

## Romance, grief, friendship: Scenes from Woodbury's garage sale weekend

By Jackie Renzetti on May 14, 2019 at 6:00 p.m.



1 / 8 Theresa Ingram talks with her son, Kirk Ingram, and her granddaughter, Alexa. The Ingram family has hosted an annual garage sale to help fund Kirk's medical costs. Jackie Renzetti / RiverTown Multimedia



By the time she moved into her Woodbury home, Barb Lau had met most of her neighbors — and even owned some of their furniture.

Before closing on her house in early May 2011, she stopped by and discovered the Woodbury Lions Club garage sale. The annual event continues to strengthen bonds in her neighborhood, she said last weekend during its 42nd year.

"It's the first time we see our neighbors in the spring," Lau said. "We get to catch up because we're outside for three days."

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With hosts and visitors alike taking time off work, the three-day citywide sale has morphed into a regional attraction, drawing hundreds of families from across Minnesota and neighboring states. So many out-of-towners visit that one centrally located gas station doubles its staff and sets up port-a-potties. With an estimated 1,000 sellers, Woodbury joins a handful of cities nationwide to host a community sale of this scale, said Bruce Littlefield, who drove cross-country visiting yard sales for his book, *Garage Sale America*.

"That's crazy big," Littlefield said, "and crazy good."

Like Lau, many garage sale hosts and shoppers say most of the fun comes from quality time with family or friends and connecting with strangers. As sellers pass on their children's outgrown clothes or deceased relatives' items, they swap family anecdotes and trivia with visitors.

"You can actually have a conversation about something that someone once loved and treasured," Littlefield said.

"There's a certain joy about that."

## An inherent goofiness

The night before the garage sales began, Chantel Deuth and her crew unloaded their day's findings into an 8-by-16-foot trailer in the Country Inn and Suites parking lot.



*Nancy Plett talks with a longtime friend who lives near her in Wisconsin. Jackie Renzetti / RiverTown Multimedia*

The group of four women woke up at 5 a.m. to drive three hours from Dawson, Minn., and swooped by earlier sales ahead of the official event.

Death said she's been coming for 18 years since first joining her aunt as a 22 year old.

"We've been hooked ever since," she said.

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That same year, Joe Sharp and his wife Amy started driving from Washburn, Wis. Over the years, they've found deals on baby clothes, tools and jewelry. This year, their 19-year-old daughter, Kelsey, came along to shop for her first apartment. Their son, Ryan, took a day off high school for the family trip.

"In the car, we talk about all the stuff we find," Joe Sharp said. "We just laugh and joke around the whole time."

"He makes fun of me the whole time," Kelsey Sharp added.

Greg Schmitz skipped school, too.

The Woodbury Middle School teacher has hosted garage sales since 2005, and said the event, which has become a family tradition for him, has an inherent goofiness.

"It's constant joking around with people," he said.

Relatives stay with him throughout the week to help set up and sell their own items. Each night has its own food theme, Schmitz said.

"We've made it an event when it's really just a garage sale," he said. "We only took one year off, and it was depressing."

He thrives on watching shoppers react as they find items on their lists, he said.

"I think you touch a lot of people's lives in different ways you don't even know," he said.



## 'It's been fun and it's been hard'

Jan Magnuson, a year shy of turning 70 and celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary with her husband Richard, held her first Woodbury Lions Club-sponsored garage sale this year.

"I would never do it again," she said. "It's been so fun chatting ... but it's been kind of hard today."

Downsizing proved to be a more emotional process than she thought, she said.

After building furniture for the family for years, Richard

Magnuson decided to sell his tools.

"I think it's time," Jan said her husband told her.

Her 1920s telephone table, which her aunt Grace had originally received as a wedding gift from her husband, went to a family from Wisconsin.

"I cried," she said. "It went to such a good family ... That's pretty cool."

She said she had only met her aunt a handful of times, but that the table later belonged to her parents before they died. Ensuring such keepsake items went to a caring home had an importance she couldn't explain.

"It just is," she said. "It's just something in your heart."

As one shopper walked through her garage to check out her aunt's rocking chair, he stopped to comment on her 1967 Ford Mustang.



*A pair of teenagers check out Jan Magnuson's 1967 Ford Mustang.  
Jackie Renzetti / RiverTown Multimedia*

His wife had one just like it in a previous marriage, she said the shopper told her, but her then-husband had sold it without telling her.

Lucky for him, it was for sale.

Within hours, he had purchased it as a surprise for his May 10 wedding anniversary, she said.

Meanwhile, Jan decided to take the rocking chair back off the market, she said.

"It's been fun and it's been hard," she said. "A little bit of both."



"Faith, hope, love," reads one of the signs for the Kirk Ingram garage sale. Jackie Renzetti / RiverTown Multimedia

## 'Strength and hope'

Days after the birth of his daughter, Kirk Ingram injured his spine diving into Lake Minnetonka.

Since the 2015 accident, Ingram has been working to regain mobility from his chest down. Now, he does about 25 hours of physical therapy week.

To help offset medical costs, his family has hosted a garage sale with donated items for the past

three years, bringing in around \$6,000 last year. Some people donate without even buying something, said his father, Brian Ingram.

"He's very, very thankful," he said. "When I help him brush his teeth, he says, 'Dad, thank you for brushing my teeth.' That's just the type of guy he is."

A scheduling conflict almost prevented the Ingrams from participating this year. But when they announced their sale on social media two weeks before the event, dozens of people donated items to sell.

"It's very humbling," Kirk Ingram said.

A crew of family and friends donning "Team Kirk" T-shirts welcomed visitors, explaining everything is priced by donation. Bulletin boards and photo collages of Kirk with his family adorned the garage walls, prompting conversation among visitors.

Theresa Ingram, his mother, said the event has allowed her to speak with families working through similar struggles.

"It just gives me more strength and hope," she said.

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