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# Ben's Gets Canned

Story by Nathan Johnson — nathan.johnson@yankton.net

Local Bar Owner Displays Collection Of Beer Cans

**A**sk Ben Hanten what's new with his bar, and you're likely to get a canned answer.

It's fitting, since one of the newest features at Ben's is a large beer can collection.

Hanten said it's been a hit with his customers.

"Everybody thinks it's cool," he stated. "They all wonder, how did you get them?"

Hanten is quick to acknowledge the source: Yankton resident Bob Neibergall.

Neibergall painstakingly collected most of the cans in a time span stretching from the late 1960s through the 1980s.

He was lured into beer can collecting by the hunt.

"Schmidt Beer at that time had cans with animals on them," Neibergall said. "They'd have a moose, a bass, a deer, a bear, etc. They were quite colorful. I thought I'd like to get each one of them. I did that to start with and kept running into interesting cans."

Living in Mason City, Iowa, at the time, Neibergall said his proximity to Minnesota and its many breweries gave him easy access to cans for his collection.

Sometimes, it was as easy as spotting a can in a road ditch.

Eventually, Neibergall joined the Beer Can Collectors of America — now called the Brewery Collectibles Club of America (in both cases, the BCCA) — during the heyday of beer can collecting in the 1970s. According to the BCCA website, its 1978 membership numbered nearly 12,000 members, including many grade-schoolers and high-schoolers.

"I bought and traded a lot of cans through the BCCA," Neibergall said. "They put out a monthly newsletter. People that were collecting would put ads in it."

A popular form of collecting at the time was "potluck trading," he said. Neibergall would send a collector 12 cans from his region, and the individual he was trading with would do the same.

"I did a lot of that until I started getting a lot of cans I already had," Neibergall said.

He would also go to trade shows in Minneapolis.

"The hallways of these motels would be full of people sitting on the floor trading beer cans," Neibergall recalled. "Even little old ladies got into it. It was unbelievable."

He said one of the most memorable purchases he made was a five-can Tennents Lager Beer set from Scotland. The cans featured a scantily-clad model named "Penny" in alluring poses.

"Eventually, they were banned in the U.S. because she was too indecent," Neibergall said. "She really



**ABOVE:** Ben Hanten is seen here with some of the approximately 1,400-can collection he purchased in 2010. It was bought from Yankton resident Bob Neibergall, who collected beer cans for several decades. Among the items in the photo are cone-top cans from the 1930s. Hanten currently has about 800 cans on display at his bar, Ben's.(Kelly Hertz/P&D)

**BORDER:** A photomerge of the collection Hanten has displayed on the wall of Ben's. Examples of two of the cans on the wall are in the corners, with lettering from two different cans displayed in the headline and at the start of the story. (James D. Cimburek/P&D)

wasn't by today's standards."

The prize of the collection is the vintage 1930s cone-top beer cans.

"They're interesting because they're older," Neibergall said.

Neibergall said he also enjoyed collecting cans from foreign countries, though he learned there is such a thing as a bad beer.

"I once drank a can of Brazilian beer, and I got sicker than a dog for a few days," he stated. "After that, I stayed away from drinking foreign beer."

One of the tricks Neibergall learned from beer collecting is that you open a can from the bottom.

"That way, when you display it, it appears that it hasn't been opened," he said.

Neibergall largely gave up accumulating beer cans in the 1980s after amassing a collection of approximately 1,400.

In 1991, he was transferred by Hy-Vee to work in its Yankton Save-U-More location. He retired from Hy-Vee in 2001.

"I had these cans boxed up when I moved here in 1991," Neibergall said. "I didn't take them out of the box until 2001 when I had more time to work with them. I built some shelves in the lower level of my home to display them."

When he and his wife decided to buy a smaller home in the community, Neibergall concluded it might be time to give up the collection.

Hanten was a next-door neighbor at the time, so Neibergall asked if he would be interested in purchasing the cans.

"I didn't have a place in mind for the collection at all. I didn't know where to put it without people being able to reach it and hurt it or steal it," Hanten said. "But I knew I needed to have it because, for one thing, it needed to stay in Yankton."

Hanten purchased the collection in 2010 but struggled with finding an affordable way to display it in his bar.

"One day, I was looking through a design magazine and I came across an off-set print shop in Minneapolis that had a huge beer can collection displayed on the wall," he said of

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