

Dentist's collection became Buffalo hockey museum

BY DAVID BERTOLA

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Joseph Gambacorta is happy to share his memories. Like the one when he was 7 years old and his father took him to his first Buffalo Sabres game at Memorial Auditorium.

Funny thing, he doesn't mention who the Sabres played, who scored or how the game ended. Instead, he describes how he was on his hands and knees, scrounging for discarded ticket stubs.

It's said that one man's garbage is another man's treasure. And Gambacorta treated those stubs that fell to the floor like precious artifacts.

Now a dentist, he said he has been collecting memories ever since. The stubs represented the first entries into what would become the Buffalo Hockey Experience and Museum.

Some of his impressive collection is on display at HSBC Arena. In two 18-foot cases are jerseys, skates, photos and other artifacts in chronological order.

"The Sabres have been a huge asset and a great partner and have been very supportive of our efforts," Gambacorta said at the arena recently. "They provided this display at no cost to us."

In the case on the left is the oldest Sabres jersey ever. Fitted over a mannequin, it



Joseph Gambacorta worked with the Buffalo Sabres on displaying some of his Buffalo hockey memorabilia at HSBC Arena. He said he hopes to eventually open a museum to showcase all of it – a collection that began years ago as a pocketful of discarded ticket stubs.

looks like one worn in the 1970s, except the blue area from the neck to the shoulders is gold instead. Gambacorta said it was a prototype presented to the team before the

final version was decided upon in 1970.

The person he bought it from, he said, had kept it in a basement and presented it to him from a plastic bag.

"I paid \$600 for it, and I couldn't get the money out of my pocket fast enough," he said.

The museum has a board and is recognized as a chartered museum in New York state. The goal of it is preservation, he said.

Nothing is for sale. Eventually, he'd like to find a permanent space to house his entire collection, on which he estimates he's spent at least \$100,000.

Gambacorta also is looking to attract corporate sponsors to help move the project forward, which would pay homage to Buffalo hockey history that pre-dates the Sabres.

The rest of his collection is stored at his office on Harlem Road in Amherst, but it's not available for viewing. Among the items he collected over the years not at the arena are a wall from the gold section at the Aud, jackets, Buffalo Bisons jerseys and, yes, more ticket stubs.

Gambacorta's scrounging for them has resulted in a collection that totals nearly 2,000.

According to him, he has one from all but 23 Sabres pre-season, regular-season and playoff games. The only one from the 1970s that is missing is from the 1970-71 inaugural season. The rest are from the '80s and '90s, including 11 from the 1998-99 season when the Sabres advanced to the Stanley Cup Finals.