



## *The Oklahoma Village Collector's Club*



### **The Club History For Collectors Who Kept Christmas Well (In celebration of 25 Years)**



By  
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History is important, whether it is about family or our Village genesis as it frames who we are and how we came to be...and sometimes gives us that special spark and incentive to carry on ~~ to move on ~~ to where we need to be. As Napoleon Bonaparte is famous for saying, "History is the version of past events that people have decided to agree upon." So is the following...my version...built upon past documents, meetings, interviews and personal historical knowledge to lay a foundation as to how The Oklahoma Village Collector's Club began in celebration of people's hobby of collecting *Department 56* houses.

As a prelude to the history of The OVCC, it seems appropriate to document the history of its founder, Matt Rathbone of the current *Rathbone's Flair Flowers*. Since the genesis of anything created well requires a firm foundation, this history delves deeply into the lives and decisions of the early Rathbone's store, family, and club membership. For it was Matt's forebears who began the trek from *Ben Franklin Stores*, to floral, to collectibles that led the way to the selling of *Department 56* villages in 1976 and to the vision of establishing a club that would propel his clients into lasting relationships and bring even greater joy to their collecting hobby. As you can discern from the following, their story also complies with Napoleon's statement:



It all started in the 40's with a *Ben Franklin Store*. In 1949, Matt's grandfather, Emmett Rathbone, Sr., opened a *Ben Franklin Store* in Aurora, Missouri. That store was not that far from Sam Walton's *Ben Franklin Store* in Arkansas, later to morph into the giant *Walmart* of today. After Matt's father, Emmett, Jr., got out of the Navy after serving during WWII on an aircraft carrier, he and wife Imogene opened a *Ben Franklin Store* in Mt. Vernon, Missouri.



Matt's parents continued to own that store for several years, even after they moved to Tulsa in 1958 and opened a *Ben Franklin Store* near Cincinnati and Pine. Matt's father explained that they moved to Tulsa for a "better opportunity to expand and open additional locations." During the ensuing years, Matt's parents opened seven more *Ben Franklin Stores* in Tulsa.



There was one store in south Tulsa at 51<sup>st</sup> and Lewis near the Southern Hills Country Club, a growing area. This was a great location, but as it turned out, it wasn't so great for a *Ben Franklin Store*. So, that became the second beginning and the birth of *Rathbone's Flair Flowers, Gifts, Cards* (plus many more names tacked on to that sign as it took up the southern half of the *Fikes Shopping Center* ☺).

*Rathbone's* evolved into **the** go-to shopping place, especially for Christmas, as the Rathbones became quite the innovators, bringing into the store all kinds of crafts, gifts, décor, cake decorating supplies, accessories, furniture, even *Hallmark Cards* and unique Christmas decorations in part of the store all year long. For that reason, it became a spot that attracted a lot of tourists; often busloads of people would stop to enjoy the bountiful and beautifully displayed Christmas decorations.

When *Department 56* introduced its Original Snow Village in 1976, Matt's parents saw the future of the line and ordered this hot new product for their stores. *Rathbone's* then offered each new village in its year of introduction. This new product line was a natural fit for a true Christmas store. Sales caught on quickly and soon had the passionate collectors in Tulsa busy sharing ideas and stories, inviting each other to their homes to see their latest creations,



especially at Christmas. This decision placed *Rathbone's* among the first in the country to carry *Department 56* products. They were also among the first *Gift Creations Concepts* dealers in the country and reached all levels of achievement for sales ~~ Showcase, Silver

and Gold Key Status, the highest recognition awarded by *Department 56*. At one time, they were one of the largest Christmas stores in the four-state area.

Matt had a lot to do with the growth at *Rathbone's* when he became more involved after high school graduation in Jenks. His work in the store was under the tutelage of his parents and of his brother Mike, ten years his senior, whom Matt credits with a lot of his knowledge and direction. Matt and Becky met, dated, and were in the band together at Jenks high school and were married after each graduated. Becky also became interested in *Rathbone's* and worked with Imogene, learning her skill in designing floral arrangements. As Matt had attended *GCC* conventions for several years and had visited *Bachman's Floral* (the parent company of *Department 56*) in 1990 and 1991, both in the Minneapolis area, he was able to have conversations with retailers across the country and gained great insight as to the future of the hobby and its collectors. Mike and Matt ran the store at Lewis and 51<sup>st</sup> Street in the *Fikes Shopping Center* where Matt learned to display and create unique village concepts and landscaping under Mike's leadership. The store was built on three levels, each with its own color of carpeting ~ red, gold, and green. The villages were located on the "red" level as that is the color of Christmas. Humor prevailed when employees would use the PA system to announce "help needed on the red carpet."

Through the years, *Rathbone's* has had stores in many locations in and around Tulsa, including *Woodland Hills Mall*, *Fontana Shopping Center*, Memorial and 68<sup>th</sup> Street, Lewis and 51<sup>st</sup> Street in the *Fikes Shopping Center*, Bartlesville and Muskogee. In 1988, the Rathbones purchased the old *Brookside Bowling Alley* on Peoria and initially sold furniture and other household needs. They remodeled it and converted it into a beautiful Christmas and Collectible store ~~ this being at 4734 South Peoria, the location that ultimately began it all for The Oklahoma Village Collector's Club. As they refurbished this new location, they closed the store in *Fikes Shopping Center* and the Peoria store became the Christmas and *Department 56* venue.



In 1994, *Rathbone's* became nationally famous as they produced the first Collector's Jubilee at the Tulsa Expo Square. Matt's mother was the marketing whiz behind this brilliant and enormously successful venture. (More on this later in the section specific to The OVCC's history.)

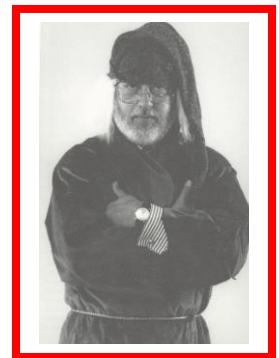
In 1995, Matt and Becky took over as owners of *Rathbone's*. In 2001, they also opened a *Rathbone's* at Memorial and 68<sup>th</sup> Street and operated three locations for a while but eventually decided to focus on their number one love...so they closed all but the Jenks location for their primary function of running the floral shop, which remains successful

today. In keeping with their rich history, every fall they transform the whole store into a Christmas wonderland as Christmas is as special to them now as it has always been.

As one might imagine, Matt and Becky also became personal collectors of *Department 56* village pieces. Matt loves Christmas In The City with its vertical walls and the angles of its metropolitan architecture, and Becky collected the Original Snow Village as well as some North Pole Series after it was introduced in 1990. Their first piece, and one they cherished, was the Original Snow Village 3 Train Cars and Train Station, introduced in 1980. With raising three boys, this group of pieces did not survive all the Christmases and times of display, but the memories will last forever. Matt strongly favors the display of trains in every village and is also partial to the *Coca-Cola* buildings introduced by *Department 56* because his father collected Coke items and always had authentic working Coke machines in his *Ben Franklin Stores*. They still have their collections and make them a part of every Christmas.

It also seems appropriate to insert a bit of history of *Department 56* and the National Council of Clubs:

In 1974, Ed Bazinet and his friends drove into the snow-covered burg of Stillwater, Minnesota on the St. Croix River to eat at the Lowell Inn and spied a small, turn-of-the-century village, decorated for the holidays and covered in new-fallen snow. The village was filled with quaint cottages, lampposts and narrow roads. People all over the country were totally unaware that a product would soon come along that would greatly brighten their holidays and create avid new collectors and display artistry. Along with the success of



*Department 56* and the Stillwater Vision that convinced Paul Bachman to dedicate a division of *Bachman's Floral* to home décor, came Jack Skeels (an avid collector who was acquainted with Paul) with his own vision. Jack wanted the many who collected these houses and who had started clubs across the country through the years to come together as one group of clubs...a "council" or a "club of clubs." Jack's idea dates back to the



1990 *Bachman* Gathering when he overheard a Denver club offering to help a Houston club with their set of bylaws so they too might have a sense of order in their club. As he attended other seminars and Gatherings and talked to people, he found everyone to be receptive, but the nagging question always seemed to be "Who can we find that has talent, time, and enthusiasm to take on this kind of assignment"? Jack found the "missing link in Lexington, Kentucky after meeting Lynn and Allen Wagner, who quickly

endorsed the idea.” Thus, with work and many to help, especially Alan and Lynn Wagner, the National Council of 56 Clubs was born.



With all the above as background, on to The OVCC, and the tie-ins to *Department 56*, the NCC, and *Rathbone's*:

Each year has certain things that make it memorable for many. The year of 1992 saw the Washington Redskins defeat the Buffalo Bills in the Humphrey Metrodome in Minneapolis, Minnesota (a location that was to become a “collecting headquarters” for the club). Ross Perot announced his candidacy for President, *The Silence of the Lambs* won the Academy Award, Mafia boss John Gotti was convicted of the murder of mob boss Paul Castellano, Chicago had a great flood and Los Angeles had huge riots, Johnny Carson retired after 30 years as host of *The Tonight Show*, the Mojave Desert had a massive earthquake, the largest shopping mall in the U.S., *Minnesota's Mall of America* was constructed on 78 acres (another tie-in for the club and its collecting headquarters), Hurricane Andrew ripped across south Florida, and Bill Clinton defeated George H. W. Bush in the U.S. presidential election. These are some of the occurrences that served as a backdrop to formation of what was to become The OVCC. The Minnesota connection was strong given Matt's many trips there over the years. When in 1992, Jack Skeels' dream came to fruition with a “club for clubs,” in the form of the National Council of 56 Clubs, Matt began investigating and then started Oklahoma's first club to celebrate Christmas through collecting and displaying *Department 56* houses.

In October of 1992, the weather was typical for Tulsa as the leaves were turning and the cooling days were an average of 61 degrees. All was well as the city turned towards another celebration of the wonderful season that is Christmas. A group of people who were frequent shoppers at a store called *Rathbone's Flair Flowers, Gifts, Cards ...* also followed Charles Dickens and knew “how to keep Christmas well.” They passionately shopped for small ceramic and porcelain village pieces throughout the year to create snow-covered settings which nostalgically brought precious memories to life. Truly, they created depictions of life from a simpler time.



It was through the passion and enthusiasm of the many shoppers at this store that Matt and Becky decided they needed a club to bond, share ideas, and further grow with each other. So many had such amazing displays that Matt wanted to harness this passion and funnel it into an official organization to provide for the wonderful interchange of hospitality and ideas. He didn't want to have a *Rathbone's Club*; he wanted it to be a COLLECTOR'S CLUB, to be enjoyed on their own. He accomplished that and much more through an employee by the name of David Van.

David designed the store displays for the Original Snow Village and was a genius at organizing events and relating to customers. He helped Matt approach their numerous customers about a club and they were rewarded with resounding acceptance. Customers were invited to attend a 'Village Gathering' on Saturday, October 17, 1992 at 2:30 p.m. to meet other collectors and be a charter club member. Documentation from Sharon Fichtenburg, the club's first treasurer, shows that 33 joined that evening, obviously



lending credence to Matt's idea. David and Matt brainstormed a club name while David designed a proposed logo and presented both to the Club. Both items were accepted, thus Oklahoma's first *Department 56* collectors club was born as The Oklahoma Village Collector's Club. David Van served as president for the first two years and the club was off and running. Rounding out the first board

were Terri Peters, vice president, and Lindy Legener, secretary. The first year was also the first year of a home tour. It became a tour of homes in January, after Christmas, with food at each stop in the mode of a progressive dinner. The tour continues today in December and is always the highlight of The OVCC's year. Club tee shirts and sweatshirts soon followed in 1996.

In the early years, *Rathbone's* hosted the monthly club meetings in an upstairs balcony and David Van presented programs on village design while invoking competition among the members in various club meetings. This gradually transitioned to other locations, including members' homes. In 1995, the Club began meeting at a room in the Helmerich Library on 91<sup>st</sup> and Yale, but as the membership grew and other retailers began providing door prizes and meeting space support, the locations became more numerous. Members' homes were still the order of the day, but Eastland Mall and Becky's Hallmark provided many venues as well. Other stores (listed later in this document) had location availability but were restricted in space. Members' homes became the preferred sites which promoted involvement and made The OVCC a more personal experience.





President Pat Stephens at the opening of Becky's Hallmark in August 1999

Dues began at a mere \$15 per membership (family unit) (still only \$30 twenty-five years later) and they provided contributions to the *Little Light House* charity, one that the Rathbone's had supported. In 2007, dues increased to \$20 to cover copy and postage expense of newsletters, as not everyone had email. In 2010, the \$30 mark was agreed upon in order to have flexibility for club events.

Enthusiasm grew along with club membership. The first year alone had nearly 100 memberships. Since the club began in the month of October, it became the official start of their fiscal year with elections and dues paid.

*Rathbone's* put Tulsa, along with The OVCC, on the national map by sponsoring what they called a Collector's Jubilee during the years 1994, 1995, and 1996. The first Collector's Jubilee in April 1994 was touted by Betty Lombardi, the NCC Region Rep, as the "Southwestern Regional States Get-Together" with the NCC having a table presided over by the first NCC co-presidents, Lynn and Alan Wagner. The Tulsa Expo Square was the selected location; it was then the largest building in Tulsa under a single roof...354,000 sq. ft. of column-free space under a cable-suspended roof. This was a three-day event featuring artists, manufacturers, retailers and secondary marketers from around the country and the world. Hundreds of booths were filled with everything collectible and encompassed over 2 ½ miles of booth space.



The OVCC had a goal to participate in a regional show, and as then club president David Van wrote, "that opportunity has now been manifested." Collectors from across America descended on Expo Square, one of only three shows nationwide that carried the prestige of the Collectors Information Bureau's official sanction. Over the years of the Jubilee, many national figures attended such as Sam Butcher (Precious Moments), Bob Rau (PBS), U.S. Senators, Judith Isaacson (Disney), Sarah's Attic, the Collector's Information Bureau, Lefton, Forma Vitrum, Christopher Radko, Annalee, McDonald's Collectibles, British Collectibles, Bellsnackle, and Arcade Toys, just to name a few. Marianne Moore, the editor of the *Village Seasons* newsletter, was a guest speaker and gave display seminars throughout the Jubilee ~ a real treat. Lynda Blankenship, an authority on *Department 56* and the owner of the *Dickens Exchange*, worked with the

Club on a huge gathering of village displays in a specially designated area. Each display was judged, with prizes going to the best exhibits within the various village lines. People could enter as individuals or work in a group. Each displayer received a house just for entering with a retired piece going to the winner. The OVCC was tasked to have at least five to eight displays so they would be well represented among the many other clubs that would attend and enter. *Department 56's* Roger Bain and Rhonda Ritchie would also attend with Rhonda writing an article for *The Quarterly*. This is perhaps the historical beginning of what are current-day village display contests at the annual NCC Gatherings.



Souvenir Pins from "96 Jubilee

In addition to the display competitions, the Jubilee offered village seminars conducted by some of the nation's leading village authorities, social events with other clubs from across America, and access to the Village Collector's Fellowship Hall. The OVCC hosted the 'Jubilee' Village and a buffet breakfast; they also provided a membership table with club information and newsletters near the display areas as well as operating and maintaining a hospitality area for use by all attendees. One could argue that this was the forerunner of the NCC Gathering 'hospitality rooms' that one experiences present day. Truly, through the vision of Matt's mother and the work of *Rathbone's Flair Flowers*, The OVCC was able to create a template for future Gatherings of the NCC...an important mark in the history of our village clubs throughout the nation.

The OVCC not only did their part in supporting the village life at the Jubilees, but they came home as winners. Mark Dickson won the village display contest in 1995 and Darrell Ingmire cleaned up as the winner in 1996. Mark was president in 1995 and



responsible for much of the club's supporting roles. Darrell became a fixture in the future successes of The OVCC with many offices held with his wife, Ellen, including president 2000-1, 2005, and 2013-15. On the Village Tour of Homes many times, he was also editor of the newsletter in 2003-4. His village display knowledge was evident with his many club demos and store displays at *Rathbone's*, *The Perfect Touch*, *Et Cetera House*, *Becky's*

*Hallmark and Becky's at the Farm*. He has been a continuing presence at NCC Gatherings to represent The OVCC in style.



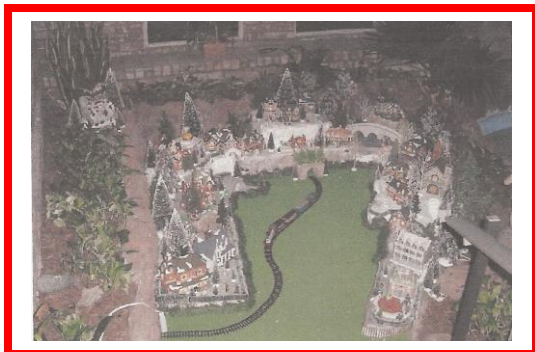
Charity has always been important to The OVCC. After the club was founded, they adopted the *Little Light House* as it was already an important charity for the Rathbones. Matt and Becky had heard testimony at their church from the *LLH* and the school's needs came to the forefront of their hearts. The OVCC readily joined in with donations at each year's end from the treasury. The *LLH* is a school formed to improve the quality of life for children with special needs. It provides tuition-free educational and therapeutic services to children with special needs, ages birth to six. *LLH* has been a part of Tulsa since 1972

and is a nationally recognized developmental center that receives money only from private sources, such as foundations and grants. The Rathbones also had a niece who was a recipient of services from *LLH*, making The OVCC's choice for charitable giving that much more special. Beginning in 1995 and for several years thereafter, The OVCC members constructed a village scene at Christmas that added to the children's joy. This greatly enhanced their festivities. Matt specifically remarked on the smiles on the faces of visitors as they viewed the beautiful display and the children joyously celebrating in wheelchairs decorated with angel wings.



In 1997, *Department 56* announced the company's donation of North Pole Series pieces to each Ronald McDonald House, with the beginning piece being an Original Snow Village building entitled "The House That Love Built." That year, members of The OVCC set up the Tulsa Ronald McDonald House as a Christmas charity gesture of good will and love. Members Mark Dickson and Bob Brun volunteered to assemble the village for several years until the pieces of the donated village began disappearing--a sad point and the reason for discontinuance.

However, with every down there is an up! In 2003, Ellen Ingmire's mother was a resident in the University Village Retirement Home and a member of The OVCC had an idea for a Christmas village display for the residents. What started out as a small village



on the floor working around an indoor fish pond grew into something larger and grander for the residents. Of course, with anything new, there is always resistance. One resident commented that she liked the Christmas tree that had been in the small display better 😊. Another chimed in that there should be a working train because there was no movement. Enter Karl Schmidt and his

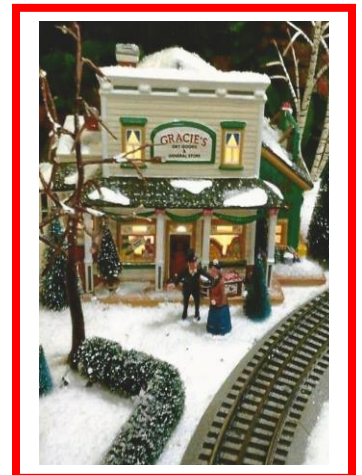
extensive knowledge of trains 🤔🤔. In 2005, Karl designed a track layout that ran through each 2 X 4-foot foam piece of landscape that the members created with their own personal touch. Under Karl's leadership, the club also built a layout 'table' to accommodate the many needs of wiring and electrical conduits! The floor was history. Today, the platform is 16 X 8 feet with a train traveling through many villages and home territories. The residents of University Village even get to start the train and work the whistle as it makes its rounds throughout. The outpouring of love for this charitable endeavor is received in such a warm, heartfelt manner that no one could ever see an end to this annual rite of Christmas giving.



A touching story that still resonates today involves the Original Snow Villages' Gracie's Dry Goods house. While setting up the display at University Village in 2005, Darrell Ingmire was talking with one resident, Gracie Boeger. Their conversation ensued because Darrell and his wife, Ellen, had just returned from a vacation in California that included a stop at the Boeger Winery in Placerville. Darrell was wearing a souvenir shirt from Boeger Winery. Gracie mentioned that she had a village

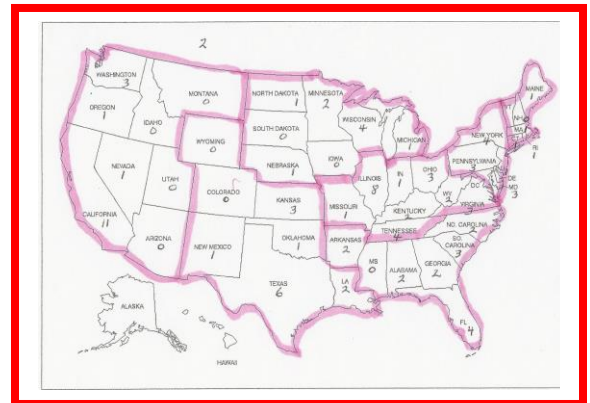


piece, the Gracie's Dry Goods building (get the connection?). Darrell told Gracie that if she would bring it to him, he would leave a space for it in his 2 x 4-foot section each year. Gracie followed through and to this day leaves her building at the reception desk each November when it is time for The OVCC to set up the Christmas village display. What a great example of the true meaning and spirit of Christmas!



David Van had kept close ties to the Minnesota presence in all collectible doings and proposed to Matt that the Oklahoma club should be a member. Thus, communication ensued such that when the NCC was “formulated” in 1992 and “formalized” in 1993 by charter, The OVCC joined immediately and remains today as one of the few clubs to have also been formed in 1992. David Van served as the then ‘state networker’ for Oklahoma, designated by the Southwestern Region representative, Betty Lombardi, who was President of the Cottage Collectors Club of Dallas/Ft. Worth.

In 1992, the NCC had begun with seven regions of the country. The OVCC was in the Southwest Region with Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Texas and Louisiana. One could speculate that the seven regions mirrored the Original Seven Buildings of the Dickens Village introduction in 1984. Today, The OVCC is in Region VIII of what are now the ten regions of the NCC. Their state partners are New Mexico, Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana.



It is important to also recognize the many retailers other than *Rathbone's* who provided support for The OVCC over the years, donating door prizes and an occasional place to have club meetings:

*Uniquely Susie's*  
*Etcetera House*  
*Becky's Hallmark*  
*Cohlma's*  
*Perfect Touch*  
*Expressions*  
*Another Point of View*

Unfortunately, the Tulsa area is without a retailer today that carries the *Department 56* village line, a long departure from when president Mary Trexler's newsletter of February 1995 listed 24 retailers in the Tulsa metro area and what villages each carried.

Membership has always been extremely active and has never been an issue for club continuance, unlike so many clubs around the country that have witnessed their own demise. Today, the active roll lists 28 memberships (mailing units) equating to 43 members (total people). When the club began in 1992, there were 33 members but quickly had over 100 memberships equaling nearly 200 people by November 1993. As David Van wrote at the October 17, 1993 meeting, “Our Charter Year Memberships have reached approximately 100 in total.” Those numbers topped out in 1995 at 105

memberships when the early infectious enthusiasm was misleading due to the newness of the club. More reasonable numbers were memberships reported in 1996 of 67, 1997 of 58, and of 35 in 1998. In 2002 there were 31 memberships and, as shown above, have maintained consistency since.

The OVCC has always had a communication link to the members and mailed newsletters from the beginning until the internet took over in 2007. At that time, email traffic provided information as official newsletters were not continued. In 2016, the newsletters were reinstated. The only official title of the newsletter was used by Sharon Fichtenberg while president during 1996-1998 and was simply called *Oklahoma Village Collector*. Originally in 1993, David Van had “planned to expand to at least four newsletters annually.” Although there has never been a set number to be published per year or when to be sent, the success of The OVCC has been due to the strength of communication (mailed, oral or electronic) from its many excellent board members. Communication is an unsung part of The OVCC’s continued success. From David Van’s first newsletter to today’s board communiques, The OVCC collectors receive current information, keeping them abreast of club events and national happenings. The OVCC board members have always recognized that communication is the cohesive agent to keep the club involved and flowing, especially with non-stop scheduling of events every month. Call it power of the press or just old-fashioned communication, but it has worked.

The OVCC has maintained its membership and interest over the years of declining retail support through its wide and varied programs throughout the year. Over the years, they have moved from meeting every other month to meeting monthly. In the early years, the club met in many stores and had six meetings each year. As retail numbers declined, The OVCC began more frequent meetings in private homes, eventually deciding to meet monthly. This allowed continuity and focus to maintain interest. Heavy emphasis was placed on village display demonstrations and education. One of the strengths of the club is its constancy of purpose, having meaningful events each month including a number that recur each year:

- ~Building the University Village Display in November
- ~Village Tour of Homes in December
- ~Taking down the University Village Display in January
- ~Halloween Party House in October with Costume Contest
- ~Summer Picnic with demonstration in June or July



Other monthly programs include:

- ~Pound Party (bids to bolster treasury)
- ~Container Contest (vignettes)
- ~Shop 'N Sell (first one on November 5, 1994 at *Rathbone's*) and silent auctions
- ~Various Road Trips to stores and other clubs (together we grow)
- ~Demonstrations and How-To sharing at members' homes (education)

Two of the highlights of the year are the Halloween Village Party and the Christmas Village Tour of Homes. These events culminate each year's efforts with anticipation and fun.

In 1998, Department 56 introduced the first of Snow Village Halloween buildings, the Haunted Mansion. Grimsley Manor followed in 1999 and the continuation of a new village being built moved forward from 2000 through present day. Prior to having Halloween buildings, The OVCC met for their own Halloween party in the 90's with current members fondly recalling yearly costume parties at places such as the Potters' home in Claremore in 1997, *Becky's Hallmark* in 1999, and at *Chimi's Restaurant* in 2000. A place was always selected to display the spooky stuff to create a goblin atmosphere, complete with costume contest and bat food to quench even the hunger of Count Dracula. Costumes continue through the present with prizes awarded. In 2010, the Halloween party took a village turn as the club went to the then new members' home of Dan and Cheral Crossland. Dan is such an avid fan of the decorations for the holiday that he produces incredibly creative displays throughout their house in addition to massive Halloween Village displays. Cheral comes alongside, adding wonderful touches through her skill with paints and adding all the little details that make the displays particularly eerie! The décor doesn't end with just villages as the home is always a haven for all things that fly on brooms and they have become the annual Halloween party house. Frightful indeed!

Following Halloween, the University Village display set-up in November prepares members for the capstone of each year: Christmas! Five homes usually volunteer for being on the Village Tour of Homes. What started in 1992 when The OVCC was formed has continued without interruption. Although early records show the home tours being in December, the club toured mostly in January after the hustle and bustle of each year was past. The tour returned to December around 2014 as members desired being right in the midst of



2007 Village Tour of Homes on the Trolley

the Christmas spirit and also allowed members to take displays down after New Year's Day. The tour is a sought-after opportunity for the members to show all their talents and what they have learned throughout the year. Food is of course available throughout the tour stops with some years having a dinner prior to the tour, at the last stop, or only a dessert. Either way, no one has ever gone hungry. The party culminates in a 'steal the present' gift exchange, ending the season on a joyous note. Ho! Ho! Ho! Twenty-five years and twenty-five tours!

One of the cornerstones of The OVCC is the untiring efforts of its volunteer boards. The leadership over the years has been a strength, with the following members giving tirelessly of themselves to serve as president:

1992, 1993	David Van
1994	Mary Trexler
1995	Mark Dickson
1996, 1997, 1998	Sharon Fichtenberg
1999	Pat Stephens
2000, 2001	Darrell Ingmire
2002	Clark Bumgarner & MaryAnn VanMeter
2003	MaryAnn VanMeter
2004	Clint McQueen
2005	Darrell Ingmire
2006, 2007	Craig Bills
2008, 2009	Linda Davis
2010, 2011, 2012	Lynda Horinek
2013, 2014, 2015	Darrell Ingmire
2016, 2017	Dan Crossland

The name Tulsee Town was a shortened pronunciation of Tallasi, meaning Old Town in the Creek language. How appropriate, as this club, The OVCC, is an 'old' club, originating with many other clubs in the NCC vision of Jack Skeels. As Tulsa and its surrounding towns are known as the Heart of Green Country for the beautiful landscape covered with lush green forests and wooded hills, dotted with lakes, connected by sparkling streams and winding rivers, so is The OVCC the Heart of the National Council of Clubs. All of this was made possible by the passion of numerous collectors making Christmas special for one and all, riding the vision and dreams of Matt Rathbone with a wonderful club that even Ben Franklin would have joined. ☺ Twenty-five years of fun and friendship paints the way for the next twenty-five. The OVCC's genesis and the club's key role in the *Rathbone's* Celebration Jubilee provided the opportunity for success and shaped how it would impact villaging in *Department 56* clubs for the next quarter century. That innovative spark was present then, and it continues today as it carries each member to new heights.

This is a story of 25 years of growth and celebration, of starts and change, of continuance and fellowship. As one member so aptly put it: “If we had no villages that dictated our meetings, we would still be together socially as this club and its members are true friends who get along well.” But, isn’t that what Villaging is all about? We have a unique passion that connects us. Perhaps the theme of this history is truly served by its members who “know how to keep Christmas well.” The OVCC could easily be renamed as The Oklahoma Village Collector’s FAMILY.



*The Oklahoma Village Collector’s Club attendees in Tempe, Arizona for the National Council of 56 Clubs Twenty-Fifth Anniversary celebration*