

## Area pawnshops see increase in gold, silver sales

By Denise Ruttan

Statesman Journal  
October 11, 2008

Sales are brisk at pawn shops and secondhand stores in the area as the news from Wall Street continues to look grim and people reassess their budgets.

At Monte's Coins & More in Stayton, owner Monte Mensing said he knows the economy is down when business increases at his shop.

"This particular business thrives in a bad economy," Mensing said.

Shipments of gold and silver he ordered in August are only coming in now. Mensing's manager, who runs a shop in Lincoln City, also is out of gold and silver.

Lately, the gold bullion that is most available is Canadian Gold Maple Leaf bullion coins, and Krugerrand gold bullion coins from the South African mint.

"We sell bars and rounds as well. Right now we're investing by what's available," Mensing said. "You're going to pay a premium price for something specific."

On a recent morning Mensing rang up a \$25,000 transaction.

"That's in a small town. Think of what they do in a big city," Mensing said.

Mensing's shop also is a secondhand retail store that is licensed to buy from the public. The coin shop is his primary business, but he also sells and buys jewelry and other items of value. He does not buy TVs, stereos, iPods or electronics, or "things most commonly stolen by burglars," he said.

At American Gold and Coin in Keizer, owner Brian Stocker said he has been wiped out of gold and silver in the past few weeks. It takes eight to 10 weeks to get shipments in.

"I've been seeing a huge increase in people wanting to buy gold and silver as a hedge investment," Stocker said. "People are not really excited about cash in the bank or investing in the stock market."

Most popular are American Eagle gold coins, followed by Krugerrand gold bullion coins and Canadian Gold Maple Leaf bullion coins. Stocker sells silver rounds and silver bars as well.

Bullion coins are 22 karats, or 91.6 percent pure gold. Silver rounds are .999 pure silver, he said.

Prices can run \$30 to \$80 per ounce higher than the spot prices that are listed on the Internet, depending on the quantity being purchased.



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Steve Swearingin (left) helps appraise a silver bracelet at Monte's Coins & More in downtown Stayton as owner Monte Mensing talks with Stayton resident Dawn Tamburri.

Stocker said he is seeing people bring in more jewelry, items that might in better times have had too much sentimental value to sell.

"There's always a reason. Their son's in the hospital and they have to pay a medical bill," Stocker said.

It is also tough dealing in a volatile market, he said, where prices from national wholesalers change by the day.

"It's a very unstable market right now for precious metals. A lot of dealers are real jittery in dealing with bullion," Stocker said.

The retail side of his business has gone down, he said.

"People can't get loans. They're trying to get work where they can. It's a tough situation," Stocker said.

At The Pawnshop in Salem, owner Bruce Bertrand said it has been business as usual at his shop, regardless of the economy. The Pawnshop does not sell gold or silver, but does a lot of business in electronics and musical instruments.

"We're happy. We're doing business as usual. We haven't seen any stampede," Bertrand said.

Ken Bashford, the owner of Salem Coin & Stamp Shop, said he has seen an increase in scrap metal — recycled gold or silver — sales. He has had 20 phone calls per day and 15 to 20 people walk into his shop every day.

Gold and silver are off the shelf as soon as he receives an order.

"It takes four to five weeks. I used to get it in four to five days," Bashford said.

Kolt Coudare at Santiam Buyers, a secondhand dealer in Stayton, said business has increased at his shop. More people are selling, he said.

"People are definitely parting with stuff they can live without," Coudare said.

And they're selling for a reason.

"That seems to be the key phrase. They're selling to get gas in their car to get to work," Coudare said.

At Games Galore, a secondhand video game store in Stayton, owner Shannon Orr said business is down for him.

"On the flip side, everybody's been wanting to sell to us," Orr said. "When people need to put gas in their car or food on their table, the first thing that goes is entertainment."

At Timber Town Indoor Flea Market in Lyons, owner John Bach said even though he moved to the area two years ago to retire, he's been swamped.

"This thing is keeping me so busy that I haven't had time to do anything on the farm," Bach said.

At Deb's Attic, a secondhand clothing shop in Stayton, owner Deb Turner said people in the Stayton area are looking local first before paying for gas money to get to Salem.

"It opens your eyes to what's available around town and what you can utilize here instead of making that extra trip," Turner said.

Back at Monte's Coins & More, Mensing hears frustration and hopelessness from customers about anything from the bailout plan to the presidential election.

"In this shop, because I'm in small-town America, people have the general feeling that Wall Street executives are getting the golden balloon and it's not in the best interest of middle-class America," Mensing said.

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