Written by Story and Photos by Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent
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From the outside, the modest house on the north side of Gallup is unremarkable, but inside are works of love collected over the years by Lester Sandoval. One of his larger possessions was featured in a recent article in the Gallup Sun three weeks ago; the customized 1993 4-WD GMC1500, a work of art that is the centerpiece of the regular Sunday afternoon car show at Camille's Sidewalk Cafe.

There is more to Sandoval than just one award-winning vehicle, although, one wall of his small

living room is stacked with trophies and pictures of his truck.

The 'more' becomes evident before even crossing the threshold of his front door, where the visitor is greeted by a small piece of his art hanging over the entrance – a small set of deer antlers made from the roots of tall pines near Summit, just west of Window Rock. Inside are more of these roots, some finished and some not, that he has turned into shelves and wall decorations through his hard work.

These are his personal belongings and these works have provided resting places for more of his collections, obtained piecemeal over several decades.

Antique Roadshow should schedule a day, or a week, just to visit this varied collection.

"It's not easy to find and clean the roots from these large trees that have blown over, exposing the tangled designs that I like to work with," said the Gallup-born Sandoval. "Cleaning out the rocks and dirt from them, brushing on layers of varnish - four or five that soak through to the very core - and creating pieces I can use to add small shelves takes a long time."

Sandoval has created several of these pieces for others, including a masterpiece that became the head and foot-boards for a bed he designed and made for a customer, complete with many shelves for all those things people want near while they sleep.

Most of his works also include hand-carved designs into the base or branches as he bends nature by using a particular flaw as the base for a yucca plant carving, or another for a horse's head.

As remarkable and beautiful as the pieces are, one's attention is instantly diverted by the smaller pieces that are everywhere in the living room and kitchen.

This more modern but still antique collection is awesome in scope, representing so many

different art forms all within view of one's vision that it becomes difficult to focus on any one piece. There are ceramics, glass-works, pottery, brass-works, other metal works, paintings, leatherwork, and all in such a multitude that the head is unable to sort it all out in one glance.

The list also includes piles of sheet music from years gone by and other art forms that would fill any reporter's notebook.

A lunch box from earlier mining days, brass-worked designs in Western motifs that are clocks or old AM radios, toys designed and manufactured before the era of today's massive production, including miniature cars some decades older than Hot Wheels.

A perfume bottle shaped like a hummingbird, delightful figurines of mice in costume - circa the beginning of Mickey and Minnie – and sets or pieces of decorative glassware of the 40s and 50s manufactured by McCoy, Pippen, Bower, Magellica and Maurice, the must-have ashtrays, plates and bowls of that era.

Sandoval's collection extends into his other areas of his house, where thousands of more items are stored lovingly for his own indulgence, and his memory of how each piece was acquired is precise and complete.

His presence at Flea Markets in Gallup, Yahtahey and Window Rock is a given every Saturday, and the former employee of General Dynamics, P & M Coal, and Ft. Wingate Army Depot has made those trips into a ritual of his otherwise unfettered life.

"I was married and have three children," Sandoval said. "I call myself 'happily single' now, though I do have a girlfriend."

Living in the house where he was born – actually his grandfather's house – and surrounded by his collection of more recent artifacts that he has hand-picked and saved from probable destruction, Sandoval has created his own museum, an interesting place to remember what was and how people lived in the previous generations.

It is a creation of love, and amazement!