

If We Ain't Got It, It's Gonna Be Hard to Find!

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The Whoopee Bowl reopened in 2025 and recently celebrated its one-year anniversary on October 3. (Image: Whoopee Bowl Clarkston)

My grandfather's favorite pastime in the 1980s was to toss my brother and I into his pickup truck and tell our grandmother we were running errands. The Silverado would disappear into a labyrinth of dirt roads cruising past rundown golf courses, odd sculpture parks and miles of empty forests. The old man would smoke a carton of cigarettes along the way.

Although he had safely navigated the Solomon Islands during World War II, he would act like he had no idea where we were or where we were going. A ruse, of course, the kind of practical joke a grandfather plays on his young and naïve grandkids simply to shake up a Saturday afternoon during summer vacation.

Every trip ended the same way. The great forest would eventually disappear, and we would pop back into civilization in front of a large orange warehouse in Clarkston, MI, known as The Whoopee Bowl.

Yes, this was its official name.

During the 1980s, The Whoopee Bowl was a gigantic surplus store full of junk. It was a magical place where collectors and treasure hunters could spend hours rifling through boxes searching desperately for knickknacks, trinkets and doodads.

If a customer was searching for antique road signs, vintage board games, mechanical components, tools, military weapons, light fixtures, furniture or go-kart supplies—this was the place to be. Retro toys pinned to corkboards looked like they belonged in an insidious Toys R Us where every doll followed you as you walked down the dimly lit aisles, nightmare fuel for those with relentless imaginations.

My grandfather spent hours at the Whoopee Bowl, years before anything like *Antiques Roadshow* or *American Pickers* slipped into the pop culture vernacular. Upon arrival, he would give my brother and I \$10 each to spend in the store. You would not believe the bounty a kid could produce at a Walmart-sized flea market back in 1985 with \$10.

The shop would eventually become an iconic local landmark operating under the slogan, “If We Ain't Got It, It's Gonna Be Hard to Find.”

The memories of that giant, pumpkin-looking warehouse still make me smile when I think of the treasure I pulled from the shelves and storage bins. Comic books, miniature gears, pulleys, toy robots, a giant barrel of marbles, weird art; whatever you wanted was hidden somewhere in the superstore's dark, congested corners.

My appreciation for gears, bearings, pumps, electronics, motors, vintage computers, metal parts and old machinery—consistently featured in the background of most Terry Gilliam films—probably stems from aimlessly walking the Whooping Bowl aisles and imagining a beautiful mechanical world of junk-deco art, steam-powered machinery and never-ending ductwork.

The store would eventually shut down, and Michigan residents would refer to the old building as a “colossal eye sore, falling into a permanent state of disrepair. My brother and I, however, have wonderful memories of scavenging the building for anything mechanical, tangible, quirky yet modestly priced.

I was thrilled to hear residents had reopened the Whoopee Bowl site in October 2025 as a new destination for antique collectors and treasure hunters. After 17 sets of blueprints and four and a half years of construction, the Whoopee Bowl triumphantly returned to the area with a deeper shade of orange paint. It also features Rusty Relics Vintage Antiques, with more than 100 vendors across 16,000 square feet of space.

Though my kids are young adults at this point, I am looking forward to tossing them in the SUV, getting lost in the woods and finding out how far \$10 will go at the Whoopee Bowl in 2026—my guess is not very far at all.

