

Pottery makes instant history

Red Wing crock picked for state sesquicentennial

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How much would you pay for a piece of history?

When it's a history-making piece of Red Wing pottery and only 150 of the stoneware crocks are being made, price may not be an object to collectors.

Scott Gillmer, the third-generation owner of the business, expects to see a crowd in front of the Red Wing Pottery salesroom at 9 a.m. Saturday, when the limited-edition Minnesota sesquicentennial crock goes on sale.

Last year, when Red Wing Pottery produced a special 150th birthday jar for Red Wing's sesquicentennial, "a couple of people spent the night outdoors to be the first in line," he said.

That piece sold out the morning it was released. And, Gillmer said, within a week or so, it was going for \$500 on the secondary market.

The longtime Red Wing business was chosen by the state's Sesquicentennial Committee to make 150 salt-glazed commemoratives to help celebrate Minnesota's 150th birthday.

"We of course felt real honored," Gillmer said, adding that Red Wing pottery has been made for 140 years, almost since Minnesota became a state.

"It was our idea for the shape of the piece and the style we wanted to do," he said.

Historically, the handthrown crock with saltglaze finish and cobalt decoration was one of the most common products manufactured here.

Potters Mark Connolly, Alex Wilson and Scott Keith each hand-turned 50 of the lug-handled, 2-quart crocks, which they stamped with the official sesquicentennial logo and the Red Wing Pottery stamp. The bottom-numbered crocks feature handpainted cobalt blue birch leaves.

Six prototypes - not numbered - went to the state and were auctioned at a sesquicentennial event, Gillmer said.

Of the 150 numbered crocks, 140 will be sold on a first-come basis at the salesroom - one piece per customer, and no saving spots in line - and 10 will be sold in an eBay auction that also will start Saturday morning. People in line when sales begin will have first option, then those who call the toll-free phone number will have a chance to buy any remaining crocks. There will be no pre-orders.

Random numbers were chosen for the eBay auction pieces, Gillmer said. They will be up for online bids for five days. Starting and ending times will be staggered one hour, with the first going online at 9 a.m. Saturday and a new piece each hour until 6 p.m.

The online auction is planned because "I am worried that there will be a big line that morning and we will run the risk of not giving some of our good out-of-town customers a chance to buy this

piece," Gillmer said on the business Web site.

The potters, who are at work in the salesroom studio seven days a week, also have been busy making special pieces that celebrate the 12th anniversary of the revival of salt-glaze pottery manufacturing in 1996.

Salt-glaze refers to the process by which glaze is applied to stoneware pots. Salt is thrown into the kiln when it reaches its maximum temperature of 2,400 degrees F. The finished pots have a grey or tan clay body with a cobalt blue decoration.

Red Wing's first potters produced salt-glaze pots in the late 1800s.

The anniversary pieces and some special bottomnumbered designs by the three potters all will be marked with the limitededition 12th anniversary stamp.

Those pieces will go on sale at 8 a.m. July 11 during the Red Wing Collectors Society convention.



Scott Gillmer, the third-generation owner of Red Wing Pottery, holds one of the 150 salt-glazed

crocks made for the Minnesota sesquicentennial. They go on sale Saturday morning at the salesroom and online. Cody Buckalew/Republican Eagle



The bottom-numbered crocks feature a cobalt birch leaf and the Minnesota logo. Cody Buckalew/Republican Eagle