

Family



Linda Greenfield opened Chili's Victorian Doll Museum in 1970. Forty years later her collection features more than 3000 dolls dating back to 1860. PHOTO BY MATT DETURCK

The ultimate dollhouse

[MUSEUMS] BY KATE ANTONIADES

Linda Greenfield was watering plants outside her museum one day last summer when she spotted a yellow plastic bag on the ground. Figuring it was trash, she opened it to discover a doll inside — one that had definitely seen better days. After gluing the head back on and reattaching an arm, she added the “orphan” doll to her collection.

Greenfield has been building that collection since she was a child, while constantly growing her encyclopedic knowledge of dolls. The Victorian Doll Museum and Chili Doll Hospital, which she opened in 1970 with just \$23 in her business checking account, now exhibits more than 3000 dolls that date back to 1860. Greenfield, whose nametag identifies her as a “doll doctor since 1967,” runs the place with her husband, Robert.

Any child drawn to dolls will discover a treasure trove in the museum, which visitors enter through a door that plays a music-box style tune. Many adults visit each year, says Greenfield, but she says the museum is a good spot for families, too.

“It’s not so big that you can get lost,” she says. “You can get through in a certain amount of time.” And she points out that the audio tour units, which dispense facts at the touch of a button, ensure that parents don’t need to know a thing about dolls themselves.

The museum’s collection is housed in several wooden cases, each featuring a different type of doll accompanied by handwritten signs. Some cases hold additional items, like relevant books or clipped news stories. The space also features doll furniture, tea sets, and a few furnished dollhouses. The décor in the display area — brown carpeting, a few chairs, and framed paper-doll collections on the walls — gives the museum the cozy feel of someone’s living room.

The dolls themselves run the gamut from Susan B. Anthony to “Star Trek,” from nuns to nurses. The collection includes famous figures (characters from literature, entertainment, and advertising campaigns), traditional baby dolls, and of course, Barbie and G.I. Joe.

Adjacent to the museum is the doll hospital area, marked with signs reading, “Emergency Room” and “Outpatient Department.” There, Greenfield repairs and restores about 1000 dolls each year. The gift shop sells new and vintage dolls, doll clothing and clothing materials, shoes, wigs, and other items.

The Victorian Doll Museum & Chili Doll Hospital is located at 4332 Buffalo Road in North Chili. The museum is open March through December Tuesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Admission costs \$3, or \$1.50 ages 3-12. For more information call 247-0130 or visit chilidollhospital.com.