



One man's museum

Story and photos by Larry Edsall

When he was 12 years old, Mel Martin and a buddy were kicked off the carousel in the park in their hometown of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

"Someday I'll own one of those things," vowed Martin, whose family moved to Arizona when Mel was 16 years old.

Now in his early 80s, Martin not only has his carousel, but he keeps it inside his Martin Auto Museum, where he also houses five rooms of cars he's collected through the years, cars ranging from the 1917 Douglas dump truck his great uncle gave him when Martin was still in high school (top row at right) to the stunning and rare 1930 Duesenberg Model J boat-tailed speedster he recently acquired (second row at right).

Martin opened his first M&M Garage when he was a teenager in Mayer, Arizona, a town where his great uncle John Martin was among the community pioneers. Mel was in his mid-20s when he moved to Phoenix and opened another garage. That garage evolved into a body shop and then into a towing service that at one time operated 34 trucks.

He also started a major used car auction company and became involved in commercial real estate.

Oh, and he also raced cars and was among the members of a local jalopy racing association which in the 1950s helped convert a former dog racing track into Manzanita Speedway, a nationally known auto racing oval that Martin owned for several years.

The Martin Auto Museum is located at 17641 N. Black Canyon Highway, adjacent to the northbound lanes of I-17 on the northwest side of Phoenix. The facility is open to visitors on Thursday, Friday and Saturday afternoons (except during the summer months) and also can be rented for car and other club meetings, even wedding receptions. Funds from such events help made the museum and its collection available for school groups. Info: www.martinautomuseum.com

