

Authentic Chuck Wagons Built From Scratch

There's no plywood or screws to be found on Kathy Christensen's authentic chuck wagons. The hardware, drawer pulls and latches are all hand made by a blacksmith. Most of the wood is solid pine or cedar. Rivets, square nuts and bolts are also hand-forged. Christensen herself does everything but the forge work.

"At wagon competitions, we're judged on authenticity," explains Christensen. "They have to be built just like they were in the 1800's."

Christensen's wagons usually do well. Last year she finished second out of 30 chuck wagons. Ironically for her, she is often competing against other wagons she has built. Christensen builds and sells chuck wagons for as much as \$12,000 to 14,000 each.

She starts with an existing running gear and builds the rest of each wagon. She outfits them with a canvas fly, poles and stakes to spread over the cooking area and a water barrel and chuck boot. The chuck boot goes under the chuck box, which is the food cupboard at the rear of the chuck wagon. The box carries the cooking equipment.

"Each one takes about a month to build," says Christensen. "I used to do a lot of buggies and carts, but now I only build chuck wagons and sheepherders' wagons on spe-

cial request."

The sheepherders' wagons take a lot more work, she explains, although lower-end models are available for as little as \$9,000. A recent wagon was custom designed for use at a Bed and Breakfast in Wyoming. It had a double bed on one end and benches on the side with a little chuck box and a heating stove.

"Some have cook stoves in them, and some are insulated and paneled," she recalls.

"They can be pretty cozy and stand up well to travel."

The chuck wagons are used not only for competition, but also for cookouts. She says they are often used at fund raising and volunteer events and sometimes as actual chuck wagons for trail rides.

"I do a lot of catering with my own rig," says Christensen. "I have done weddings, family get togethers, reunions and other types of events."

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Authentic chuck wagons are built from scratch just like they were in the 1800's.



Kathy Christensen also builds authentic sheepherders' wagons.



Both chuck wagons and sheepherders' wagons are custom built to match customer needs.

How To Take A Rent-Free Vacation

If you know where to look, finding rent-free luxurious accommodations on vacation is easy and fun.

Each issue of a unique newsletter called *The Caretaker Gazette* contains about 150 listings of "caretaking" and "housesitting" jobs throughout the world. The assignments can range from "as short as a weekend, to as long as the rest of your life," according to publisher Gary C. Dunn of Bergheim, Texas.

Sometimes the homeowners are ordinary people who don't want to leave their property unattended while on vacation or on business trips. Other times, they're very wealthy, and simply have too many homes to live in themselves. Most are worried about theft or vandalism while they're gone.

Some have more specialized needs, such as farmers and ranchers who have not had a holiday in many years. They need to get away, but they also need someone who can take over their chores, caring for horses or other livestock. There are also bed and breakfast owners who have never taken a vacation themselves, but finally need a break and want someone experienced to handle things while they're gone.

The *Caretaker Gazette* also includes numerous "situations wanted" listings where people advertise their availability to housesit or caretake. Some see short-term caretaking as a way to take a vacation from their regular life, while others use it to live a nomadic lifestyle. Still others approach caretaking with a long-term commitment in mind.

"The Gazette fills many needs and is the only publication in the world dedicated to the property caretaking field," says Dunn. "This is our 24th year of publishing and we cover all 50 U.S. States, plus about 20 foreign countries in each issue."

Every situation is different. The advertisements for light, housesitting duties can translate into rent-free vacations, while some listings seek fulltime professional estate managers (fulltime, salaried jobs with on-site housing).

There are also temporary house swapping arrangements for people who wish to trade



Here's a house that was recently listed in *The Caretaker Gazette*.

their surroundings and see another part of the world.

Sometimes the property owners aren't absent at all. They just require someone to handle caretaking duties, or to act as a companion (such as for the elderly).

Some request single caretakers, some prefer couples, and others are open to families.

"A lot of retirees use *The Gazette* when they're searching for that perfect place to retire to," Dunn says. "Often, they've lived in the same place their whole lives, and want to experience a different climate. But before taking the plunge and buying property somewhere, they take a short-term assignment to try it out first."

The *Caretaker Gazette* is published bi-monthly (every other month). It's available to subscribers online or in paper form. All subscribers with an email address also receive daily updates of the most recent listings. Subscriptions cost \$29.95 per year.

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Good Use For Old Corn Crib

Jim and Alisa Ellis bought three old corn cribs at a farm auction sale. After getting them home, they put them to good use.

They sat each one over a small tree in the back yard and started filling them up with all kinds of birds. Right now, they're keeping about thirty different kinds of rare and exotic chickens in them. They have chicken emblems attached to the sides of the cribs, as well as potted flowers.

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Corn crib houses exotic chickens.



Giant rosary is made of bowling balls laid out on Bernard Clark's front lawn.

Bowling Ball Rosary Strengthens Faith

Bernard "Chubb" Clark, Nokomis, Ill., is calling for some "heavy praying" with this rosary made of bowling balls that's laid out on his front lawn.

Chubb got the idea for the giant rosary after he ended up with five used bowling balls. He decided to see if he could find a use for them and came up with the idea for

the rosary. It took some time to get it figured out, but he got it done.

He used a total of 59 balls to make the rosary. He ran links of chains between the balls and laid it all out on a bed of gravel.

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