

## Ripley's reaches out for oddities

### PANAMA CITY BEACH —

Ripley's Believe It or Not! National Tour is looking to add items from the Florida Panhandle to its unbelievable collection during the Bizarre Buying Bazaar on April 25-26 at Ripley's Panama City Beach Odditorium.

"I have been buying exhibits for a long time, but the Bizarre Buying Bazaar started last year. We had three last year and this will be the third this year," said Edward Meyer, VP of Exhibits and Archives for Ripley Entertainment Inc. "If you've got something you think needs to be in the museum, now's your chance. We're looking for anything odd from geography and science to artifacts and artwork."



This motorcycle sculpture made entirely from animal bones was acquired at Ripley's Bizarre Buying Bazaar in St. Augustine.

RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT! | Contributed photo

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By JAN WADDY | PanamaCity.com

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Meyer has traveled the world for more than 35 years, collecting more than 20,000 different unusual items for Ripley's extensive collection.

"We have always found items wherever we can, a combination of searching, people bringing them and online. This is going out of the office and into the community to find items," said Meyer, who reviews all items that come to the Bazaar and makes offers for anything he deems worthy.

More than 100 items have been purchased from the public at Bizarre Buying Bazaars in the U.S. and Canada. Oddities have ranged from a rare New Guinea widow's finger chopper to a motorcycle sculpture created from cow, alligator and other animal bones in St. Augustine and a lamp made from a taxidermy chicken.

"It's pretty hard to impress me because I've seen everything, but bring something the average person hasn't seen. It has to have some sort of wow factor," Meyer said.

He added that Ripley's has received a lot of sports memorabilia, which is interesting to sports fans but doesn't have enough widespread appeal.

"We've seen an awful lot of baseball cards. While I am a baseball fan and I will look at them, they are not Ripley-esque," Meyer said. "We think the Florida Panhandle is a more rural area than we are typically in. We hope to see maybe some folk art you don't see in big cities made from alligator hides or snakes skins or something."

While at the Bizarre Buying Bazaar in Orlando, he purchased a dog portrait made from actual dog hair.

"She (Jean Ford) was a commercial artist who became a dog groomer and combined the two careers together," Meyer said. "Yes, this is something anybody could do, but she actually did it."

Ripley's has continued its relationship with Ford.

"We have ended up buying three of her pictures," he said. "That's also the kind of thing we want — to discover an artist. If we like the art, there's a good chance we will want more."

Items presented to Ripley's, but not purchased, have included a \$400,000 Lamborghini and a possible Stradivarius violin worth an estimated \$2.5 million.

If you accept an offer from Ripley's, you will receive a "receipt and formal contract on the spot," Meyer said, but "no cash will change hands" at the event.

"The company is 95 years old. We have a pretty good track record," Meyer said. "You will get a certificate on the spot in recognition of your contribution, and anytime we display in the museum, your name will be on it."

The item could then be on display in the next Ripley's project "or it could take a couple of years" to get into an exhibit.

"Nothing we buy sits any longer than it has to," Meyer said. "We do half a dozen projects a year."

Though Meyer admitted he doesn't like to talk about how much Ripley's is willing to pay for an item, his job is to acquire the unbelievable.

"To this point, it is safe to say most (offers) are in the three digits, but some in the four and close to five digits," he said. "We'll pay what it takes to buy it if we want it."

Ripley's Manager Drew Morales said the Bizarre Buying Bazaar most likely will be held inside in the Odditorium, 9907 Front Beach Road, and he is interested to see what this area has to offer.

"We've had people occasionally bring things every now and then out of the blue. One of the strangest things someone randomly brought was a one-eyed cat — 15 years ago — that was still born in a formaldehyde jar," said Morales, who was working at the Ripley's Grand Prairie, Texas, location at the time. "Another time we were giving a tour and a person said, 'I have six fingers and six toes,' and we made a wax hand and foot of them."

If you are planning on bringing an oddity to the Bazaar, RSVP to Angela Johnson ([Johnson@ripleys.com](mailto:Johnson@ripleys.com)) in advance with details on the item to help with appraisal.

#### **BIZARRE BUYING BAZAAR**

**When:** 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. April 25-26

**Where:** Ripley's Panama City Beach Odditorium, 9907 Front Beach Road

**Admission:** Public welcome to watch bazaar for free; ticket purchase required to tour Odditorium

**Details:** (850) 230-6113 or [Ripleys.com/PanamaCityBeach](http://Ripleys.com/PanamaCityBeach)