

Passion is stamped on collector's hobby

By Peggy McKenzie
The Commercial Appeal

This is the year of the stamp collector, says David Saks, and he gives the credit to the upcoming Elvis stamp and Bill Clinton winning the presidency.

Sound like an odd combination of reasons for stamp collecting to become more popular?

Not to Saks, and he should know. The 40-year-old Midtown resident has been collecting stamps since he was 5, owns half a million of them, reads everything he can get his hands on about them and owns all sorts of contraptions to inspect and record stamps, including an electronic video enlarger, gauges and a computer to keep up with his collection.

He is most excited about the Elvis stamp and has tips for would-be collectors on the Elvis stamp and any other new issues. A three day-event planned around the stamp's issuance in Memphis Jan. 8 is expected to attract about 10,000 Elvis fans and stamp collectors.

Saks, president of the Central Gardens Stamp Club and a musi-

cian who was at Elvis's home when Presley died Aug. 16, 1977, can hardly wait. He gets worked up when he talks about stamps. His eyes widen; his face flushes; his gestures become exaggerated.

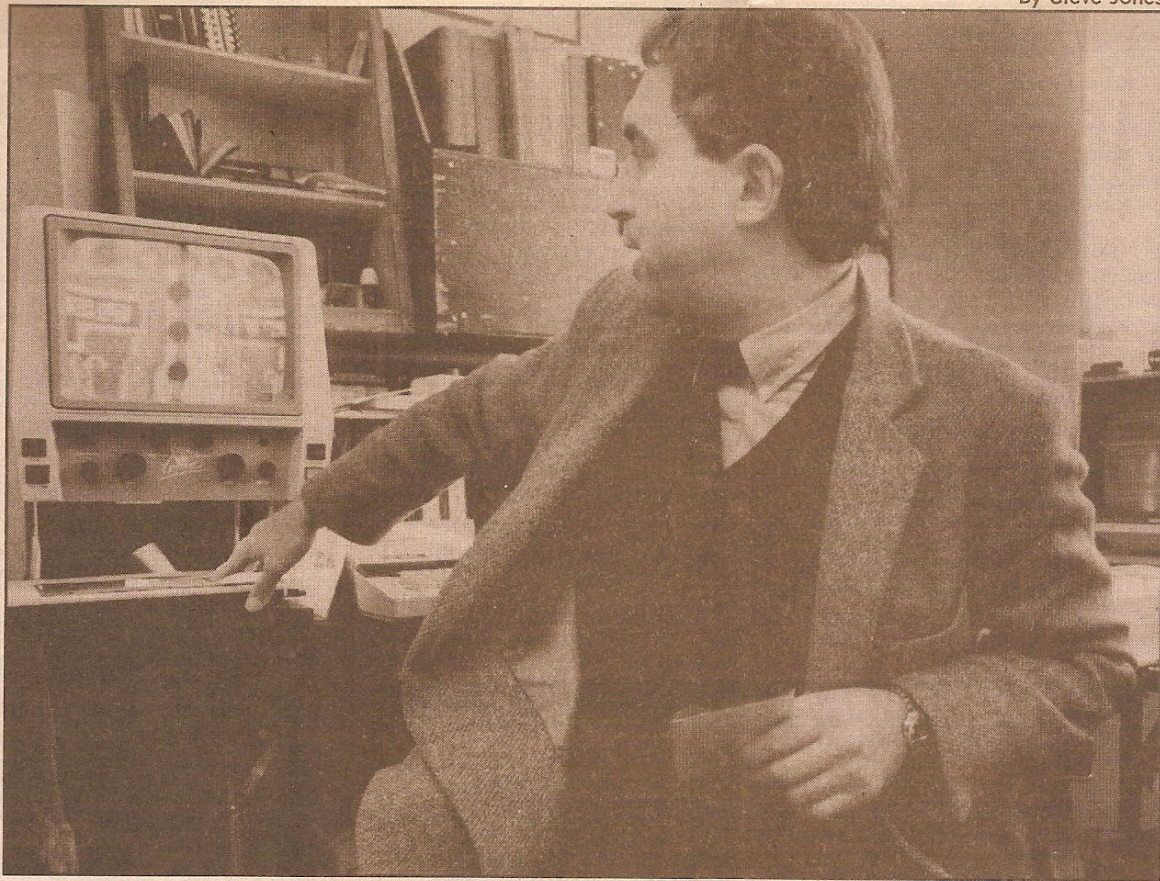
"This is staggering what this is going to do for stamp collecting. It is going to be of a magnitude like we've never seen before. It is going to create new enthusiasm. It's been a long time coming. It's about time stamp collecting got this type of recognition," he said without taking a breath between sentences.

So what does Clinton have to do with stamp collecting? Saks says it has to do with a Democratic president taking office and offering new hope, which affects the commodities market, which affects the collectables market.

"Stamp collecting never had this kind of enthusiasm, the kind of spirit it had in the year 1980" with the Carter presidency, Saks said. "Stamp collecting went to an all-time high. The gold standard had gone up to \$800-\$900 an ounce. It affected the collectable market, too.

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By Steve Jones



David Saks works with his electronic magnifier to examine details of stamps in his extensive collection. Saks developed a love for stamps at an early age and remains engrossed in his hobby.

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Stamps

"Gold, right now, is at an all-time low. It closed last week (week of Nov. 9) around \$330 an ounce. Because of that, it is hurting the collectables market. I think collectables are affected by commodities."

Saks doesn't consider himself a stamp dealer, but a collector who trades and sells to other collectors. He also is a musician and songwriter whose songs have won local awards, including City Council songs of the year in 1990 and 1991.

His two loves — music and stamp collecting — clash in the small bedroom in his apartment where he keeps his stamps, keyboard, banjo and other musical equipment. The stamps have won, though.

The room overflows with stamps — books and bags of them — and a library of books on stamps. "My closets are full; my bookcases are full. I keep up with the auctions. I have to watch the markets. I watch the gold standards."

Now he is focusing on the Elvis stamp. The stamps themselves, for the most part, will never be worth much, he said. But the first-day covers — special envelopes to affix newly issued stamps — and imperfections in printing greatly in-

crease the value of stamps, he said.

"Because of the many millions that are going to be printed, it is going to kill the value of the stamp. But the post office lottery can make you a rich man or woman — the discovery of that unique variety of that stamp.

"You have to really be on the lookout for what stamp collectors commonly call EFOs — errors, freaks and oddities — stamps with printing errors." Examples include a cracked printing plate that creates a split or line in the design, perforations that go through the stamp's design or pictures that are not centered.

A famous freak stamp is the Inverted Jenny stamp of 1918, where the picture of the airplane was printed upside down. "A block of four sold for \$1,200,000 earlier this year," Saks said.

He warned would-be collectors to not buy stamps reputed to contain imperfections without having them examined by an expert, because stamps "can be altered by chemical means."

In examining new stamps, he advises that you:

- Check to see if the design is centered.

- Look at the perforations to make sure they are even and correctly frame the stamp.

- Look at the margins around the design.

- Examine all colors in the stamp to make sure they are

even.

- Look for paper flaws.

- Examine the cancellation on the stamp for imperfections.

Saks is having about 50 first-day covers designed and plans to purchase a sheet of 50 to 100 stamps.

Graceland, the Memphis Symphony, the Memphis post office, other post offices around the country and individual artists will offer covers for sale.

Saks is most proud of a cover he had created for the unveiling of the Elvis stamp last spring at Graceland. He attended the ceremony and had the cover signed by dignitaries, officials, reporters and others attending the event, including Elvis's former wife, Priscilla Presley; Sam Phillips, founder of Sun Studios, where Elvis cut his first record; Elvis's longtime friend George Klein, and the postmaster general.

He said he was offered \$1,000 for it but doesn't plan to sell. He plans to affix an Elvis stamp to it and keep it in his collection.

And this one-man-band for stamp collecting never misses a beat when it comes to selling his hobby.

"Stamp collecting can reduce stress, reduce your cholesterol level, reduce blood pressure — in general, do all kinds of wonderful things to help eliminate stress and allow you, from your armchair, to travel around the world."

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