

Collector of war artifacts seeks to open military museum

By Lisa Horvuzi

Special staff writer

A weary U.S. soldier and his regiment climbed an Austrian hillside to Adolf Hitler's mountain retreat in 1945, shortly after Germany surrendered. Jubilant that World War II had ended, the soldier picked up the dead dictator's silver tea set as a memento.

Now Chicago-based collector Jim Dryden, 47, owns the tea set. The retail consultant, who never served in the mili-

tary, has more than a thousand such artifacts from the war and has scoured the country looking for more.

He will stage a "you-got-it-we'll-buy-it" show Friday and Saturday at the Country Hospitality Inn, at U.S. 31 and James Street.

He hopes to open a museum in Arlington Heights, Ill., called the Midwest Military Museum.

"Most young people don't know what was involved on both sides of the war," said

Dryden, who was in diapers when World War II ended. "Many are not aware of the consequences of us winning the war."

He began collecting war items more than 20 years ago, after an uncle brought him a samurai sword from a military tour in the Pacific. The boy, then 14, treated the finely crafted weapon as a museum piece and stored it in a corner.

"I didn't play with it," Dryden said. "Even back then I knew it was much more than a toy."

He came to appreciate the artistry in German and Japanese swords, daggers and medals, he said. When he grew up, he placed advertisements in newspapers offering to buy war mementos in cities he visited on business.

Behind each piece of history is a personal drama, he said, which sometimes is capitalized when the owner sells it.

"Some people are very emotional when they donate their items," Dryden said, recalling tearful partings with war sou-

venirs. "It's what they've gone through during the war. ... Soldiers witnessed their comrades get killed and remember what they went through themselves."

His ads trumpeted an urgent need for Japanese and German weapons from World War II, and proclaim that he is willing to pay \$25 to \$5,000 for swords, daggers, medals. He has paid up to \$10,000 for a sword.

He also is interested in buying uniforms, hats, helmets,

rare flags, beer steins and documents.

Just don't ask how he pays for it all.

"People don't ask where Donald Trump gets the money to pay for things," he said. "I'm not financed by a group. I pay for this on my own."

Interested sellers can write to him at the Midwest Military Museum, Box 398, Lake Zurich, Ill. 60040, a post office box he has established until his collection is moved into the museum. Sellers may also contact him at (708) 438-4501.