

Grand Junction's

Bird Dog Museum

Outdoor Adventures

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Spotlighting the Sporting Dog.

By Ann N. Yungmeyer | Photography courtesy of the Bird Dog Museum

The enduring canine-to-human bond has long been depicted in literature and film. Likewise, the keen devotion of man to his dog is beautifully portrayed in The National Bird Dog Museum.



In the heart of bird dog country, a small group of sporting dog enthusiasts established the Bird Dog Foundation, Inc., to preserve the field trial and hunting traditions of West Tennessee and other parts of the world. In 1991, the group opened the National Bird Dog Museum in Grand Junction, Tennessee, an hour's drive east of Memphis.

With a growing collection of artwork, photography and memorabilia, the museum is a destination for dog lovers and bird hunters as well as curiosity seekers. Representing more than 40 breeds of sporting dogs used in hunting and field trial competition, the museum mainly features pointers, retrievers, setters and spaniels – breeds that possess remarkable instincts in water, scampering through the woods, and nosing thick brushy meadows.

Do you know the distinctive traits of Irish Setters versus Gordon Setters, or English Cocker Spaniels versus Springer Spaniels? Museum visitors can learn about the characteristics and training of the dogs, and the birds they hunt. Dedicated galleries focus on specific breeds, such as the National Retriever Museum that shows the different kinds of retrievers and from where they originate – including the Golden Retriever from England, Labrador from Newfoundland, and Chesapeake Bay Retriever from the east coast of the U.S.

The multi-winged museum complex also features Field Trial Hall of Fame galleries and a Wildlife Heritage Center, a resource for education added in 1996. The center's taxidermy exhibit is a favorite for visitors, with a collection of various types of waterfowl, owls, bobcats, otters, coyote and other wildlife.

Preserving History

West Tennessee's proximity to the Mississippi flyway has long attracted waterfowl hunters, putting the area on the map in the late 19th century as home to the ongoing National Field Trial Championships held at the historic Ames Plantation. The National Bird Dog Museum highlights the area's rich sporting dog heritage, shedding light on more than 100 years of bird dog life.

The museum's Field Trial Hall of Fame recognizes accomplished dogs and people who have contributed significantly to the sport. Many artwork pieces and

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trainers, owners and handlers.

"The majority of our museum items are collected by donation from bird dog lovers and artists from all over the world, as well as through family estates of bird hunting enthusiasts," says Tonya Brotherton, executive director and curator of the museum. "The foundation is fortunate to receive many donations that reflect the sporting dog history and culture, and we have a process to display things in a way that complements our objectives and the themes of each gallery."

Dog breed groups such as the pointer/setter, retriever and spaniel clubs actively support the museum with fundraising and contributing to exhibits that celebrate specific breeds. Those include the Brittany, English Cocker, English Springer, German Shorthaired Pointer, Red Setter, Vizsla and Weimaraner.

Inspired Artwork

Many forms of art are found at the National Bird Dog Museum, from antique oil paintings to modern sculpture and taxidermy mounts. Featured artists are often hunters themselves, inspired by the natural landscapes in which the dogs work.

The Sporting Dog Wing presents a variety of in-thefield scenes such as the English Springer with pheasant and German Shorthaired Pointer finding a covey of quail. Outdoor spaces include a walk of champions, memorial garden and bronze sculpture lawn. Recent additions to the bronze collection include: the German Shorthaired Pointer "Sportsmanship" by sculptor Sandra Van Zandt, dedicated in 2015; and "Pacolet Cheyenne Sam," of the Brittany Field Trial Hall of Fame, by Matthew Gray Palmer.

"Our galleries contain works by several notable

sporting dog artists," says Brotherton. "We have a famous dog portrait by Lynn Bogue Hunt, one of America's greatest periodical wildlife and outdoor artists (1878-1960). Also Iwan Lotton. Some of his commissioned paintings of famous field trial dogs are here. Another recognized name is Edwin Megargee, a featured artist in Field and Stream in the 1950s."

Several museum pieces previously owned by bird dog enthusiasts are treasured for their historical significance, including one painting of a pointer that has holes in the canvas.

"The holes are from shrapnel," explains Brotherton, "because this painting hung on the wall in the office of Federal Judge Lee West at the time of the Oklahoma City bombing."

An unusual piece of antique value is the taxidermy English Setter called Count Noble, portrayed to be on a quail hunt. The mount, circa 1891, was donated to the National Bird Dog Museum by Carnegie Hall in 1999.

A prized recent addition to the collection is a portrait of Gary Lockee, one of the museum founders and a Hall of Fame member. Presented by Dr. and Mrs. Eugene Bortnick of Kansas, the painting honors Lockee, an avid huntsman and World War II veteran who retired from the U.S. Navy. Now, at age 95, Lockee and his wife Sally are still very active in the museum.

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Community Outreach Brings Awareness

Education and community outreach are hallmarks of the Bird Dog Foundation. Though man's best friend is the featured species of the National Bird Dog Museum, the broader objectives of the foundation touch on the delicate balance between man and nature.

The Wildlife Heritage Center at the museum brings awareness to the importance of wildlife/ game management practices and conservation of the natural environment.

The museum hosts school field trips in which students learn about upland game birds and waterfowl through the variety of taxidermy mounts and a nature classroom. The William F. Brown Memorial Library at the Wildlife Heritage Center offers an excellent resource for books and magazines on the hunting dog breeds and related topics, containing rare vintage books as well as a children's reading corner.

In addition to field trips at the museum, the Bird Dog Foundation offers essay and sporting dog art contests for area students. The Annual Youth Art Contest is held for students (grades K-12) generally within a 75mile radius of the museum. Winning artwork is displayed in the William F. Brown Memorial Library for approximately one year. Deadline for submission is January 15 each year. The Annual College Scholarship Essay Contest was created for the purpose of promoting interest and education in wildlife and conservation. as well as providing financial aid for rising college students. The contest is open to high school seniors in Tennessee. Mississippi and Arkansas. Deadline for submission is in April each year.

The museum is supported through contributions to the Bird Dog Foundation, a nonprofit organization. Admission to the 30,000-square-foot museum and grounds is free for visitors, and donations are accepted. For more information, visit birddogfoundation.com.



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