



## Driving Home the Memories

### Iola Old Car Show Connects People to their Past

If you love old cars, the Iola Old Car Show, held the second weekend in July, is the place for you. Billed as the Midwest's greatest old car show and swap meet, this annual event—about to mark its 43rd year—showcases more than 2,200 collector cars of all kinds. The event also has a vast swap area where auto enthusiasts can search for classic car parts, as well as a 1,000-site car corral for people looking to buy or sell their old cars. It's a veritable paradise for vintage car lovers.

However, you don't have to be a car collector to love the Iola Old Car Show. In many ways, the cars themselves are secondary to what they represent.

"The show sells memories," said Larry Fechter, managing director of the Iola Old Car Show. "A lot of the people coming to this show don't have a car like these or can't afford one, but coming here allows them to fall back to a time of their life when they had one.

It connects them to the past, to their first car or maybe their first date. It reminds them of a wonderful time of their life, and that's really the catch."

Held this year July 9–11, the Iola Old Car Show typically attracts crowds of more than 120,000, a turnout that's even more impressive when you consider the village of Iola is populated by only about 1,300 residents. To put on a show of this magnitude, a team of roughly 3,000 volunteers is assembled from various service organizations and individuals in a five-county area. These people work together



in true cooperative spirit to make the show an annual success. All of the show's proceeds are distributed among the organizations that donate their time staffing the event.

"This show affects 138 different organizations in a five-county area," Fechter explained. "That's the important thing to remember. This show is not just beneficial to Iola, but to five counties, and the economic impact on those counties is unmeasurable."

Among the dedicated volunteer groups is Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative, which has lent the use of bucket trucks and digger trucks to help at the show over the years. In addition, CWEC employees have donated countless hours either individually or on behalf of the co-op.

Mark Forseth, CWEC's vice president of member services, has been volunteering at the Iola Old Car Show since he moved to this community in 1987. He's a member of the Iola Lions Club, the show's founding service organization, and he's been serving on the Iola Old Car Show's board of directors since 2011.

"It's truly, truly amazing how all the groups and organizations come together and volunteer their time and just pull this off and make the show as fantastic as it is," Forseth said.

As a board member, Forseth meets monthly with the other directors as well as the three full-time staff members of Iola Car Show Inc., a non-





profit corporation established for the betterment of area communities. The board and employees work yearlong to ensure the car show has broad appeal and that it keeps evolving with new attractions and themes.

This year's featured exhibit is Pace and Race, showcasing race cars. Among the highlights of the exhibit will be an appearance by Big Daddy Don Garlits, a race car driver and engineer known as the father of drag racing, and his Swamp Rat 12-A dragster. Also featured will be an exhibit devoted to the planned memorial project for racing legend Dick Trickle, who began his career in nearby Rudolph.

The youngest visitors will especially enjoy a display of replica characters from the animated movie "Cars," including Lightning McQueen and Tow Mater. These cars will be on display at the popular Teamed to Learn exhibit area, where special guests and auto experts lead interactive workshops and discussions about restoring old cars and other vintage auto topics.

*The Iola Old Car Show will be held July 9–11 at the Iola Old Car Show Grounds, 130 Jenson Drive, Iola. A three-day pass is \$18 and a daily pass is \$10; children 12 and under are free. Free spectator parking is available, with shuttle transportation between the parking lots, campground, and spectator gates. To learn more, visit [iolaoldcarshow.com](http://iolaoldcarshow.com) or call (715) 445-4000.*



*Each year in July, the community of Iola swells in size as more than 120,000 people converge on the Iola Old Car Show Grounds. This aerial view is of the 2014 Iola Old Car Show. (Photos on this page courtesy of the Iola Old Car Show).*

"This show has something for everybody," Forseth pointed out. "We've got collector cars, swap area, car corral, and hands-on exhibits for the old car enthusiasts. You won't leave hungry as there are plenty of food stands offering a variety of items, including a lobster fest on Saturday. For those that need a break from the show there's Art on the Track at the school, with shuttle service available."

The show has come a long way since the inaugural gathering in 1972, when event founder Chester Krause invited some car collectors to bring

their vintage vehicles to an Iola Lions Club Pork Roast fund-raiser, luring them with the promise of a pair of free tickets to the roast. As the story goes, that first effort resulted in a modest but well received car show of just 22 vehicles. Over the years the show got bigger and better, quickly outgrowing the original park site and moving to its current 300-acre grounds, complete with a 1,600-site campground.

Through all the changes, however, one important part of the show has remained the same—it's still about the memories—*Mary Erickson* ■

