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The big band music program Guy Thomas was listening to seemed appropriate coming from the speaker of one of his vintage 1940s radio. The only trouble was, it was impossible to tell which of the dozen or so radios, all in mint condition, was producing the music.

The rich wood cabinets of each set were in show room condition sitting on a table inside Thomas's cluttered TV repair shop on Monte Ne Road in Rogers. The dozen radios are part of his collection of about 500 acquired over many years. Most of them work.

Thomas owns crystal sets dating back to the infancy of radio in the early 1920s. About 100 of his radios were built before 1930. His newest radios date back to the 1950s.

Fixing televisions, VCRs, and stereo equipment is Thomas's job. But his hobby is putting life back into old radios.

"Most of the ones I get are basket cases," Thomas said. "A radio 60 years old, you usually don't find it in good condition."

With that, his son Tim pulled a radio from a pile waiting to be repaired, and began to take the set apart. Upon removing the cabinet, mouse droppings and nest material spilled over the work table. Inside, among the tubes and wires that made up the guts of the radio, was a nest of shredded paper and other debris where the mouse had made its home for who knows how long.

The two were confident the radio could be fixed. It would take about 8 hours to get it playing again, they guessed, then more to recondition its wood cabinet.

Tim Thomas, an employee at his father's repair facility, does most of the cabinet refinishing while the elder Thomas does most of the electronic work.



Guy Thomas shows a Philco Cathedral radio, built between 1932 and 1934.

Yesterday's radios: Music to his ears

Thomas said he has one fault as a collector. "I buy, but I don't sell."

His repair shop and the two-car garage at his home is packed with radios. So is his attic. Some of his favorite radios furnish the antebellum-style home where Thomas lives with his wife Peggy. "I've got all my wife will let me put in the house."

Thomas, who has been in the electronic repair business in Rogers about 35 years, wouldn't be able to fix any of his old radios if he hadn't had the foresight to collect parts, too. Over the years he's saved good tubes, and bought tubes from other repairmen who went out of business. Most of them cannot be purchased today. Those that can often run as high as \$25 each.

"I don't know how many thousands I have," Thomas said. All are organized in a room of his shop. He also has a library of repair manuals pub-

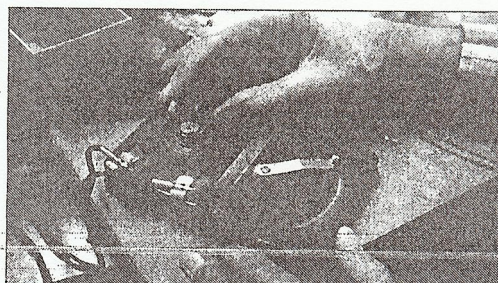
lished when Jack Benny, Ed Sullivan, and The Shadow were at the apex of their radio careers.

The collector has been interested in radio since age seven when he built his first crystal set. Friends have donated many radios to his collection. Others he has purchased at garage sales and flea markets.

"That's how we spend most weekends, either fishing or going to flea markets," Thomas said. He has also acquired sets at swap meets for radio collectors, usually held in large cities.

Many of his radios had a price tag of only a few dollars decades ago when they were new. Today a radio collector might pay the price of a modern stereo system for one of the radios Thomas has restored to mint condition.

But he's not selling. "I like them all," he said. "You try to pick a favorite one, and you can't."



A Philmore crystal set, produced in the 1950s is part of his collection.



Tim Thomas, above, does most of the refinishing work on the radio cabinets. Below, a radio is built into an antique table in Thomas's living room. A door is opened to reveal the controls.



Pictures, story by Filip Putthoff

