



# Just Imagine—Over 4,000 Arrowheads!

*He's found most of them right here in the fields and streams of Iowa.*

By Cheryl Duke

"PEOPLE ask me why I don't have a phone or computer...and I tell them that if I have a fishing pole, shotgun, hoe and a pocketful of rocks, I'm happy."

That pretty well sums up my good friend Tony Sanders, who operates the Indian Artifact Museum in the historic village of Bentonsport in Van Buren County.

More about the fishing pole, shotgun and hoe a bit later. But first an explanation about the pocketful of rocks he mentioned.

Tony's hobby—make that passion—is collecting Indian arrowheads, and he has over 4,000 of them. He found his first arrowhead while playing in a creek when he was 7, and he's been hunting for them

ever since...mostly in southeast Iowa, but occasionally across the border in Illinois and Missouri.

He'll spend from sunup to sundown roaming creek beds and recently tilled farm fields in search of his next treasure. Last year he added 184 artifacts to his collection of arrowheads, knives, axes, grindstones and spear points.

## How to Find 'Em

"Hunt in creeks after a large rainstorm," he advises. "The rain washes away layers of dirt, which may uncover one."

"Sometimes you can also find arrowheads in plowed fields, but more often in the streams. Look for a white rock that wouldn't normally belong in a field."

Many of Tony's artifacts come from

the Sac and Fox tribes that roamed Iowa in its recent history. But some rare finds date back 11,500 years ago to the Paleo-Indian Period.

"Every artifact is a thrill," he says. But one of his favorites is a snake effigy carved out of stone and used in ancient ceremonies. "I found it in Lee County in a plowed field on an old Indian campsite."

## Woodwork's a Work of Art

Just as impressive is the way Tony displays his collection. Step into the cabin he built to house them, and you'll see an amazing array of cedar, oak, cherry, walnut, hickory, elm and other native woods pieced together to form the walls, ceilings and other backdrops for his arrowheads.

Untold hours of handwork, much of it with a small coping saw, went into cutting and fitting those beautiful pieces of wood together. You can't really appreciate it until you see it...and he is eager to show it to anyone.

"What is the good of having this col-

*"Tony rarely steps foot in a grocery store..."*

lection if I can't share it with others?" says Tony, who accepts donations but doesn't charge admission to the museum.

Tony's place is easy to find, since only about 40 people live in Bentonsport. Just look for the Indian scene painted on the garage door.

The museum's hours are "catch as catch can". "Anytime I'm home, I'm open," he explains. "Come up to the door and beat on it, and I'll open up."

(To make an appointment, call the Greef General Store where I work at 1-319/592-3579, and we'll get a message to Tony. We're open daily mid-April through October, and on weekends November through mid-December.)

## Always Been a Bachelor

Tony is a bachelor. "I guess I was born a free spirit," he says. "Marriage is a lot of give and take...and I guess I'm too stubborn to give up my running around looking for arrowheads."

He worked on a dairy farm near Fort Madison for 42 years. After visiting his brother in Van Buren County, he decided to retire in Bentonsport—not surprising since Tony prefers a simple lifestyle, and

**INGRAINED** in Tony's "museum" is amazing woodwork he crafted from native Iowa trees.

Side Note: A man's home is his hassle.





**MAKING A POINT** about Iowa's Native American heritage is Tony's arrowhead collection.

there isn't a stoplight or fast-food restaurant in our entire county.

In fact, Tony rarely steps foot in a grocery store...and that's where the fishing pole, shotgun and hoe come in.

He puts food on the table with his fishing pole—crappies are his favorite, fried

up with fish eggs that he tosses into the frying pan.

He also eats fruit from the 20 fruit trees in his yard, vegetables from his garden, and squirrel, rabbit, turtle and deer from his hunting expeditions.

"I got three big turtles," he told me

#### WHO'S YOUR "CHARACTER"?

Almost every town has someone like Tony Sanders, who keeps people's spirits up, finds humor in nearly any situation and is the "glue" that holds the community together. If that sounds like someone you know, drop us a note telling a little about him or her. Include a snapshot if possible.

Send to: "Country Characters", *Our Iowa*, 2501 North Loop Drive, Ames IA 50010. Or E-mail: [editors@OurIowaMagazine.com](mailto:editors@OurIowaMagazine.com) and put "Country Characters" in the subject line.

recently. "One was a 24-pounder from your farm." I was surprised—I didn't know I had such whoppers on my place.

Above all, Tony is a genuinely nice guy who likes people and thinks everyone should work to get along.

"No one will like everyone the same," he tells me, "and sometimes we don't like what they do. But there isn't any reason not to try to get along."

Amen to that. 🙏

# Kalona Cheese Factory



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**Twin County Dairy, Inc.**

**2206 540th St. SW**

**Kalona, IA 52247**

**319-656-2776**

4 Miles North of Kalona on Hwy. 1

Side Note: Chance is always powerful. Let your hook be always cast; in the pool where you least expect it, there will be a fish.