

Antique Touring Co. offers unique peek at history

By Jody McVeigh on June 22, 2022 (Grosse Pointe News)



Courtesy photo

Lisa Stolarski shares Detroit history by giving driving tours about town in Model A cars.

Though Lisa Stolarski wasn't awarded for the idea she presented during a business plan competition through Michigan Women Forward, she has been winning ever since.

After the competition, the Highland Park resident made her plan a reality by founding Antique Touring Company in 2018. The business allows guests to learn about historic sites while touring them from the seats of historic Model A cars. It also allows Stolarski to share one of her passions: history.

“I worked in an industrial setting years ago, then 15 years in cooperatives,” she said. “No matter what I do, I’m fascinated with the history behind it. ... When I moved to Detroit/Highland Park, the history I was uncovering was mindblowingly cool.”

Through Antique Touring, Stolarski and her team “bring people in from other places to have authentic experiences driving a car from a bygone era — an important era,” she said.

The business is headquartered at the former Ford Piquette Avenue Plant, 461 Piquette in Detroit — in the light industrial district known as Milwaukee Junction. According to her website, antiquetouring.com, “At the beginning of the 20th century, this annexed acreage where railroads join became the ‘cradle of the auto industry.’”

“Cadillac, Oldsmobile, Packard, all of the big three had major aspects of their companies started within two miles of Milwaukee Junction,” Stolarski said. “It’s what I’m passionate about — telling that story.”

Initially, Stolarski thought she’d give tours in Model Ts. She volunteered at the Piquette Museum to learn about them. However, after talking with the museum’s executive director and president, she went a different route.

“They said Model Ts were for tinkerers; I wanted to drive them daily,” she explained. “They said Model As were for drivers. It was excellent advice.”

It took Stolarski a couple of weeks before she felt confident driving a Model A. Touring in 2018 was a learning experience; 2019 was even better, she said, because “the cars broke down a lot less.”



“There are a quarter of a million Model As left in the world that are operational,” she said. “Aftermarket manufacturers are licensed by Ford to make parts so we can still get parts, which is not so for all the old cars.”

In 2020, along with so many other businesses, Antique Touring did not operate because tourism is not an essential service; however, business is picking up once again.

Antique Touring currently offers a trio of tours, with a fourth kicking off this week. Its “Signature Tour” takes patrons through historic Belle Isle Park. Its “MotorCities Tour,” sponsored by MotorCities National Heritage Area, includes connecting stories about Detroit’s automotive history.

“I was reading biographies and was able to piece together intersections between characters in the history of the automotive industry,” Stolarski said. “That’s the advantage to telling the stories I tell. Some people are Ford people, some are GM people, some Chrysler people, some Oldsmobile people. I am able to take these different stories and build a weaving of the story, thanks to the people who’ve written these biographies.”

Other tours include the oldest neighborhood in the city, Corktown and Michigan Central Station, and a tour focusing on prohibition. A fifth tour, planned to open this fall, will cover labor history.

Not only have the number of tours and tour guides grown, but the Antique Touring fleet of Model A cars also keeps growing.

“Jack” is a 1931 slant-windshield deluxe town sedan. “Jupiter,” a 1930 Phaeton, was won in an eBay auction. “Josephine,” a 1929 woody station wagon, also was won at auction from the estate of an Allen Park resident.

“It was a museum car, so we had to do a little work on it,” Stolarski said. “It can seat up to six people.”

Tours typically are offered June through the end of October, but Stolarski said she plans to leave her options open as fall turns into winter.



“It’s so much work shutting down for the season,” she said. “This year we’re leaving it so ... depending on the weather, we may do a tour here or there.”

Also this winter, she plans to convert a car into an electric vehicle.

Stolarski said she regularly receives positive feedback — from tour guests and non-guests alike.

“People love to hear the horn,” she said. “They wave when we go by. One woman on a tour

said she felt like she was in a one-car parade.”

One man, she added, summed up his feelings by remarking, “Everybody is happy when they see this car.”

“There’s something about old cars that bring us back,” Stolarski said. “It’s nostalgia for an America that existed only in our imaginations, an America a little more together than we are now. In some ways, it was never true, but in some ways I miss it anyway. I miss my grandfather’s view of America. Even though he was not right about everything, I miss his optimism.”

Antique Touring is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day but Monday.

“We are there even if there isn’t a tour on the weekend,” Stolarski said.



Tours can be booked throughout the day, but if the temperature is higher than 85 degrees, mid-afternoon tours are not offered.

“I would love to invite Grosse Pointers to come out and visit us,” Stolarski said, noting that Antique Touring also occasionally drives the cars for weddings, proms and other special occasions.

Members of the Ford Piquette Museum get a 20 percent discount. Discount packages also are available through Visit Detroit.

For more information or to book a tour, visit antiquetouring.com or call (313) 333-5833.