



Cawker City, Kan., ball of twine is displayed for visitors in a room built for it.

Kansas Ball Of Twine Still Growing

Do you know what the difference is between the big ball of twine in Minnesota and the big ball of twine in Kansas?

The Minnesota twine ball in Darwin was started and finished by one man. The Kansas ball, on the other hand, is a community effort that's ongoing. In fact, if you can get to Cawker City, Kan., you can add a piece of twine to the ever-growing ball yourself.

Linda Clover, caretaker, says the Kansas ball of string was started in Dec. 1953 by Frank Stoerber as a way to get rid of piles of twine on his farm.

As the ball grew, neighbors would bring him their twine. It finally got so big he took it to town.

The small town adopted the ball of twine and built a shelter over it so visitors can touch it any time.

They found out how much the ball weighed when a crane lifted it into place in 1988. Since then, they weigh the twine as added.

Right now, Clover says it weighs approximately 17,670 lbs. and has 7,049,191 ft. of twine on it.

"We just have fun with it," she says. People come from all over to see it and sign a book. While some come specifically to see the ball of twine, others happen to be just driving by and can't believe it," Clover says.

A local artist painted twine like it was un-



This is what the ball of twine looked like just before Frank Stoerber took it to town.

raveling all along the sidewalk and visitors walk along, following the strands of twine to works of art in storefronts. Then they try to find the ball of twine in each painting, says Clover.

"We just try to entertain people," she says. "We like to say we're unique. Some people say odd."

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Morgan drives down street in his couch, which is powered by a pair of electric motors.

Photo courtesy Janet Groenert

"Couchmobile" Wows Parade Goers

Ever wish you didn't have to get up off your couch to go into town?

If so, you'll like this "couchmobile" created by Morgan L'Argent, Minneapolis, Minn. He added a pair of motors to an old 2-seater couch. "It was just something fun to do," he says.

Two 24-volt electric motors, one on each side, control it. L'Argent can go forward, backward or even spin in place using a remote control car controller with two joysticks, each of which controls one motor.

When not "moving," it looks and acts like a regular couch.

Although not street legal, he put a fake license plate on the front for fun.

L'Argent says the mobile couch goes faster than walking but slower than running.

"When I built this I wanted to make everything enclosed so when it's not moving, you can't tell anything's been changed," he says.

When people see it, their jaws drop, he says. Others make comments such as "Can I have a ride?" or "Where's the TV or beer?"

L'Argent says he plans on creating a webpage that describes how to create a couchmobile.

Once posted, a link will be found at www.artcarparade.com.

"Leech Lady" Attracts Crowds To Unusual Museum

If you ever find yourself traveling anywhere near the southern Illinois town of Springfield, it would be worth your while to stop by to visit the "Leech Lady."

Barbara Mason, curator of the Pearson Museum, has an unusual claim to fame. She knows everything there is to know about leeches, those slimy black "water worms" that were used for thousands of years by medical doctors.

Surprisingly, they've been making a comeback in recent years. Mason tells visitors to the medical museum about the history of leeches and about the ways they're being used today.

For example, one of the more amazing instances involving leeches in reconstructive surgery happened in Illinois in 1991 when an Amish youth was seriously injured by a tractor pto. His scalp was torn off and 44 stitches were required to reattach it. Leeches were attached to the scalp to help get the blood flowing again normally.

Leeches are also used regularly in limb reattachments. The bloodsuckers inject their own anesthetic into the skin as well as an anticoagulant that keeps blood flowing after they're removed.

Although leeches live only six months without food, their life span shortens when they are needed during surgeries. "They have to keep the leeches hungry so they are ready for action when needed," she says. After doing their jobs, the leeches "forfeit their lives" because they could transmit disease if used again.

Other items found at this unusual museum



"Leech Lady" Barbara Mason knows everything about leeches.

include Roman surgical instruments from the second century, bloodletting instruments, a set of home hewn wooden false teeth, and outrageous treatments for the mentally ill.

While visitors are welcome, Mason recommends calling ahead of time to ensure that it isn't being used by students and residents at the medical school. Admission is free.

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Air-Powered Train Whistle Made From PVC

"It looks and sounds like an old steam locomotive train whistle," says Dewey Wright, Charlotte, N.C., about the three-chime, air-powered whistle he made entirely from PVC pipe.

The whistle measures 15 in. tall and 3 1/4 in. in diameter. It's designed to be powered by a low volume compressor at about 15 psi. There are three smaller 3/4-in. dia. pipes inside that are partially visible through arch cut-outs. A quick-connect ball valve screws into the bottom of the whistle, which is painted gold to look like brass.

"I used PVC because it's easy to work with and cheap. If I built it from brass, it would cost at least \$200 in materials alone," says Wright, who makes whistles as a hobby. "When they first see it, a lot of people are amazed that it isn't actually made out of brass. You can mount the whistle on top of your barn or on your car or truck. It's very loud and has a beautiful sound to it. I can change the whistle's tone by moving the ball valve back and forth.

"I use a 150 psi compressor, but the quick disconnect ball valve fitting reduces the air pressure to about 60 psi. If you ran a 3/4-in. dia. pipe with 150 lbs. of pressure directly into a whistle it could blow up," he says.

He sells his whistles on eBay as well as through the mail. "On eBay, I start the bid at \$1 to give everyone a fair chance. Normally the whistles sell for \$100 plus \$15 S&H," he notes.

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PVC train whistle sounds like the real thing. Can be mounted on a truck, tractor, or even on top of a barn.



Whistle is powered by a low volume compressor at about 15 psi.