



OREGON GOVERNOR Victor Atiyeh poses with one of the flintlock rifles that is a part of his extensive gun collec-

tion. Atiyeh didn't start collecting guns seriously until the mid 1940s, and now has 75. —AP Laserphoto

Like Many, Atiyeh Likes Guns

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Like many people in Oregon, he is a gun owner.

Like many gun owners in Oregon, he is a collector. His 75-gun collection is small, as gun collections go, he said.

Like many gun collectors in Oregon, he likes to take some of his weapons to the target range when he has the time.

But this gun collector stands out from the rest. He also is governor of Oregon.

"I just liked guns and started gathering them," said Vic Atiyeh, a member of the National Rifle Association. "I can't really explain it."

"Everyone needs a hobby, a release valve," he said. "I love to take old guns apart and clean them up. My hands get dirty, the oil gets under my nails — it's great."

"When I'm working with a gun it's like I'm not even on the face of the earth."

Atiyeh said he got his first gun, a .22-caliber rifle, when he was a boy. He traded some broken headlamps for it.

"I convinced this other kid to trade, took the gun apart and fixed the mainspring," the governor said. "I was always good with a

screwdriver."

He said he didn't start collecting guns seriously until the mid 1940s.

"At first I just collected American guns in general, but then I started to specialize in small guns — Derringers," Atiyeh said. "Then I started collecting Colts stamped with 'U.S.,' moved on to muzzle-loaders, and now I'm back to where I started, collecting American guns in general."

Atiyeh said he gets most of his guns by trading and negotiating with other collectors individually and at gun shows.

What makes a particular gun collectable?

"I like something that's scarce," he said, "but still in fairly good condition—whatever happens to strike my fancy."

"For me, guns represent history."

"Some people look at guns today and shudder," Atiyeh said. "But the gun was as needed a tool as a shovel or pots and pans (were needed) for settlers. It was something they needed to live."

Among the historic pieces in Atiyeh's collection is an 1860 Colt Army pistol with the inscription "Hon. J.W. Newsmith." Atiyeh do-

nated the weapon to the Oregon Historical Society.

"Nesmith was the second senator to go to Washington from Oregon, and there's no question in my mind, although I don't have the documentation, that Colt gave it to him personally," Atiyeh said.

Another historic gun in the governor's collection is an 1873 Sharps hunting rifle. According to company records, the gun was shipped on Feb. 21, 1873, to Mark Biedel, a Sharps agent and buffalo hunter in Kit Carson, Colo.

"You can say for sure that this buffalo gun was used to shoot buffalo," Atiyeh said.

The governor said his job often prevents him from target practicing with his muzzle-loading rifles.

"I make my own musket balls for these rifles," Atiyeh said. "You have to measure the diameter of the barrel, and get the right-sized mold for it — you want to make the balls just a little smaller than the barrel."

"All guns have a character of their own," he said. "Some need a lot of powder, some don't. You have to clean some rifles after every shot, others can wait until five shots."

Atiyeh makes no apologies for his affiliation with the NRA. In fact, he appeared in a national NRA advertising campaign earlier this year and was a featured guest at the organization's convention in Phoenix, Ariz., last May.

"I decided to become a life-member in 1946 because I knew gun collecting was something I was interested in and would continue," he said. "I really resent some people's attitudes towards the NRA. We're portrayed as kooks and right-wing nuts."

Atiyeh said one reason he appeared in the ad campaign was to dispel what he feels is an inaccurate image of the NRA.

"The whole idea was to portray who the NRA is," the governor said, "a bunch of normal people who like guns and believe in our country."

"You guarantee a criminal won't get a gun, and then I'll stand behind gun control," Atiyeh said, "(but) that guarantee can't be made."

"Some view gun control as a panacea," the governor added, "but it's really just an effort to find a simple answer to complex questions. I believe in stronger punishment for commitment of crime with a gun."