

## You see junk, but Jerry Ritter sees a challenge



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When most of us want to relax we might read a book, see a movie or maybe even take a nap, but not Jerry Ritter. He grabs a chain saw.

"This one's driving me crazy. I've been working on it for two weeks now." Sounds odd that something that drives him crazy makes him relax but it does. Jerry goes to garage sales every Saturday morning looking for things that don't work. Then with a little elbow grease and mind bending he makes them new again. Kind of reminds me of the Island of Misfit Toys in the *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* Christmas special. He gives new life to things many of us would give up on and throw away.

"I find all kinds of things to work on. Stuff like that fascinates me. And it keeps my mind going . . . it keeps me sharp."

Jerry, 72, searches for broken appliances such as microwaves and lawn equipment, clocks, watches and anything else that looks hopeless. I met Jerry recently at a garage sale in Mesa. It was a good sale where I snatched up two nice-size plants for \$4, but I did pass on a box of junk for sale. Jerry didn't. He grabbed the box of miscellaneous items for \$3. I was intrigued. I had to find out why someone would want a box of "stuff" - something most of us would've put in the trash instead of the garage sale. Turns out he saw materials he could use to fix his collection of items on his operating table in his garage.

"Oh, I'm still not done sorting through that box, but there are screws, bolts and tape measures," he said. "Things I can use for some of my projects and other stuff."

When Jerry brings home his "patients" he begins work not in the garage but often on the Internet. He's in search of product manuals and other information that can help him repair items he picks up at sales. Take, for instance, the 40-pound safe he found for a dollar at a sale. The owners didn't know the combination, so they just wanted to get rid of it. Jerry contacted the manufacturer and sent them a signed affidavit pledging that he owned the safe. And *voila*. The company sent him the combination and Jerry had a perfectly good safe.

Then there's the time he got a brand-new Toshiba pocket PC for \$2.

"The folks wanted to get rid of it because it wasn't working and they were upgrading to a new one," Jerry said.

He went to the company's Web site and discovered that particular PC had been recalled because of a defect. Jerry sent the company his garage sale PC and they sent him a brand new one. Jerry estimates that find is now worth at least \$600.

The former IBM worker started going to sales after he retired 12 years ago. He goes with his wife, Margaret, who looks for clothing and jewelry, preferably the kind she doesn't have to fix.

So remember, at your next sale, don't throw away that box of junk. Jerry may be just around the corner waiting to take it off your hands for a few dollars.

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