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Say cheese!

By **LATALA PAYNE** Staff writer



Eden's City Hall was home to the ninth annual gathering of a special niche group this past weekend: Argus camera collectors. Members of the Argus Collectors Group came from across the United States and other countries to share their research and other knowledge about this line of cameras and photography equipment.

Robert Kelly, from Seattle, Wash., has come almost every year to the meeting. He said it's a little vacation for him.

"I really enjoy the country here – the rolling hills and farmlands – but the humidity is a little high for someone from Seattle," he said. "I just have a really good time here with the people. You've got something special in common with people from all over the world."

Kelly said the group has had members from Australia in the past come to these meetings, and this year members from Canada are coming for the first time. The group also has members from the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom.

Kelly started collecting Argus cameras in the 1970s. He was collecting many different types of cameras, but found a lot of them to be expensive.

"I found that Argus cameras weren't expensive, and there were lots of variations within this brand that would

interest a collector,” he said. “So I sold off my other cameras and just started to collect Argus.”

After becoming more and more interested in Argus cameras, Kelly took to the Internet to find out more information. He said he formed a discussion group with several other people interested in Argus cameras, and now he talks to people all around the world about them.

“Someone will ask ‘How do you do this?’ or ‘Does anybody want to buy so and so?’” he said. “We do this all the time.”

Ron Norwood, an Eden resident who is an organizer of the meeting, said it was started mainly for people within a few hours’ distance. He started the meetings along with

Doug Wilcox, a Martinsville, Va., resident who used to own a camera shop.

“We weren’t looking or expecting people to come from such great distances; it was just the local boys getting together,” he said. “It started off as just a Saturday event with people getting together, but it has evolved into much more.”

Norwood said they’ve added expert panel discussions, and special presentations on different aspects of Argus cameras. He said it’s almost turned into a seminar weekend with several thousand cameras available for viewing, most being one-of-a-kind models. Special topics included a history of the company and its president and how Argus cameras were used in the film industry.

As a part of the annual group meetings, members go out to historic places or places of interest around the county and sometimes in Virginia. This year they went to the canal at Spray Cotton Mills. They made it a photographic outing to take pictures of the canal and dam.

Other special activities include sending a camera all around the world for people to use in order to take pictures of their surroundings. Once the camera is passed, members include photos that they’ve taken for the next recipient to enjoy.

Norwood said this is usually a small meeting with around 35 to 40 people, but he would like to encourage community involvement in the future. He said the group will look at ways to notify the community and encourage local residents to come and check out their annual seminar.

“Eden is a wonderful place to have our meetings, and we’re just thankful for the cooperation from the city,” he said. “It’s absolutely no charge for people to come out. We just want people to come and enjoy themselves.”

The Argus Collectors Group is the largest group on the Internet dedicated to the collection and restoration of Argus cameras and the study of the company’s history, according to its Website. The group boasts several hundred members who contribute information through the site’s forums. For more information on the Argus Collectors Group, visit <http://arguscg.org/>.