



Chris Russell / Dispatch

Steve McVoy of Hilliard plans to put his collection of picture tubes on display this year at a proposed Museum of Early Television in Hilliard. McVoy estimates he's spent about \$500,000 on the collection and the museum building on Franklin Street.



A Hilliard man's hobby of collecting old televisions, including the earliest color set and 25 prewar models, is one of the world's largest collections of rare TVs.

Rare televisions to go on display

By Steve Stephens
Dispatch Staff Reporter

Hilliard could soon be to old televisions what Paris is to art — or maybe what *Dallas* was to sleazy oil barons.

One of the world's largest collections of rare televisions is scheduled to go on display this year at a proposed Museum of Early Television on Franklin Street in Hilliard.

Hilliard resident Steve McVoy created the nonprofit Early Television Foundation two years ago after selling his stake in Coaxial Communications, the cable company.

"We thought we'd be doing our business forever, but we sold all of a sudden, and I had to find something to do," McVoy said.

"As a kid, I worked in a TV-repair shop. I was always intrigued by old televisions, so I thought it would be interesting to collect them as a hobby."

That hobby grew like — well, not like early television, which actually was sort of a failure.

In its earliest days, in the 1920s, experimental television used a rudimentary mechanical system.

In the 1930s, an electronic system similar to that used today was first tried. But World War II temporarily stopped television's development.

"When I started, I didn't even know there was television before the war," McVoy said.

Prewar televisions are rare. Only about 350 exist, said McVoy, 58, who owns 25.

And he keeps close tabs on others, lest they come up for sale.

"I think I know where 90 percent of them are," he said.

Every now and then, though, one pops

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up and surprises him.

"One I found in a little old lady's attic in New Jersey," McVoy said.

The rarest old televisions can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Recently, McVoy bought a collection of 14 rare televisions.

"The guy's health was getting bad, and he liked the idea of the TVs going somewhere where they would be on display for people to see," said McVoy, whose collection also includes many sets from the 1940s and '50s, including the earliest color televisions.

He painstakingly restores his sets to working order.

"Finding the parts can be difficult, and some of the picture tubes are irreplaceable," he said.

If Hilliard approves a parking variance this week, McVoy will move his collection to a permanent display at 5396 Franklin St. He hopes to open the museum to the public on weekends and to school groups by appointment.

The museum will be unique in scope, said McVoy, who estimates he's spent \$500,000 on the collection and the museum building.

"I'd say I have one of the three or four best collections in the world.

"There really isn't a collection like it in any U.S. museum. There are three or four (prewar televisions) in the Smithsonian and three or four in Henry Ford" museum in Dearborn, Mich.

Columbus resident Murray J. Mercier Jr., 89, likes the idea of the museum.

Mercier thinks he might have picked up one of the first television signals captured in Columbus.

"I was always interested in radios and was building my own radios," he said. "I was in high school when I decided to build myself a television.

"In 1928, there was a test program from New York, and on one early one we got fairly good reception."

Not long after, Mercier's father opened a store selling and servicing radios and televisions.

"There was one evening when we had promised to show the television publicly in our store window. At that time, there was 24 lines (of resolution) and the screen was a big 2½ inches. We didn't sell any televisions.

"Of course, now television sort of rules the world."

The Web site of the Early Television Foundation is www.early-television.org.

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