

The Norton Shows, now in their 21st year of operation, take place in the “gold market” of the south. Gatlinburg Apparel and Jewelry Market LLC and Norton’s Gift and Variety Show LLC run concurrently four times annually, March, June, September and November at the Sevierville Events Center at Bridgemont, Sevierville, Tennessee, encompassing Sevierville, Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg.

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Q: What’s special for Norton Shows in 2008?

A: When we started in 1987, our first show was held at the old Mills Auditorium in Gatlinburg. Two years later, we moved to the new Gatlinburg Convention Center, adjacent to Mills. (The Norton Shows were the very first event in the Center. Tom was mayor and on Board of Directors for building Gatlinburg Convention Center. As a matter of fact, Tom, as mayor, traveled to cities all across the United States, looking at various centers, in an attempt to best design the GCC.) We conducted all our shows at the Gatlinburg Convention Center for about 17 years, growing to the extent that we, in addition, leased the Mills Auditorium in 2003, filling it up also. The city of Gatlinburg closed Mills Auditorium immediately after our 2003 show and began reconstruction on the presents Mills Convention Center, so we could not utilize the space again until 2006. In 2006, September and November, we again booked and filled the entire Gatlinburg Convention Center and the Mills Convention Center, engendering booths in two buildings on two floors. The extra space was great even though some exhibitors complained about everyone not being together. However, the limited two truck bays and traffic problems caused by our move-in (only one day in November to set-up and move in hundreds of booths was disastrous. We and our exhibitors were exhausted and the difficulty of the move-in cost us a lot of exhibitors. They had the option to attend The Norton Shows. We did not have the option of a smooth move-in and were, in essence, trapped. We had no recourse. We had long since outgrown the Gatlinburg Convention Center. We bided our time. In 2006, Sevierville began building the Sevierville Events Center at Bridgemont to open in October 2007, 10 truck bays, ample parking, two day move-in, all heavenly. We immediately moved our shows to the Sevierville Events Center at Bridgemont for November 2007, March 2008, etc. and look forward to continuing there for many years. We are thrilled with the new center, all our exhibitors on one floor in one building, our expansion and growth, our reception, the ease of a two day move-in with lots of entrances and exits and the fact that our exhibitors and buyers love the new convenience. We look forward to expanding our present location (an additional tent space for 200 booths is connected to center) in the next few years as The Norton Shows intersect the north and south, east and west and are the best positioned wholesale market in the United States for growth and viability.

Q: Who is the typical buyer?

A: Buyers come from 25-27 different states each year, since Tennessee is only a day’s drive for half of America’s population. While a few chains and department stores do participate, our attendees generally hail from the smaller, independent stores so prevalent in the South. This is also an especially tourist-oriented area, and those shops tend to be independent as well.

Another factor to consider: Presently, the United States are experiencing economical difficulties. Tennessee and surrounding states which deal heavily in tourism do not feel the pinch as much. People always vacation, people always travel. The percentage of visitors to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was up in attendance in 2007. And, among the 8 – 12 million tourists who frequent the park are many, many storeowners who attend The Norton Shows, conduct their business and their buying while their families vacation, and, the storeowners also get a few days of R&R, as TNS lie in such close proximity to the Smokies.

Q: What makes your shows worth the trip?

A: These are markets for one-stop shopping. At The Norton Shows, buyers will find a wide variety of gifts, jewelry and apparel under one roof. Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge and Sevierville, three sister cities who know how to host visitors, provide the perfect venue for mixing business with pleasure. We urge our attendees to take a few steps away from the buildings and the sidewalks to explore the surrounding mountains. Many buyers turn this market into a getaway for their families. We offer discounted hotel suites at rates as low as \$35.00 and as elevated as 5-Star and luxury accommodations, so storeowners may they leave their spouses and children to swim in the hotel pool and explore the town while they stock their stores.

The fact that we're Cash & Carry is important as well. Many businesses in this economy don't have money for large future orders, so they prefer to buy in smaller quantities more often. Buyers can get fresh merchandise from our shows four times a year. But, times change. Cash-and-Carry is our main thrust but, now, orders only, we believe, is becoming important again to some stores. Accordingly, The Norton Shows will set up an "Orders Only" section, beginning June 2008. The Norton Shows' business is wholesale, regardlessly, so we let the buyers decide how they want to conduct business.

Q: What tips do you have for buyers?

A: Don't buy the first thing you see – try to browse the market for at least an hour and half before making any purchases. Make friends with the exhibitors, because that's how you're going to do good business. Most importantly, don't be afraid to ask exhibitors questions about their merchandise. We see some buyers intimidated by how a booth is decorated or by products they don't know much about. We encourage them just to jump right in and talk to exhibitors.

Q: How are exhibits organized?

A: The beauty of our market is that jewelry, gift and apparel booths are interspersed to create a good flow. We like to keep our merchandise somewhat mixed so attendees don't get tired of buying the same thing over and over, and so they can see how an apparel item they purchased at one booth works well with the jewelry in the next booth. This keeps the buyer stimulated and excited for their next purchase. Our exhibitors, storeowners and buyers know they are welcome at The Norton Shows. They feel they are part of our family, the family of The Norton Shows. And, that's priceless.