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On 'Cash in the Attic,' odds & ends

By **MARISA GUTHRIE**
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Winning the lottery has become a pillar of the American Dream.

Now, the popularity of programs like "Antiques Roadshow" means that pack rats can fantasize about vindication in the form of a cash windfall for all the stuff they couldn't bring themselves to throw out.

HGTV's "Cash in the Attic" capitalizes on that collective wishful thinking, sending appraisers to the homes of people who are looking to unload something old to buy something new.

'Things have the power to transport us to those really happy times.'

— 'Attic's' Tim Luke

"It's really an insight into human nature and this retentive quality that we have," said John Sencio, who as host has visited dozens of dens of disarray.

The 26-episode series deploys appraiser Tim Luke to comb the attics, basements and garages of homeowners who are looking to auction off some of their clutter in order to finance new projects.

In the first episode, Sept. 12 at 8 p.m., Barrie and John Overend want to turn their basement into a playroom for their children. Their small home is stuffed with furniture passed down from John's parents.

In many homes, said Luke, partners are on opposite sides of the keep-versus-sell divide. And

that's when tugs of war break out.

"It was interesting to watch the negotiations between" couples, said Luke. "Things have the power to transport us to those really happy times, and when we see them, if you are sentimental, these objects become a time machine where you love taking the trip every time you look at it.

"It is my job to break that time machine."

At the auction, the Overends raised well over their target goal of \$1,500 by selling unexceptional furniture and knickknacks.

"That's the beauty of this

justify means

show," said Luke. "Everything that you see is just everyday stuff."

Most collectors don't set out with dollar signs in their eyes. Many collections are worthless, or for that matter priceless, depending on your perspective.

The strangest collection Sencio has come across: toothpaste tubes, some empty, some not.

Even the professionals are not immune from the pull of the inanimate.

Luke, who runs a consignment business in South Florida called Treasure Quest (www.tqag.com), collects advertising memorabilia: mid-19th-century to early-20th-century cardboard signs and posters.

"My father was a pack rat," conceded Luke, "so I come by it honestly. Of course, I've got it under control."

Sencio's father is also the family pack rat. He has 5,000 vinyl record albums. His mother's favorite day of the week, on the other hand, is garbage day. So the question has become: To sell or not to sell the vinyl collection?

"That has been a discussion in my family for 20 years," said Sencio. "I don't know how I'd feel about it. That would be a big moment in the Sencio mythology. That would be a fundamental shift."



TRASH TV, OR TREASURES?
Alfred and Wendy Howell look over auction items.