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## A car museum on steroids

By KATHY SILVERBERG  
Herald-Tribune Columnist

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It is fair to say I am not a car person. With the exception of my very first car, a Chevy Nova, and the Grand Am my husband and I bought when we were young marrieds with no children, I have never been very attached to cars. My last car was a Buick Park Avenue that I was forever calling a Pontiac. I'm pretty fond of the Acura that currently provides me with more-than-adequate transportation, but I sometimes have trouble picking it out of a parking lot filled with mid-size silver cars.

So I can't say that visiting a car museum would be high on my list. I did spend a few hours at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich., once, but what else is a conventioneer with a free afternoon to do in Detroit?

If it hadn't been for the fact that I was attending a Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce event just down the road, I probably would not have made it to the official ribbon-cutting at Muscle Car City, and that would have been a mistake. A visit to this new museum on the south end of Punta Gorda is well worth a trip from anywhere in Southwest Florida, whether or not you are a car enthusiast.

Oftentimes, efforts of this kind come together because a group of people who share a passion work very hard raising funds so that their dream can become a reality. In this case, it was one man with an insatiable appetite for cars, particularly fast cars that look as good as they run. Muscle Car City, which opened to the public in March and will celebrate its grand opening festivities Saturday, is the result of 40 years spent buying cars.

### A Wal-Mart for a garage

The man responsible for this impressive display of steel and chrome is Rick Treworgy, a longtime Punta Gorda resident, real estate developer and partner in a number of local restaurant enterprises. As he collected more and more cars, he ran out of storage space in a number of warehouses where his prized possessions were often stacked to the



Rick Treworgy and his daughter, April, stand among rows of vintage Corvettes at his Muscle Car City museum in Punta Gorda. STAFF PHOTO / CHIP LITHERLAND

ceiling. Occasionally, he would invite fellow car people over to have a look.

So what is a person to do when he runs out of room to keep his collection? Buy an old Wal-Mart, of course. Treworgy has transformed the building, vacated when Wal-Mart moved to a larger facility nearby, into what the brochure says is "possibly the largest GM muscle car collection in the nation." A quick check on the Web seems to confirm his contention. A muscle car museum in Sevierville, Tenn., boasts 90 cars and other collections are not nearly as specialized. April Treworgy, who is the manager of her father's museum, said there are currently 174 cars on display, with another 45 or so stored off site. The plan is to rotate the collection at the museum to keep the display fresh.

The facility also boasts a '50s-style diner complete with chairs upholstered in red and white vinyl, a gift shop filled with lots of car stuff, including models in various sizes, and a parts store. Plans call for a full-service restaurant to be added in the near future.

### GM in all its glory

But the real show is the cars, Camaros, Chevelles, El Caminos, Impalas, GTOs, Olds 442s and his favorite, the Corvettes. His daughter says he's partial to the '67 model, since that was the year he graduated from high school.

Every one is in perfect condition and appears ready to take on the road at a moment's notice. The cars look as new as when they graced the showroom floor. Some still have the price sticker attached.

The magnificence of Treworgy's collection stands in sharp contrast to the current condition of General Motors, as the nation's most prolific car company finds itself in a struggle for survival. Oldsmobiles are already a thing of the past and Pontiacs will soon follow.

But one could easily forget all that while strolling the aisles at Muscle Car City. It is a room that holds memories for all who have ever settled into the bucket seats of their very own car, smelled that new-car smell or punched an accelerator on an open stretch of road.

In Punta Gorda, thanks to Rick Treworgy, American automobile ingenuity is on display in all its glory.

Kathy Silverberg is former publisher of the Herald-Tribune's southern editions. E-mail: [kathy.silverberg@comcast.net](mailto:kathy.silverberg@comcast.net)

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