

ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS

Inside Alaska's most epic garage sale

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The annual Kempton Hills garage sale Saturday had some things you'd probably expect: baby clothes, unappealing books, dusty mugs, plates. And some things you might not. Like the caribou antlers priced by the pound. Or the coffin.

Calling it "a garage sale" doesn't really do it justice.

The massive event is more like a one-day, pop-up economy in the South Anchorage neighborhood. Aside from more than half of the nearly 200 homes in Kempton Hills filling their driveways with pretty much anything you might dream to find, kids set up bake sales and lemonade stands, ice cream trucks parked on the streets, and others sold shaved ice, chili, nachos and hot dogs.

Hundreds of people parked their vehicles bumper-to-bumper down Lake Otis Parkway, just south of Huffman Road, and teemed through the streets with Radio Flyer wagons, rolling suitcases, children and dogs in tow.

Some started prowling as early as 7 a.m. Finding parking much later than 9 a.m. was a chore.

Raina Piekarski and her friends plot out their plan for the sale every year. They coordinated on Friday night, talking on the phone about how to split up to find everything they were looking for. Among those items, a blender.

"Everybody already sold all their blenders!" Piekarski, wearing a see-through rain poncho, exclaimed at one house on Kempton Hills Drive.

"We sold our blender, but how about some donkey ears?" asked Margi Petersen, holding up a fuzzy brown donkey ear headband.

"How about a candle holder?" asked Piekarski's friend, Stacy Graves.

"No," Piekarski said.

"It's a skull," Graves persuaded.

"OK, I'll take it."

Petersen was selling an extensive collection of Halloween decorations (she was the one with the coffin). She lives in another part of town but decided to take advantage of her friend's driveway to get rid of some stuff. An oil industry consultant, she's downsizing as she prepares to sell her house and move out of Alaska.

"It's scary selling everything off, but exciting," she said. About halfway through the day, she had made around \$1,000 from the Halloween decorations alone.

Petersen wasn't laid off from an Alaska position, she said, but right now all of her projects are in Canada.

She's planning to get rid of virtually everything, pack camping gear into her pickup truck and drive to Edmonton and Vancouver for work. After that, she'll head to Seattle and then Mexico.

"Then, I'll come back to Anchorage to see what the housing market is like," in April or May, she said.

Other items at the sale were a bit more practical than Halloween decorations. One man walked down the sidewalk hauling an Everlast punching bag, another with an ironing board under one arm and glass oil lamp in the other hand, the hood of his blue sweatshirt pulled up to shield against the steady rain.

Pickup trucks loaded with furniture and tires slowly crawled through the clogged streets. A group of people tried to cram a red, pullout couch into the back of a white Subaru that appeared too small for it.

Near a line for a portable toilet, several of which were brought in for the day, one man looked around at the packed driveways and sea of cars and muttered to himself, "I'm so lost."

People get ready for this event for months.

Keith Korri is president of the Kempton Hills Homeowners Association, which organizes the garage sale. He starts getting calls as early as December and January, he said, from people in the neighborhood wondering about the date of the sale.

It's a tradition that, as far as he knows, has been going on since the neighborhood was formally created about 30 years ago. That might be because if someone in Kempton Hills wants to have a garage sale any other day, he or she needs permission from the association.

"I think that's one of the reasons this garage sale was started," he said. "It's instead of having a hodgepodge of garage sales throughout the summer, and at the same time serving the community. It's quite a social event."

Some people raise money for nonprofits, and others sell products from their own businesses.

Charlie and Krystal Moore set up a table to sell dog chews made from caribou and moose antlers, from their business Alaska Wilderness Products. On the lawn, they spread out a variety of whole antlers for sale. They appeal to taxidermists, or people who might want to hang the antlers up on a shed or cabin.

Krystal was at the garage sale last year, too, but is still shocked at how huge it is.

Sabrina Ben, whose family lives on Mission Circle, was selling off snowmachines, after a few winters not getting much use from them.

"It hasn't snowed in like three years," she said. "But I know as soon as we sell them, it's going to dump."

This year was Rachel Brusseau's first time at the event. She lucked out early by finding one vacuum cleaner for \$5 and another one for free.

"The other one doesn't have a battery, and she was like, 'just take it,'" Brusseau said.

She and her friends had already made five trips back to their car by about 11 a.m. to store their haul.

"This is the Disney World of rummage sales," said Katie Povolito, proudly sporting a purple fanny pack — her marker of Kempton Hills garage sale preparedness. Povolito was there with Brusseau and two others who'd never been before. She called them virgins.

Bargains like free vacuums are usually easy to find here. Neighborhood residents are eager to get rid of junk that's accumulated over the past year.

"The money is just a bonus," said Jeff Carlson, who lives with his family on Mission Circle. "It's about the house cleaning, just trying to purge your house and get as much out as you can."

He started setting up Friday night after work and was up until midnight, then got up at 6 a.m. Saturday.

And if you live in Kempton Hills, your best bet was probably either to stay home all day or leave all day. The traffic made it nearly impossible to do anything in between. Carlson said that's also because nearby neighborhoods piggyback on the event with smaller-scale sales of their own.

"We get our food, have our coffee, and hunker down."

About this Author

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Annie Zak covers business news and general assignments. She joined the Daily News in 2015 and previously was a reporter at the Puget Sound Business Journal in Seattle and the Orange County Register in California.