

The Advertiser-Gleam

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B.B. Hudspeth of Guntersville holds a trouser belt worn by James Arness as Matt Dillon on *Gunsmoke*. Other items pictured are Michael Landon's *Bonanza* boots and *Highway to Heaven* jacket, a jacket worn by Arthur Hunnicutt in the Oscar nominated *The Big Sky* and a cap worn by Victor Sen Yung as Hop Sing in *Bonanza*.



A holster made by late quick draw Arvo Ojala and a Colt .45 used by James Arness as Marshal Matt Dillon on the TV show *Gunsmoke* recently sold at auction for \$50,000.

'Gunsmoke' series gun sells big thanks to B.B.

By Mike Easterling

His favorite show was "*Bonanza*" and his hero growing up was Little Joe Cartwright, but collector and impressionist B.B. Hudspeth turned to another popular TV western to add a prize to his collection.

B.B., a 1987 graduate of Guntersville High School, helped re-document lost paperwork of a gun, holster and trouser belt used by actor James Arness while playing fictional Marshal Matt Dillon in "*Gunsmoke*", which ran for 20 seasons and was the longest running series on TV in the 20th century.

He didn't keep the gun and holster – they sold for \$50,000 earlier this year through High Noon Western Americana Auc-

tion – but he struck a deal to keep the trouser belt. The 3 items had been sitting in a vault since documents of authenticity had been lost since they were last auctioned in 2006. B.B. researched and located the individuals who provided the original documentation and had it re-established.

"I ACTUALLY had the opportunity to purchase the gun," he said. "However, one of the main reasons I collect is to share my items so that others can enjoy them when I travel to events. A gun can be quite a hassle passing through airports and buildings, so I chose the trouser belt to add to my collection."

The gun's big selling price led to a story in *True West Magazine*.

"To me, the final bid is a testament to how much James Arness is admired and respected, not only as an actor but as a

man," B.B. said. "He was truly a hero on screen and off."

Mr. Arness, who stood 6-foot-7 and served as a rifleman in the U.S. Army 3rd Infantry Division, was severely wounded in the right leg at the Battle of Anzio during WWII and was presented the Bronze Star and Purple Heart medals.

The injury at Anzio contributed to the noticeable limp with his Matt Dillon character. Mr. Arness died in 2011.

B.B. BEGAN collecting animation art originally. His first western collected item was a pair of boots worn by the late Michael Landon while he portrayed Little Joe.

"He was my hero when I was barely old enough to walk," B.B. said. "That got me into collecting western memorabilia."

B.B. also owns the leather jacket worn by Mr. Landon on the "*Highway to Heaven*" series.

Aside from collecting items, B.B. is an impressionist who is currently entertaining with his original character "Scrappy Higgins." He's an old-timer from the Old West who shares wisdom and humor about his life and encounters with fictional and real people.

B.B. started doing impressions as a student at Carlisle Park Middle School and wrote plays about his favorite TV characters and performed them at local nursing homes. He continued performing voices through high school and college and became a professional entertainer as both an impressionist and motivational speaker.

HE'S CURRENTLY concentrating only on "Scrappy."

"This is the only character I created," he said. "Going from a couple dozen characters a show to only one has been quite different but a fun experience."

B.B. has entertained for special events across the country and has been a presenter for official events celebrating "*Bonanza*." Appearances have included the 50th Anniversary Friendship Convention, the *Bonanza Round Up* and Lorne Greene's *Ponderosa* 50th Anniversary. Last month, he appeared via Skype at *Bonanza Round Up 2* in Carson City, NV., and has been invited to perform at next year's Lorne Greene's *Ponderosa II* in Mesa, AZ.

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