

40,000 eBay Auctions Later, We Revisit a Story Featured in the first issue of Wilton Magazine

By Sheryl Kraft, January 1, 2008

Get on the invitation list! If you are interested in attending openings, galas, after hours receptions, and other interesting local events, then click here to signup! Wilton Magazine maintains several opt-in lists that you may subscribe to receive invitations and other information. Your information is never shared, and you may opt out at any time.

Picture this: Working so many hours that you lose track of how many hours you actually do work. Drawing no salary. Dealing with lots of different personalities; sorting through musty attics, dust-covered basements, years and years worth of someone else's old memories—other people's "junk." (Well, maybe junk: A Brooklyn police auxiliary badge crowded into a shoebox full of old "stuff" ended up selling for \$1200.)

To do all this, you'd better love what you do.

And Tom Greenbaum does indeed love his job. He is a very happy man. The day-to-day business of running Con\$ign-Net, his online consignment store, leaves Tom intellectually challenged, having more fun than he's ever had running any other business. Where else would he have come across a 1986 edition of Playboy magazine—in Braille?

It was 2003, and Tom felt it was time for something new. He'd already enjoyed years of success running focus groups for Groups Plus, his own market research company. But the travel—an overwhelming 150,000 miles a year—led him away from that business. His passion for collecting—Tom has amassed a huge collection of autographed baseballs over the years—led him right into his current business. Like any unexpected finding, serendipity had a hand in it, too. "A friend of mine was asked to teach a course at UConn on buying and selling on eBay," explains Tom. When the friend suddenly became ill, he asked Tom to fill in for him. Although he'd never sold anything on eBay, Tom learned quickly. "Over a weekend, my friend gave me some quick lessons. I sold a couple of things on the site, too, to see what it was all about." He swiftly sold about forty baseballs from his collection; even his wife got in on the act, handing over some things she no longer wanted or no longer used. An old vintage Hermes scarf yielded \$450. He was hooked.



Photo By: Jeff Pemberton

Tom slowly phased out of his market research career, becoming more and more entrenched in the business of buying and selling on eBay. (For those of us who don't know what it is, eBay is the world's most well-known Internet auction site.) And so, a year and a half ago, Tom officially was doing his buying and selling full time. "I'm having as much fun now as when I started," Tom says, grinning.

By the time he officially started Con\$ign-Net, Tom had already done almost 3,000 auctions. To date, the site boasts a staggering 42,000 auctions. By keeping his overhead low and reaching for high-end valued merchandise to sell, Tom is able to keep the business growing and thriving. "I take pride in our integrity, professionalism, and friendly expert service," Tom says.

It's true that anyone can sell on eBay, without a broker like Con\$ign-Net. But Tom's expertise allows him to spot an item that will sell, and the way he presents the item and the constant traffic of regular customers at his online eBay store often lead to higher prices than an amateur seller can get. He can confidently walk into an old attic or overflowing garage and joyfully dig through decade's worth of items destined for the trash, then turn them into true profits. He is a pro at setting up the merchandise for photos that are posted on the site, presenting the items to look as clear and attractive as possible, and headlining the photograph with a few choice words. "There are only two things that really matter when you're selling on eBay," Tom says knowingly, "the photography and the headline."

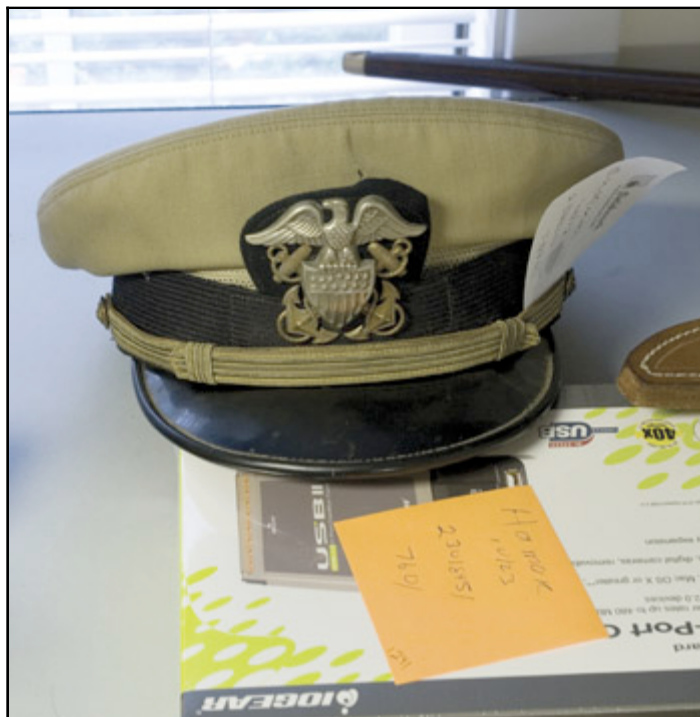


Photo By: Jeff Pemberton

Although advertising is a valuable way to get the word across, word-of-mouth and location counts for a lot, too. Word-of-mouth is how Tom

has secured the gently-worn clothing of...sorry, I'm sworn to secrecy. But I'll just say that this comedienne has reported news from the Red Carpet on many a night, perhaps even dressed in one of the outfits that Tom sells. Another client is a former ambassador to El Salvador. He once shipped a silver platter to Dick Cheney's office, not without incident, by the way. "All the items go through an x-ray machine, and since it was metal, it was sent back to us," Tom explains. "It took quite a while for us to settle the matter with his office and get the tray to him." Another time, he sold the designer Judith Leiber a belt of her own design. "I guess she didn't have that one, and wanted it for her collection," he says.

Besides traveling to a client's house, many clients will come to him. "I have some who come in every single week; others come every few months with a ton of stuff; some may be downsizing, and I'll see them just once or twice." He shares the building complex at his new location at Danbury Road, just past the Wilton Chevy/Buick car dealership with a dentist's office and Wave Hill Bread, whose intoxicating baking odors waft through the open windows on this day.

The business is full of surprises. "When the door opens, I don't know what's coming in," Tom says with a broad smile of anticipation. "I've dealt with over 500 consigners, and get to meet the nicest people," he adds.

Tom is full of interesting anecdotes, which he proudly refers to as his "war stories." A client walks in with a violin in dire shape. Against his better judgment, Tom places it on his site. \$280 later, he gladly hands over 60% of the proceeds to his client. An old auxiliary police badge that he found at the bottom of a dilapidated trunk that was listed at \$9.99 "because I didn't even think it would sell," ended up selling for a whopping \$1200. Another client brought in a Louis Vuitton bag sporting a big hole, compliments of a hungry rat: Sold. A little tin truck—"old, but I don't know how old,"—was offered at a starting bid of \$49: Sold—for \$1700. And a cast iron bank from Hawaii—"a pretty ugly-looking thing"—that Tom thought would sell for maybe \$29 ended up with a final bid of \$400.



Photo By: Jeff Pemberton

Designer pocketbooks are the single best-selling item on the site. Why? “Women who buy pocketbooks want them right away,” Tom explains. “We get paid faster for pocketbooks than for any other item, sometimes before the ink is dry.” Another surprising tip that Tom shared with me is that companies like Chanel will refurbish any authentic Chanel bag. So, even if a bag he is selling is not in perfect condition, for a fee, it can be sent to Chanel and come back looking brand new.

Tom’s favorite story? Hands down, it’s about the nun and the baseballs.

“I’d never met a nun in my life,” Tom recounts. “We had such good times together. Her brother and uncle were both priests, and people gave them things, which they, in turn, gave to her.” The nun asked Tom if he could sell one of her items, a baseball inside an unopened box. “I knew it was old,” he says, “but couldn’t find that much information about it.” So, he listed it on his site for \$25. Apparently, someone else knew a thing or two about it, and bought the baseball—for \$400-plus. And after hearing the rest of the story, this writer thinks that if you look in the dictionary under the phrase, “Kick Yourself,” you will read this: The nun, when told what the baseball fetched, made a startling confession: she had a carton filled with about 25 similar boxes—that she gave away to her 8th-graders, “just to play with.”



Photo By: Jeff Pemberton

Like so many items that are on to enjoy a second life, Tom is on to the second phase of his professional life, and loving every minute of it.

“Just this week, someone gave me three Hermes ashtrays. I had never even seen an Hermes ashtray.” The starting bid was \$50. The final sale was \$300.

Surprises—and wonders—never cease.

Copyright ©2004 Wilton Online a [Town Green Media](#) publication. All rights reserved. Privacy policy.