

# LEGENDS OF THE JAR!

## Dick Bere – Collector Extraordinaire

By Bruce W. Schank

*[Editor's Note: This article is a result of long-time collector and author, Bruce W. Schank, reaching out to long-time collector, Dick Bere.]*

There comes a time in everyone's life when they actually get a chance to meet someone who is really rather special. Actually in my humble opinion, this person is extraordinary to say the least. I haven't known Dick for very long but after spending the entire day with him, seeing his fabulous collection and hearing from others about his life and personal passions, I agree that he is somewhat remarkable. And mind you, it is not because he is a former president of Kroger Company, the largest food retailer in the country bar none. It is because he unselfishly gives of his money, time and energy to benefit the least of those in Cincinnati.

Incredibly, instead of sitting on his laurels and living the good life, Dick has spent the major portion of the last decade driving to downtown Cincinnati to a place he helped get started – "Crayons to Computers" (C2C) – a non-profit organization that benefits poor inner city children and teachers who do everything within their power to educate those same children. C2C was the original model for a nationwide network of Teacher Free Stores that have one simple mission: "To serve the educational and imaginative



**Dick Bere**

needs of children in the Greater Cincinnati area by providing a unique means to transfer donated, value purchased product, and created product from businesses and individuals free to teachers for use in their classrooms and schools". Since it was founded in 1997, C2C has given away more than \$80 million in free school supplies. The only thing asked of the teachers is that they or their students write thank-you notes to the donors.

Take my word for it when I tell you that Dick has a tremendous fruit jar collection among other fabulous collectibles that, simply put, would turn any collector's head. Just looking at all of the wonderful jars as well as the other collectibles he has amassed and how he has displayed everything, you can immediately tell he has an incredible passion for many different hobbies, notably fruit jars. Yet, he also has a deep burning inner passion to help poor



**Another look inside C2C.**



**Phil Smith, notable jar collector and recent donor to C2C, is shown inside the store (in rear).**



**Adjacent warehouse full of donated materials.**

inner city children have the opportunity to get properly educated, and thus have every chance to be as successful as humanly possible. Let's face it, it's a daunting challenge to say the least, but a very noble one indeed. I will also freely admit right here and now, my sheer inadequacy in terms of what this man has done for others and my lack thereof.

Crayons to Computers is fortunate to have several hundred "family" volunteers who come in at least once a week to stock the store, sort product, help teachers shop in the afternoons and do whatever other tasks that may be needed. C2C has a small staff and relies on volunteers to do most of the work. It gets no government funding. For more complete information on C2C, visit the Website at [www.Crayons2Computers.org](http://www.Crayons2Computers.org)

Dick has managed to use his former business and professional contacts to get companies to donate product, equipment and financial help to this worthy cause. He states that he has become good at begging. He also has worked very hard in the warehouse and store setting up racking, shelving, unloading trucks, stocking the store and cataloging what has been donated by various donors. For some reason, you might think you are in a Kroger store without perishables. His guidelines to the many volunteers are that when they get done restocking the store, it should be in grand opening condition.

**W**hen I arrived at Dick's home, the first thing I saw at the front entrance was a very nice hand painted sign with fruit jars on it given to him by a friend. This time I brought my better half with me so she could get a bird's eye view of what I see and do when getting these stories. To say she was impressed with Dick and his collections is an understatement to say the least. Dick took a real liking to my wife, Glenna Mae (who wouldn't?). At one point, while she was looking at a coffee table book, Dick decided to give it to her as a gift. Dick's generosity knows no bounds.

Dick was born north of Dayton, Ohio in a little town with a population of just over 300 people at the time of his birth. He's not at all sure whether he was born in a hospital or in the farm house. His mother was a school teacher and didn't get hired until the war broke out because a married teacher couldn't be hired back then. He went to Olive Branch High



School and graduated from Ohio State University. While working on his doctorate, Dick was approached about an opportunity at Kroger by his advisor who had spent six weeks with a summer fellowship. Dick wanting to change from the academic field to the business field, and

having already done some research work for Kroger, asked his advisor to call some of his Kroger people and tell them he knew



**Fabulous was sealer wall display.**

of a bright young fellow in Columbus who they should hire.

So he interviewed believing he did fairly well on the test. He was called back numerous times and finally someone from the general office in Cincinnati interviewed him. Then he interviewed with the top people from the general office and they finally offered him a job. After starting work he asked the assistant personnel manager what took them so long to hire him and he said, "We didn't know what to do with a guy with a Ph.D. degree and wondered why he would want to work for Kroger."

It was while Dick was already working at Kroger that he received his degree. Incredibly, he started out as a carry out-boy in a store in Columbus, Ohio with a Ph.D. While working one day in the produce department, a fellow he graduated with came by while Dick was standing near a food rack with his dirty apron on. All that guy could do while turning his head numerous times in Dick's direction was shake it as he moved on. Dick had a great career with Kroger and doesn't regret one moment spent with them.

Dick's meteoric rise in Kroger to the top spot as president was not overnight by any means. He was transferred a lot to different locations and each transfer was to a better position. He also claims he had some guardian angels in the front office looking out for him. Dick told me besides the lack of candidates at the time, and the fact he was qualified for the position while running a southern division for Kroger, that he really wanted to retire. He was called into the front office in Cincinnati and met with the CEO at the time and asked not to retire yet. A few weeks later he received an offer to come to Cincinnati as a regional VP and then a few years later he was promoted to president.

**D**ick first became interested in fruit jars while on a sales trip. He went into an antique store in which there was a Hoosier cabinet. On top of it was a queen jar and he bought it. Dick claims he paid way too much for it, but that was the trigger that got him started on the endless merry-go-round we call fruit jar collecting. So in the beginning, Dick collected everything and anything as most new collectors do. He eventually limited it to quarts and now buys only good quarts that he finds and that he doesn't already have and is a good example. He has sold off all of his cheaper jars, although he does not like to use the term "cheaper" because all jars have value and are basically important to the hobby. He stills has many full sets of half gallons, quarts and pints that he really likes and decided they should stay put.



**Fantastic colored and rare fruit jars.**

Dick claims no favorite jar *per se* but he says he does especially enjoy both of his cobalt Canton jars, the domestic and the electric. As I walked around Dick's home, I was astonished at not only how many jars he had but the overall quality in his collection. I found it quite fascinating how he displayed many of his jars using different nooks and crannies around the home and how efficiently and ingeniously he used all available wall space that could be had.

Although a Ball collector, I was unaware that Dick had been honored by the Kroger Company who commissioned Ball Corporation to make two clear quart jars depicting his history with Kroger plus Dazell/Viking to make an amber pint with his caricature and name on it. Dick's image also graces both Ball jars. I was astonished to see he had the two molds used by Ball



**Dick's two Ball-made commemorative jars.**



**Jar display tucked into stairwell.**

Corporations on display. According to Dick, two jars were made because they couldn't fit everything about him on one jar alone. Dick had some famous expressions he used (such as dumb S#%\*) for some of his associates when they did something dumb. So, on one quart is DS which is short for that terminology, which Dick said was used on him as much as he used it.

Also, while at Kroger, Dick was against double coupons although they were spread out across the company. On one of the jars is a coupon with an X through it, representing Dick's displeasure with them. At least half of Dick's thirty-eight years with Kroger were spent in the fruit and vegetable area.

For some reason, I had thought that Ball Corporation only made these commemorative jars for their employees, but there were these two jars with the molds for everyone to see and a testimony to Dick's character as a very special person indeed. This also tells me that he is without a doubt an uncommon person for sure. My personal take is that Dick is a very humble, low key, incredibly intelligent man whose very presence has made a huge difference wherever he has been. I'm grateful I was able to get his story and see his wonderful collection of jars and other fantastic memorabilia.

Dick has enjoyed collecting fruit jars for more than 40 years, continually upgrading his way to what his collection is today. He claims he knows he pays too much for the rarer jars but figures he is just a caretaker for these jars until he dies. Dick considers some people in the hobby as his best friends and never has gone to a show where he has not learned more about different jars and the hobby. Every jar is different and that is what makes it fun, he told me. He especially misses Norm Barnett and Jim Chamberlin, who he bought many jars from over the years.



Dick Bere with miniature Kroger truck.



Rare one-of-a-kind Ball Corporation molds for two Dick Bere commemorative jars.



Rare colored Ball Mason and rare South Jersey Pogue jars.



Fabulous antique desk with angels collected by Dick's wife, Betty Jo.



Nice jar sets of half-gallon, quart and pints.



Very nice Lightning fruit jars.