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Pickup trucks are a general contractor's best friend, so Daniel Coulter has two of them. One of them is a shiny, brand-new 2003 GMC.

And though Coulter has enough garage space to store four trucks, both of his sit outside his house.

Both garages in Coulter's Platteville home are filled with old pinball machines and jukeboxes. There might even be a couple of slot machines hidden in the back.

Every night, Coulter works on junk and turns it into something that could be the pride of a Las Vegas casino, an arcade or, at the very least, a really cool finished basement.

For 30 years, Coulter, 42, has rebuilt jukeboxes, pinball machines, slot machines and even old coin-operated video games. He prefers to work on pinball machines and loves to work on jukeboxes.

He's an interior renovator, so he's used to fixing things up. And for him, fixing things is not only a way to make a living, it's a way to have fun. Every night he's out in his garages.

"It gives me something to do, it's better than me watching TV, etc., etc.," Coulter said. "Really, the most fun is plugging it in and seeing that it works."

Coulter also loves the hunt. He loves tracking down old machines, although a lot of times people come to him. Even so, he'll buy old machines from operators or at auctions.

It's getting easier to find old machines. eBay, the Internet auction site, has dozens of refurbished machines for sale, including old



Platteville resident Daniel Coulter works on the inside of a rare 1937 Mills Empress, above. The 42-year-old general contractor has a house full of jukeboxes and pinball machines that he has restored or torn apart for restoration.

arcade favorites. In fact, many have combined two games into one machine. Ms. Pac-Man and Galaga, two all-time favorite arcade games, are a popular combination.

Retro arcade machines, including pinball, slots and jukeboxes, seem to be more popular

than ever as collectibles, yet it's getting harder to find parts, Coulter said. He mostly buys from a few parts distributors he knows.

Their increasing rarity has tilted up the cost of his projects. Coulter can get up to \$5,000 for a rare jukebox and up to \$1,600 for a pinball machine, yet he barely makes a profit. Most of the time he charges about \$1,000 for either machine.

"Sometimes, actually, what I put into the machine is a lot more than what it's worth," Coulter said.

What that profit pays for, he said, is more old machines to work on. It feeds his addiction. It pays for fun.

"I'm not trying to gouge people," he said. "I do this as a hobby. There are some people who think their machines are worth a million bucks."

Coulter bought his first jukebox when he was 12. He got it from one of his friends for \$25. It was in wretched condition.

"I tore it apart, and my parents thought, 'Well, that's the end of that,'" Coulter said. "To their amazement, I put it back together."

He got some help with the wiring from another friend that first time and learned on his own from there. He also took some vocational classes in junior high and high school.

He has a favorite pinball machine. A dozen favorites, actually. There's Big Top and High Speed.

"I just sold a High Speed, and now I kind of regret it," he said and sighed.

He also likes the new machines. There's a pinball Monopoly out, and he likes that one a lot.

He really can't wait in 10 years, then, when a battered, broken-down Monopoly pinball machine finds its way into his garage.

And he will have his garages still packed with old machines. It's an addiction, and it's not one he plans on fixing any time soon.

"I'll always be looking for the next machine to do," Coulter said.

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