



BLADE PHOTOS BY LISA DUTTON

Bennie Summers, owner of Summertyme Vintage Radio Repair, works at his shop in the Maumee Antique Mall. To see more photos, go to toledoblade.com.

The Beat Goes On

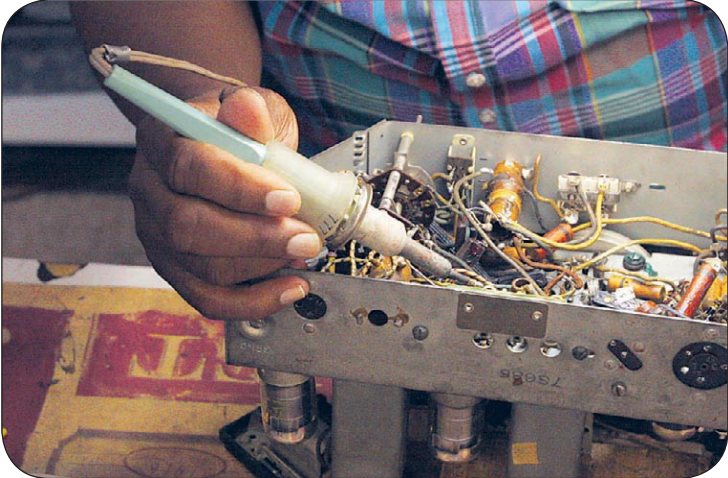
Shop restores tube radios



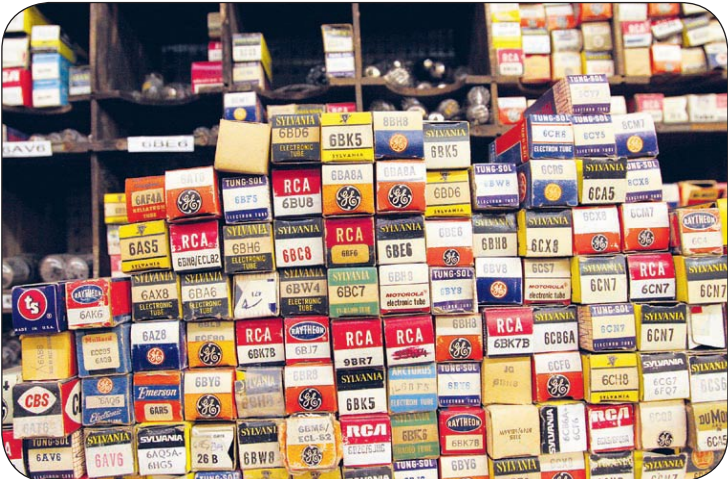
Mr. Summers uses a chart to check the numbers to dial into the old tube checker machine.



A box of old parts at Summertyme Vintage Radio Repair.



Mr. Summers repairs an old radio.



Stacks of replacement parts in their original boxes.

By KIRK BAIRD
BLADE STAFF WRITER

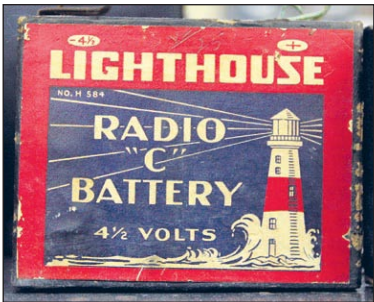
Bennie Summers is in rare company. The 59-year-old Perrysburg resident is one of only a handful of repairmen in the nation who still works on the long-extinct tube radio.

More than an odd hobby, it's a geeky passion Mr. Summers has pursued since 1976, after leaving the Air Force as a radar technician.

Along with his wife Olivia, he owns Summertyme Vintage Radio Repair in the Maumee Antique Mall, 1552 Reynolds Rd. in Maumee. The repair shop used to be in Grand Rapids, Ohio, but growing business necessitated the increase in space to house more boxes full of various tubes and radio parts, as well as a display of classic radios he has fixed and restored to former glory.

The shop's collection dates to the 1920s and 1930s — years before television, when large, well-crafted wooden AM radios masqueraded as living-room furniture and were the centerpieces of entertainment in homes — and up through the 1970s, as radios got smaller, housed in mass-produced beige plastic cases.

It was a sign of the times, as the



An old 'C' size radio battery.

era of the transistor radio began and vacuum tube radios disappeared, Mr. Summers said.

"[Manufacturers] wanted to make smaller and smaller radios. You can't have a giant vacuum tube in there and make something small," he said.

Portability won out over craftsmanship, but the convenience afforded by transistors wasn't without drawbacks.

Tubes have twice the life expectancy of power transmitters, Mr. Summers said. Meanwhile, young musicians are discovering the value of tube-based amplifiers over their transistor counterparts.

"The purists are starting to under-

stand that tube amplifiers, you run it all day and it cools down, but yet, the next day they turn it on and it comes right back and it has the same harmonics," Mr. Summers said. They are "reusing tube amplifiers because of the quality of sound."

The trouble is, electronic companies don't make tubes anymore for radios or amplifiers — let alone the parts needed to repair an 80-year-old radio. That's the challenge for Mr. Summers and what makes Summertyme Vintage Radio Repair more specialized than your typical repair shop, which can order replacement parts directly from a manufacturer.

Mr. Summers has amassed a collection of tubes over the years, still buys them online, and even has had people donate them to him.

"It's all about the availability of parts. Obviously when you're repairing a radio that's [from the] '20s, there's not a lot of those parts around," he said. "[And] if it can't be repaired I tell the customer it cannot be repaired, or the value of it exceeds what the radio is worth."

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A Hickok voltage meter.



Signs like this were once a familiar sight in radio repair shops.