

After COVID break, 'Endless Yardsale' resumes, drawing thousands to US 301 corridor

BY MARTHA QUILLIN

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Take a tour along Hwy. 301 south, from Benson to Dunn, NC, to see some of the many vendors you can find during the 301 Endless Yard Sale Friday, June 18, 2021. Shoppers can travel on 301 through five different counties looking for deals. BY ETHAN HYMAN

BENSON

Shoppers and front-lawn entrepreneurs have brought back the [301 Endless Yardsale](#) after a year off for the pandemic, turning 100 miles of road into a highway of second-hand goods.

The two-day sale, along U.S. Highway 301 from Halifax County to Harnett County, relaunched Friday in hopes of bringing back the 15,000 shoppers who have come each year since it started in 2013. It runs until 5 p.m. Saturday, though some vendors may pack up a bit earlier or stay later.

“I guess I’ve come just about every year,” said Judy Murphrey, who was making a stop at South Johnston High School Friday afternoon where several dozen vendors had spread their wares. The Endless Yardsale is a combination of clusters of sellers — Johnston County has the most, organizers say — and single-family sellers who put a few folding tables in front of the house or lay them on a tarp or sheets on the ground.

The 301 Endless Yardsale is modeled on the six-state 127 Yard Sale, which runs from Alabama to Michigan in early August.

The 301 Yardsale brings shoppers to towns and communities in rural Eastern North Carolina connected by a corridor that was once busy with north-south travelers. Highway 301 was started in the 1930s and by the time it was finished in the 1950s, it was a major part of the New York-to-Florida artery. Near North Carolina towns such as Wilson, Rocky Mount, Smithfield, Fayetteville and Lumberton, it was dotted with small motels and motor courts where travelers could rest for the night.

Later, thru-traffic was siphoned off U.S. 301 onto Interstate 95, where access is controlled, there are no stop lights and speed limits are higher.

Friday, Murphrey hit some of the vendors set up around Smithfield, where she lives, then headed south along 301 toward Benson, stopping along the way. Like other shoppers, she was out to enjoy a sunny day, have some human interaction and maybe find a bargain or a treasure.

Murphrey said she always has an eye out for certain items.

“I like knick-knacks, stuff to collect dust,” she said. She collects decorative shoes and, though she doesn’t sew, loves thimbles.

She also likes original Fiestaware from the 1950s and recalled with a glimmer finding several full place-settings in yellow for \$25 at the endless Yardsale a few years ago.

“That’s the fun of it,” she said. “The hunt for treasure.”

The sale is a scavenger’s paradise. Some vendors have thousands of items, many of them still-new in the packages, like a booth at the flea market held at the N.C. State Fairgrounds most weekends in Raleigh. Others set out boxes of miscellaneous goods, and shoppers pick through the mixing bowls, rusted wrenches and broken garden gnomes in search of something they want or need.

Some offer hand-made jewelry, wooden furniture and children's toys. A few have spreads that look like they were pulled from an antiques store, with Depression Glass and Victorian rocking chairs. South of Benson, some sellers offered cars and trucks, and parts of cars and trucks, along with farm machinery, bicycles and restaurant supplies.

In Benson, Natalie Morgan set up a tent just around the corner from her brick-and-mortar shop, Morgan on Main, to offer items that didn't sell at the store throughout the year at regular or even marked-down prices. She laid them on tables and offered them for prices starting at \$1.

Morgan said that for her, the Endless Yardsale is also an opportunity to go "picking," shopping other people's sales for items she can put in her shop. Friday, she manned the tent while her husband went off on a pick.

John Branch of Greensboro set up to sell at South Johnston High. Branch, who buys and sells online and at events like the Endless Yardsale, said that during the pandemic, he lost some income from in-person sales because of cancellations throughout 2020, but his online sales increased by about the same amount.

Generally, he said, higher-priced items sell better online and lower-priced goods move faster in person.

Branch described his focus as "rusty repurposeable trinkets," items that may have exceeded the lifespan of their originally intended use, but with some creativity could find a whole new career as something else.

He had a basket of small concrete hemispheres he said he bought from a guy who had a lot of golf-related items. Branch thought the concrete bits might have been part of a rumble strip to stop golf carts, but he put them out with a collection of other random items offered for \$1 to \$2: a single roller skate, a bit of crocheted lace, a shoe form, a turned wooden table leg.

In person, he said, shoppers will pick up an item, turn it around and look at it from different angles to imagine what it was and what it could be made into.

“This kind of thing is hard to sell online,” Branch said. “Little concrete hemisphere.’ Nobody is entering that in a search field. But out here, they might pick up it and decide to use it in the garden.”



Vendors set up in a parking lot in Benson, N.C., Friday, June 18, 2021, part of the 301 Endless Yard Sale. The yearly yard sale has vendors setting up along the side of U.S. Hwy. 301 in five counties. ETHAN HYMAN
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