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## America's Car Collection to open in Winnemucca

Contributed by .

A passion for classic cars brings a high-flying Winnemuccan home

By Erik Stabile

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Editors' note: A few weeks ago, NevadaTODAY and the Thomas and Mary Gallagher Foundation announced the funding of a scholarship competition to identify up and coming writers in Nevada's colleges and universities. Students were asked to submit a news article, feature story or op-ed piece for possible publication in NevadaTODAY. Those submissions selected for publication would then be entered in the competition to be judged by a panel of journalists selected by the Foundation. Seven scholarships of \$1000 each are being offered, one for each of Nevada's seven public institutions of higher learning.

The second such entry selected for publication is a news article by Erik Stabile. Erik is a 20-year-old student at the University of Nevada Reno studying print journalism who grew up in Winnemucca. Erik sums up his vision: "I have a strong belief that two feet of fresh powder in the Sierras is more important than two days at the office."

WINNEMUCCA, Nevada— The small town of Winnemucca will soon offer western trekkers a place to reflect on history among some of America's most attractive and amazing automobiles.

Ralph Whitworth and Dave Bengochea are longtime residents of Winnemucca, whose passion for cars began in their adolescent years of high school, a time when gas-guzzling V8s dominated the strips of small towns all across America. Their lifelong friendship evolved in Winnemucca's small desert community, located on the long stretch of Interstate 80, a river of asphalt that runs through northern Nevada connecting Utah with California.

"One of the things that has cemented our friendship all these years are the wonderful cars we enjoyed and now consider classics," said Bengochea. Today, Whitworth and Bengochea are working on a project that they hope will decorate Winnemucca with a beautiful collection of classic American cars. In 2007 they plan to open "America's Car Collection," a museum dedicated to the late automobiles of the American muscle era, along with the side project, "Flying A Garage," a working 6,656-square-foot garage named in the memory of Bengochea's late father Frank Bengochea.

Whitworth is funding the project and will also provide many of the cars from his own collection. According to locals, his passion for this project is strong and similarly evident in many chapters of Whitworth's "Cinderella Story" like life. His current resume includes titles such as a graduate of Georgetown Law School, Business Executive, and former staff member of U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee for Senator Paul Laxalt. But it all started here in Winnemucca, where Whitworth evolved from a young adult, to a successful business investor, to a man known for his humble character and

passion for cars.

Debbie Stone, the Executive Director for the Humboldt County Chamber of Commerce, believes the project will bring a substantial increase in tourism and business to Winnemucca. She expects to see a substantial increase in revenue among local business due to the trickle down effect of tourism. "People have already called about coming to see the museum, and it hasn't even been built yet."

According to Kim Petersen, Director of the Humboldt County Visitors Authority, the museum should also lead to more over-night visits, increasing profit among hotels, casinos, and supermarkets.

"The museum is popular among the whole community, old and young. Everyone in the community has been very excited about this," added Petersen. According to Bengochea, the museum will be unlike any other in the world. The museum is not only for the older crowds, but all ages of people who can appreciate the work and effort put into each classic car.

Bengochea awaits the opening of the museum with high hopes. "We know there are tens of thousands of folks just like us passing through Winnemucca every year. We are going to invite them to stop, stay awhile and enjoy our town along with some fond memories made possible by some truly incredible cars" said Bengochea.

The garage will be fully operational for the restoration of classic cars to be shown in the exhibits. Furthermore, it will be open to the public as a side exhibit, in order to give people a fist hand look at classic restoration. "It's understanding what it takes to make a classic car truly classic," commented Bengochea on the importance of this exhibit.

The collection will display a total of 160 cars, 85 of which will be shown on a rotating schedule. From drag racers to custom cars, to famous cars and local owned, the collection will display an array of one-of-a-kind road machines.