

Community



ED ARNOW
The Buzz

Locals lick their chops over refunds

IT'S TAX REFUND time, the time of year when many Americans get a windfall of money and give the economy a shot in the arm. People in the East Bay are no different. The money comes in, the money goes out.

"I'm waiting for my check of about \$10,000 from the feds," said Kathy Bellinghauser of Discovery Bay. "It's all going into a deck addition for our house. We already got the state refund. We're looking for the deck to be finished by Memorial Day in time for summer fun. This is the first time in 15 years that we've gotten a big refund."

William Sumner of Antioch put his refund into a down payment on a new Harley Davidson motorcycle. "I got a \$3,200 refund, and I came up with the additional \$15,000 for the bike. My 18-year-old son gets to use my old Harley, but he's going to have to earn it. I've been really wanting a new bike, so I figured it was better than putting the refund into a savings account."

Oakley's Rachelle Smith did put her \$7,500 refund right into a bank account. "But it's only temporary," she said. "It's going to end up being spent on home improvement and hopefully a trip to Hawaii."

Antioch's Jose Castro didn't say how much he got but it went into buying a house in Stockton. "I invested it in real estate. My kids are growing up, and I have to plan for their future. It's a nest egg for the fam-

Oakley man appraises music collections

NEIGHBORS

In our "Neighbors" series, we give you a personal look at the people who are serving your community. If you would like to nominate someone for this column, contact Tanya Rose at 925-779-7139 or e-mail trose@cctimes.com.

Name: Stephen Braitman

Occupation: Music Appraiser

Family: He has a wife and a 12-year-old son.

Residence: Oakley

Background: Braitman was born in the Los Angeles area but moved to San Francisco to attend UC Berkeley and San Francisco State University and stayed in the Bay Area. He has been into music his whole life — he has edited and written for well-known music publications, has overseen a small record label, has managed bands and has collected music in every form. When his wife decided to change careers and get into real estate appraisals, he started thinking about the appraiser societies, and how they're geared mostly toward antiques and property — how there was nothing for music.

"I looked around at this hobby of record collecting and realized there's really no standard for valuation of LPs, 45s, or even CDs or cassette tapes," he said, noting that collections can be quite valuable.

"So, I decided to start this business.

"Think about the first edition of a book — something by Hemingway or Shakespeare — and how those are such rarities. It's the same thing with records. Think of the first time The Beatles released something, or the first Rolling Stones albums or Nirvana. Those are something special because that's how the world first met this music.

"The first edition of the artifact is the attraction, and that's what record collecting is all about.

"The Beatles have sold millions of albums, but that first pressing in the first few weeks is most valuable. There are ways to tell, too, which edition it is. Maybe it's the way the cover is printed or it's the color or even the song-writing credits."

Braitman also deals with band buttons, fliers, posters or anything relating to music that might be valuable.



STEPHEN BRAITMAN, a record collector and music appraiser, is surrounded by some of the records he owns at his Oakley home. He has a collection of 28,000 items.

How many records do you have in your personal collection? "I have 28,000 items. It has taken years to catalog."

What's the biggest misconception about record collecting or about assessing value? "That the value of the

collection has to do with the quality of the music. I always tell clients when I appraise a collection that I'm not making a judgment on whether the music is good. People take their collections seriously; it's an emotional thing.

"And the other thing is that it changes over time. Something that is valuable today may not be so valuable in ten years. Late 1950s rockabilly was the highest-priced for a long time, but those people got what they wanted and the interest went down — in terms of purchasing. Right now the hottest field is soul records from the 1970s. Regional or obscure hits are selling for thousands of dollars."

What do you think of the digital revolution, this dependence on MP3s and iPods? "I have mixed feelings about it. There are good things and bad. On one hand, the digital revolution has destroyed the concept of what we consider an album or listening experience. Can you imagine not viewing the whole of Abbey Road as one album, but rather as individual songs?

"Songs aren't linked anymore, so a listener isn't conceiving of 12 songs as a whole experience. People are picking and choosing and making their own musical experiences.

"So, we're losing that sense of serendipity, the surprise of discovering new music. The digital age has allowed companies to target audiences; for example, if they know you listen to a hip-hop song, they'll target that and you'll never be served a country song through the marketing. You'll never discover Reggae by accident.

"Everyone is being very narrow-cast, and it's happening more dramatically with kids. They have their strict diet of whatever, and don't really listen outside their bandwidth.

"I for one miss the artifact — the record, the cassette. There's something important about having something to look at that makes you appreciate it more deeply. It's fun to go through the liner notes, et cetera."

How do people get in touch with you? "They can go to www.musicappraisals.com. All of my information is there."

— Tanya Rose