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## Discovering what lies beneath

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**By Jenny Andreasson**  
**The Voice**

The banks of the St. Johns River are littered with treasure — you just need a metal detector and know a bit of history to find it.

"The St. Johns is the key to everything — loose money, iron arrowheads, glass bottles, silver and gold. It used to be U.S. Highway No. 1 for people," said Stu Auerbach, treasure hunter and CEO of Kellyco, the world's largest distributor of metal detectors located right in Winter Springs.

The 30,000-square-foot warehouse is guarded by a row of canons all the way from Port Royal, Jamaica. There's also real treasure buried in the front yard where customers can test out machines.

Auerbach said when steamboats used to go down the river toward Geneva, garbage was thrown right into the water. Plus there were three Seminole wars that peppered Florida with musket balls, breastplates, belt buckles, cannonballs and coins.

"We're blessed because this is probably the best place in the world to own a metal detector," Auerbach said, as a gold coin glistened on a chain around his neck. The almost round coin, from a sunken 1715 Spanish treasure fleet, is worth \$75,000.

Anyone can find pieces of history nowadays, he said. Metal detector technology has come so far that the skill of the user doesn't matter anymore; it's all in the machine. Knowing where to go makes the biggest difference.

He said the beaches are like gold mines that are replenished every day as people lose jewelry, and searching them is a good way to recoup an investment in a detector. "Find one diamond ring — and believe me, there are hundreds of thousands of them — and you pay for the machine," he said.

Metal detecting is also a healthy hobby — people with them walk a lot, he said.

His company has been supplying hobbyists since 1955, and has also supplied two expeditions to find Amelia Earhart's plane and many professional treasure salvaging trips around the world.

Auerbach started the business almost by accident. In World War II, he was trained to clear minefields with detectors. After that, he started using detectors for fun and people asked him where they could buy one. He said he would sell them one of his, and the rest is history. Now a Google search for "metal detectors" produces a link for Kellyco.

He has the largest selection of metal detectors, including ones from all over the world. His warehouse on Belle Avenue is busting at the seams.

The family-owned business employs about 60 people and they ship anywhere between 150 to 300 machines and accessories a day at this time of year. But between Thanksgiving and the end of the year, they are shipping 600 to 700 a day. He sells machines at a 30 to 50 percent discount because of the volume.

They start at \$89.95 and go up to \$40,000.

"They're lightweight, easy to turn and easy to use," he said. "They're smart — they can tell you what's underground, how deep it is and what it is." Many can discover the type of coin or if it's a gold or silver ring.

The kind of people who buy metal detectors usually have a little bit of Tom Sawyer in them, he said. "They say, 'Well I don't really want to find a treasure, however I wouldn't object to it if I do.'"

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