

Ford retiree fulfills a long-time dream -- a 1954 Corvette

By Larry Edsall / Special to The Detroit News July 12, 2011 (reprinted by permission)

CANTON, Mich. -- Thomas Gamache remembers the day in 1953 when his father, a chauffeur at General Motors, came back to Michigan with a bunch of brochures after attending the Motorama auto show extravaganza in New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

"I was 12 years old," Gamache said here last weekend at the record-setting seventh annual Corvettes at the Summit gathering around the

shores of the pond in Heritage Park.

"I saw that car," Gamache still says the word "car" with a reverent air. "It was so beautiful.

"Someday," I said, "I'll own one."

That car was the original Chevrolet Corvette, which was shown to the public for the first time at the Motorama show and was so popularly received in New York and at other cities the show visited that GM quickly put its sports car into production, the first of the fiberglass-bodied two-seaters rolling off an assembly line in Flint on June 30.

Thomas Gamache also pursued a career in Detroit's auto industry, working first at Detroit Diesel and then retiring after 30 years at Ford.

But Gamache never lost his desire for that first Corvette roadster, and when he retired in May of 1999, he finally found one and bought it "as my retirement present to myself."

Gamache's car is a 1954 Corvette which, he notes, was built March 2, 1954, and was the 826 Corvette built to that date; after the first 300 were crafted in Flint, production shifted in 1954 to an assembly plant in St. Louis, Mo.



Thomas Gamache of Canton is the fifth owner of this 1954 Corvette, the 526th built that model year and only the 826th overall.



The license plate on this red roadster lets everyone know that Patrick Lickfeldt's Corvette is a 19 SIXTY 2.

Gamache is the fifth owner of his car. It originally was sold to someone in Dearborn, then went to two different owners in Jackson, then to Ann Arbor, and now to Gamache's home in Canton.

Sometime before Gamache got the car, it had been involved in a fire and its hood was replaced. Otherwise, its nearly all original, he said, though the front fenders were repainted after the fire and at some point the interior was redone, though not only in the proper original-equipment color but even with the right stitching.

The car also still has its factory signal-seeking AM radio, which Gamache says he worked long and hard to get back into signal-seeking and working condition.

While many car collectors have a variety of classic vehicles in their garages, often several Corvettes, Gamache has only his cherished '54 and the car he drives on a daily basis.

"It's the only Corvette I ever wanted," he said, and he was willing to wait decades to get it.

By the way, Gamache isn't the only one who appreciates his very early and classic Corvette. Not only did it draw a lot of attention at the Corvettes at the Summit show, but Gamache said his former Ford co-workers love it when he drives the white roadster to retiree reunions.

Gamache's was one of more than 150 Corvettes displayed at Corvettes at the Summit this year. The show is staged by the Corvette Legends, a relatively new -- eight years old -- and small -- only 52 members -- car club. The field of 150 fiberglass sports cars (and one matching fiberglass trailer) parked on the grassy hills around the Heritage Park pond represented nearly a 40-percent increase over the previous record turnout.

This year the increasingly popular event raised money for the Detroit Area Diaper Bank and drew individual cars and entire Corvette clubs from as far away as Flint, Battle Creek and Ontario.



Anglers at the pond in Heritage Park hope that Juan and Lisa Bradford's bright-yellow 1971 Corvette will attract fish to the shoreline.



More than 150 Corvettes -- from 1954 through 2011 -- were displayed around the pond in Canton's Heritage Park.

From The Detroit News: <http://apps.detnews.com/apps/joyrides/index.php#ixzz1SSVbPGkB>

Patrick Lickfelt attended the "Corvettes at the Summit" show at Heritage Park in Canton on July 9. A photo of his 1962 Corvette was selected to accompany the article written by Larry Edsall. This article was published in the July 12th edition of The Detroit News. We have received permission from the author and from The Detroit News to reprint the article in our club newsletter.