

Business



DELAWARE COUNTY GASOLINE
 as of Sept. 16
 average price per gallon
\$ 1.87

Station	Location	Regular unleaded
Aston Exxon	236 Pennell Road	\$1.89
Aldan Exxon Getty	600 Oak Ave. Providence Road and Oak Ave.	\$1.87 \$1.87
Chadds Ford Sunoco	Rts. 1 & 100	\$1.89
Chester Sunoco	2200 Edgmont Ave.	\$1.91
Clifton Heights/Springfield Gulf	Baltimore Pike & Bishop Ave.	\$1.85
Wawa	Baltimore Pike & Bishop Ave.	\$1.85
Coastal	555 E. Baltimore Pike.	\$1.86
Collingdale BP/Amoco	Oak Ave. and MacDade Blvd.	\$1.89
Darby Borough Coastal	Full Serve Only MacDade Blvd.	\$1.89
Drexel Hill Coastal	519 Burmont Road	\$1.86
Edgmont Sunoco	Rt. 3 & Providence Road	\$1.89
Glenolden Exxon	Chester Pike & Oak Lane	\$1.84
Hayertown Gulf	2400 W. Darby Road	\$1.86
Marcus Hook Exxon	450 Market St.	\$1.89
Morton Sunoco	Full Serve Only 753 Kedron Ave.	\$1.92
Newtown Square Mobil	3592 West Chester Pike	\$1.92
Norwood Sunoco Coastal	560 Chester Pike 532 Chester Pike	\$1.87 \$1.83
Prospect Park Exxon	759 Chester Pike	\$1.85
Texaco	Chester Pike & Lincoln Ave.	\$1.86
BP/Amoco	Chester Pike & Lincoln Ave.	\$1.89
Springfield Cligo	217 Baltimore Pike	\$1.96
Mobil	702 Baltimore Pike	\$1.87
Shell	400 Baltimore Pike	\$1.89
Exxon	801 Baltimore Pike	\$1.89
Sunoco	198 Saxer Avenue	\$1.88
Swarthmore Gulf	523 Chester Road	\$1.87
Upper Darby Getty	5336 Springfield Road	\$1.86
Texaco	5352 Springfield Road	\$1.87
Sunoco	5340 Springfield Road	\$1.91
Wayne Sunoco	302 E. Lancaster Ave.	\$1.89

Average regional prices	
National	\$1.85
Pennsylvania (Philadelphia region)	\$1.89
New Jersey (South)	\$1.73
Delaware	\$1.85

Times graphic

Auction Web site quickly becoming a retail career

By JUDY THOMAS
 Special to the Times

If someone said you could quit your job, work from home, make your own hours and earn more money, would you believe them?

Steve Kassab of Media said he has been able to do all of the above since he started selling on the Internet retail site eBay six years ago.

And he's not alone. "Close to a half million (Americans) are making their primary living selling on eBay," said eBay spokesman Hani Durzy, and the "vast majority are individuals or small businesses. Small business is the driver of the U.S. economy, and eBay is one of the drivers of small businesses in this country."

Skeptical? So was Kassab when a "computer-savvy" employee approached him about listing a few items from Antique Exchange, his Media shop on 23 W. State St., on eBay. But he quickly came around.

"We sold pieces I hadn't been able to sell in 10 years in Media," he said, "for more money than I was asking, which was pretty much the way I got hooked."

A self-described hunt and peck tylist, Kassab said he hired a previous employee, Sara Williamson, as a technical assistant because he doesn't know anything about computers. He does have a background in antiques, jewelry and furniture sales, but he swears that's not a prerequisite for success.

According to Kassab, all a seller needs is a camera and a computer to transfer photos to the Internet, and they can be on their way to eBay.

With these two items in hand, and following five months of selling, he had achieved power-seller status, and was making enough money for his wife, Mary, to end her 20-year stint as a senior executive at Macy's.

Shortly thereafter, Kassab was able to phase out his store. Although he eliminated the cost of rent, Kassab said his eBay selling fees are about twice what he paid to maintain his store. But, because of "unbelievable turnover" on eBay, he emphasized he is clearing 15 percent to 20 percent more money than he was making at his Media location.

Unlike the retail market, where an owner is "subject to limited traffic," he explained that through eBay your exposure is endless. Today, his weekly sell-through rate is 60 percent to 70 percent, and he ships 150 packages out a week.

While Kassab is making his own hours, and can freely attend to his teens' and preteen's needs, he admits he invests more time in selling on eBay than he did as owner of a jewelry and antiques store.

"It allows you more freedom," he continued, "but it's twice as much work."

A Montgomery County powerseller agrees. Since she retired from her corporate position, eBay has been her pri-



Times staff / ERIC HARTLINE

Steve Kassab sits inside his Media home with a few of the items he is currently auctioning off on eBay.com.

mary source of income. "You're working harder for the same amount of money," said the woman, who did not want to be identified.

The Kassabs are familiar with this concept. A couple truly immersed in their trade, they work around the clock out of a home office that is equipped with a corner for mailing treasures out to buyers. On one recent day, it was littered with merchandise ranging from yellowed scrapbooks, a Coca-Cola lamp, and jewelry, to a Country Bear Jamboree cookie jar, a "Welcome Back Kotter" lunchbox, and an assortment of old liquor bottles that have proven to be lucrative finds.

Because they spend the majority of their time at home, the Kassabs make a point of going out to eat frequently, utilizing discounts found on Restaurant.com, which enables them to eat in some of Philadelphia's finest restaurants for a fraction of the price.

When he's not working at home, or eating out, Kassab is combing local auctions, flea markets, estate and garage sales for goods. Wilson's Auctioneers and Appraisers, 344 Valleybrook Road, Chester Heights, "is one of the best places to buy inventory for the Internet," he said. "The entire industry has changed in 10 years," he complained.

"It's tough to get merchandise. I can't go into a local antiques store any more and purchase something, because they're afraid I'm going to make more money on the net."

While Kassab has seen a major shift in auction and retail selling, some things, he explained, are relatively pre-

dictable — like what customers want. People "that come into money," he explains, seek to recover items from their childhood. A few years ago, it was 1950s memorabilia. Now, he said, the 1960s are making a comeback.

The Montgomery County seller has had a similar experience. "People buy the past," she said. One of her customers purchased a mixing bowl, chips and cracks notwithstanding, because it resembled a bowl the buyer's grandmother had in her kitchen.

Counting back to what was in 40 years ago serves as a good rule of thumb, Kassab remarked. "Look at the fashion designers," he said, "everything cycles. Figure out what's cycling, and find that original vintage."

Cashing in on childhood memorabilia has been especially profitable for Kassab, who sold a collection of Viewmaster cards for \$3,500, a Schwinn Stingray for \$1,600, and a Hot Wheels car for \$250.

Although Kassab refers to himself as a gambling man, he said his selling technique is relatively low-risk, and that he favors "consistent, steady business."

Other sellers, he said, start low and let the bid grow, or list items at a high price, and use reserves. Sound pretty easy? Before you quit your day job, there are a few things you should know. Like any enterprise, eBay has its pitfalls. Although it has the potential to be very profitable, it is a risky business.

Kassab admitted it "doesn't take a rocket scientist" to sell on eBay, and that online tutorials have made selling increasingly user friendly. Still, he doesn't recommend it.