of the mega-sales is the Highway 127 Corridor Sale, also known as the "world's longest yard sale," stretching 450 miles along U.S. Highway 127 in Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama and Georgia. Every August thousands of sellers -- householders and professional vendors -- set up shop selling knickknacks, the occasional antique and secondhand everything along Route 127, making a single connected event although in some areas there may be many miles between one seller and the next. The sale started in Jamestown, Tenn., in 1995, and thousands of eager bargain hunters now slow traffic to a crawl on parts of the road.

Far to the north, taking a different shape but yielding nothing in bravado, the World's Largest Garage Sale spreads out from a dense center in the yards and main streets of Warrensburg, N.Y., and reaches south into the town of Lake George and north into Adirondack towns. Every September for 27 years, it has drawn more than 1,000 vendors from around the country to join the local private sellers. Timed to coincide with fall foliage tours, the sale attracts thousands of buyers. "I'm told it's the biggest," said Sue Marthins of the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce. "It's just miles and miles. I swear it took me 40 minutes to get through town, and the town's only two miles long."

In Missoula, Mont., however, another sale claims the same title. This World's Largest Garage Sale rests its claim on the size of its garage. It takes place semiannually -- on one Saturday near the beginning of the academic year and one near the end -- in a three-story parking garage on the campus of the University of Montana. Thousands of buyers appear, according to the sale's Web site. Students and other local people rent parking spaces to set up their goods at the rate of two spaces for \$20, said Ryan Hansen, a junior at the university and a coordinator for UM Advocates, the campus service organization that sponsors the sale. "In the fall students get cheap things for their dorm rooms and then they sell it in the spring," he said. "We allow them to sell anything but firearms."

Some of the world's largest have already been held for this year. South Bend, Ind., had the World's Largest Garage Sale on June 3. In South Carolina, the World's Largest Yard Sale was in Rock Hill on April 29. But it's not too late to catch two sales hoping to move in on the leaders.

In October, thousands of yard sales and vendors' booths will extend 364 miles, from Mesquite, Tex., just east of Dallas, to East Vicksburg, Miss., in the U.S. 80 Hi-Way Sale. The event was disrupted last fall by Hurricane Katrina and high gas prices, said Howard Rosser, director of the East Texas Tourism Association. But he hopes people will come back. "Where else can you get an unopened 1965 Beatles album for \$4?" he asked, adding that he had seen not only that bargain item at the sale, but a Kodak camera made around 1900 for \$4 and a pair of 1946 Packard hubcaps for \$2.

In southern Michigan, the US-12 Heritage Sale, held in August, is working toward world's biggest and best, its coordinator, Debra Yee, said, by extending the string of participants along its namesake road, which runs from Detroit to the State of Washington. The sale has grown in its three years of existence and now stretches 212 miles from Detroit to New Buffalo, Mich. It incorporates individual garage sales and an antiques section and runs through some Amish communities, where baked goods and handicrafts abound. "Big is good," the sale's Web site proclaims. "Hopefully someday we will be the largest," Ms. Yee said.

WHERE THE BARGAINS ARE

U.S. ROUTE 127 in Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia and Kentucky.

What: World's Longest Yard Sale, www.127sale.com.

When: Aug. 3 to 6.

WARRENSBURG, N.Y.

What: World's Largest Garage Sale, www.warrensburggaragesale.com.

When: Sept. 30 and Oct. 1.

MISSOULA, MONT., parking garage off Campus Drive, University of Montana.

What: World's Largest Garage Sale, 406-243-5874; www.umt.edu.

When: Sept. 16.

U.S. ROUTE 12 from Detroit to New Buffalo, Mich.

What: US-12 Heritage Sale, www.us12heritagetrail.org.

When: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Aug. 11 to 13.

U.S. ROUTE 80 from Mesquite, Tex., to Vicksburg, Miss.

What: US 80 Hi-Way Sale, www.us80.com.

When: Oct. 20 to 22.