

AN INTERVIEW WITH MCKEEL HAGERTY COLLECTORS FOUNDATION FOUNDER

The idea for an organization whose only mission is to serve young people through the passion of collector car and classic boat enthusiasts originated with McKeel Hagerty. He envisioned the potential philanthropic power of Hagerty Plus, the world's largest collector car membership organization. To date, Hagerty Plus – an affiliate of Hagerty Insurance – has donated more than \$800,000 to the Collectors Foundation.

Now, a growing number of enthusiasts and industry leaders are stepping up to help drive the future of the hobby through educating and training young people about the artistic beauty, historical significance, and exciting technology of collector automobiles and classic boats.

Since January of 2005, the Collectors Foundation has been the production vehicle based on McKeel's early design. We catch up with McKeel to get his take on the Foundation's progress.

Q: What inspired you to found the Collectors Foundation?

A: Jay Leno. I met Jay at the Meguiar's Award ceremony about 10 years ago when he was recognized as the Collector Car Hobby's Person of the Year. The ceremony was held at the Blackhawk Museum. It was a big deal because all the big players in the

collector industry were there. And it was a big deal to be in the room with Jay. So Jay gets up there on stage, in this fabulous setting, and of course begins cracking a couple of jokes. But then he got really serious. He began talking about what's becoming kind of the dying arts of automotive restoration, and that we need to get

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invested in preserving some of these arts or they will disappear. Then he told the audience about the Fred Duesenberg Scholarship that he started at McPherson College.

His words really resonated with me. It goes back to that core idea of Jay Leno saying if we've gotten anything



out of this car hobby, then we need to support it. That's the kind of core idea behind the Collectors Foundation: If it's been good to us, how do we support it, knowing that it's a greater challenge for students and for young people to get into it on a professional basis?

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Q: The Foundation has now awarded more than \$1 million in support of programs that aim to spark or nurture an interest in the restoration arts and other hobby professions.

How has your vision for the Foundation changed since its inception?

A: The Foundation was really started to fund career development programs. Initially I was thinking more at the college level. Not just for the physical skills of restoring cars, but also for the business aspect. And almost half of the Collectors Foundation grants have gone to college programs in restoration. Now, the Foundation is also supporting high school vocational programs and educational programs for children at select automotive museums around the country. Once we got into it, I was shocked to learn how quickly vocational technical training at the high school level is going away, so we switched gears a bit.

Q: Do you think that the high school age is a pivotal point in discovering an interest in cars?

A: You start your interest in cars when you're a child. And it's just whether or not you have an opportunity to see it all the way through that is the real question. There are people, I'm convinced, and I hate to use the phrase, who almost have a car collecting gene. I'm sort of borrowing that idea from Barry Meguiar. It's not a huge percentage of the population, it's just some that are crazy about it and like it. So, yes, the high school age can be very important, and even earlier in some cases.

Q: What is your favorite success story from the Collectors Foundation?

A: I met a young man at McPherson College this past spring. He was one of our scholarship recipients. He and his parents had never heard about McPherson until his dad read about the school and the Collectors Foundation's work in one of our newsletters. He applied to the school, received a Collectors Foundation scholarship, was in his second year and was absolutely thrilled to be there and doing what he loved doing. We had just kind of set up this chain of events. And it's worth it. Whenever I dreamed of what the Foundation could do, it was along those lines.