

BUSINESS ANNIVERSARY



SUZETTE COOK/Citizen

Lydia and Sonny Griffeth manage the Chiefland Farmers and Flea Market.

Flea market owners celebrate 20 years at the helm

SUZETTE COOK
Reporter

While vendor John Eigner is playing a trumpeted harmonica made during the Civil War as his booth, Bill Devine is looking over his inventory of tools. And around the corner, Ray Jones is keeping a tally in a spiral notebook of transactions that have happened in his space filled with collect-

ibles, coins and jewelry.

Jones had already had his booth for eight years at the Chiefland Farmers Flea Market when another vendor named Sonny Griffeth bought the place.

"It's made a good living for me," Jones said. And that's what Griffeth likes to hear.

"Seeing somebody come in and be successful," Griffeth said, "I really enjoy seeing somebody make money."

Griffeth ought to know about how to run a booth. Back in 1994, he said he worked with his uncle selling tolls and ended up buying the business five years later. Right about that time, he was living on a piece of property in an abandoned van and said he went out country line dancing one evening and met the love of his life, Lydia. "She latched on to me

See FLEA Page A3



There are 300 booth spaces indoors and 35 outdoors each week at the market. Business hours are Friday through Sunday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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LEFT: Ray's Place features coins, jewelry, cast iron, tools and collectibles. On bottom-right, vendor John Eigner plays an antique trumpeted harmonica.

FLEA

continued from Page A1

"I couldn't rid of her," Griffith jokes. The couple has been together for 22 years now and most of that time has been spent fostering their flea market business.

As Sonny remembers it, the previous flea market owner Jack McCormick had been trying to sell the business for a few years. One day, McCormick approached Sonny and told him that for a couple of more thousands dollars a month, he could own a flea market.

So Sonny convinced McCormick to lower his required down payment.

And since Sonny wanted to continue to sell tools there, he thought it would be a smart move that he would have a place to sell from. "So I bought

the flea market," Sonny said.

"I cashed in my retirement," he said. "I begged, borrowed and stole from friends and family members," he added.

"Here I am."

Soon after he took over in August of 1999, Sonny built an RV park with 22 sites.

Overall, the RV park and flea market sit on 11.5 acres.

With wide aisles in the flea market measuring 30 feet wide and 200 feet long, Sonny says the vendors are housed in about 36,000 square feet.

There are 300 vendor spaces indoor and 35 outdoor, Sonny said. "People swear up and down they do better outside," he said but added that there's something to be said about being under cover and able to role up a cover and walk away from your booth at the end of the day and not worry about the weather.

"I'm a simple man," Sonny says

about his business plan. "It's \$12 a day outside or inside."

The market is open year round Friday through Sunday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Sonny said there is an incentive to rent more than one space. "Rent three booths or more and get 15 percent off and for big dealers, after 10 or 15 booths, it gets better," he added.

"I've had people move in from outside," Sonny said about watching vendors build successful businesses. That's his favorite part about running a flea market.

"One vendor started with a booth then had 4,6,10,12, and she's got a store over in Trenton now.

"We were the springboard," he said. "When you sell something you enjoy, people can see your passion for it."

Lydia runs the books and business side of the flea market. She keeps track of the vendor spaces and has

made sure there are events that draw visitors to the market each weekend.

Soon local authors will visit the flea market to sign their books and talk to people. There are blood drives, spay and neuter events, an upcoming horticulture presentation. Most events and news can be found on their Facebook page.

Lydia is proud to say it's the people that she enjoys most about helping manage the flea market.

"I'm a Southern girl and I enjoy the people," she said. "We're a large family."

Lydia said her parents ran a theater in Georgia, so she's used to being around people.

Her ideal day for a visitor at the flea market includes discovering a "special treasure they can't get anywhere else," she said.

"And we have two excellent restaurants," she added, "Tony's Place and Diane's Snack Bar."