

# A Michigan town for antique lovers

**By Pamela Selbert**

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ALLEN, Mich. -- For more than a hundred years, this town in south-central Michigan was on the main route between Detroit and Chicago. Then along came the interstates, I-80/90 to the south and I-94 to the north.

"Because of that and all the other reasons small towns die," says Bonny Friend, "Allen began to shrivel up."

But--thanks to enterprising folks like Friend and her husband, Jeff--it didn't die. Today, the quaint town of about 100 on the Old Chicago Road (U.S. Highway 12) is the self-proclaimed "antique capital" of the area.

Drive through downtown Allen on U.S. 12, and you pass, in quick succession, signs for Old Allen Township Hall Antiques, Vintage Antiques, West Chicago Antiques, Peddler's Alley Antiques, Gingerbread Keepsake Antiques, Snyder's Flea Market and many others. And these are only the individual shops; hundreds more booths are located in five antiques malls at the west edge of town.

- Inspired by the popularity of the downtown shops (which had grown from a large flea market begun in the 1960s), the Friends 15 years ago built Allen Antique Mall, which sprawls across 30,000 square feet. Some 450 dealers rent space.

- The couple also built another mall nearby, Allen Antique Barn, but sold it four years ago to long-time antiques dealers Derek and Eileen Schroeder, who now have 130 vendors renting 300 booths.

- Capital Antiques, with 36,000 square feet of space, has 300 booths that display everything from pottery, jewelry, coins and furniture to cast iron alligators, embroidered linens, clocks and early phonographs.

- Preston's Gaslight Village is a mall of a different kind. Nearly two dozen historic buildings were brought here from elsewhere in Michigan and assembled into a quaint five-acre village. Among the buildings, all furnished in period style with antiques and crafts for sale, are an 1895 summer kitchen, an 1860 farmhouse, a 1920s two-story Sears catalog house and a Methodist church from 1871. The current owners, who bought the village six years ago, are licensed ministers Darryl and Sherry Preston, who have performed weddings in the historic church.

- Allen's newest mall is Hog Creek Craft and Antique Mall, named for a stream near town. Built by the Amish, and owned by Loren and Michelle Barrows, it opened on July 1. A 1930s canoe hangs in the high entryway, and a life-size colorful papier-mache hog stands on a shelf nearby. About a third of the mall's 23,000 square feet will be devoted to crafts, "but no flea market stuff," says Michelle Barrows. (The same is also true of the town's other antiques shops: no T-shirts or similar items.) Beaver pelts, antique furniture and jewelry are among the hundred dealers' many offerings.

On many days, hundreds of cars with license plates from a variety of states--bringing in more than 40,000 customers a year--can be seen parked at Allen's antiques shops and malls. The only other businesses in town are a convenience store (with a small cafe) and one restaurant, the Outpost Grill, which is also owned by the Friends and is in their Allen Antique Mall.

Derek Schroeder of Allen Antique Barn says antique malls are growing in popularity because they provide buyers with more options than individual stores and are convenient for dealers or vendors, who don't have to "mind the store" waiting for a sale.

Dealers (who come from as far away as California and Alaska) and mall owners are a team, Schroeder says: "No contracts get signed; we don't take a commission; the dealers can come and go as they please--and they choose to stay."

The malls may be drawing attention away from stores in downtown Allen, but Michiana Antiques, founded 38 years ago by Bill and Eva Pengelly, was crammed with customers on a recent visit. Antiques fill not only the glass cases and shelves of the two-story shop, but also hang thickly from the walls and ceiling.

Pengelly's husband died earlier this year, leaving her "with a lot of antiques and not much money." Now she's thinking of selling. "I'm ready," she says with a smile, "to just go fishing."

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#### IF YOU GO

#### THE MALLS

Allen Antique Barn, 9247 W. Chicago Rd. (U.S. Highway 12), Allen, Mich.; 517-869-2888. Open 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. daily. [www.allenantiquebarn.com](http://www.allenantiquebarn.com)

Allen Antique Mall and Outpost Grill, 9011 W. Chicago Rd.; 517-869-2788. Mall open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily; grill open 11 a.m.-4 p.m. daily (until 8 p.m. Fridays).

Preston's Antique Gaslight Village, 8651 W. Chicago Rd.; 517-869-2928. Open 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday-Sunday.

Capital Antiques, 9115 W. Chicago Rd.; 517-869-2055. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily.

Hog Creek Craft and Antique Mall, 10750 W. Chicago Rd.; 517-490-4131; [www.hogcreekmall.com](http://www.hogcreekmall.com). Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. [www.hogcreekmall.com](http://www.hogcreekmall.com)

#### DOWNTOWN

Michiana Books and Antiques, 100-104 W. Chicago Rd.; 517-869-2132 or 800-270-2857. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday-Monday (closed November-March; call for appointment).

#### INFORMATION

Allen is in Hillsdale County, which does not have a tourism bureau; for information, contact the tourism office in nearby Branch County: 517-278-0241 or 800-968-9333; [www.discover-michigan.com](http://www.discover-michigan.com).

Or check the state Web site: [www.michigan.org/travel](http://www.michigan.org/travel).