

Aircraft executive Jerry Slocum has puzzling personal collection

Jerry Slocum is as taken with his hobby as some people are with their pets.

Only most people won't build a two-story house in their backyards for their pets.

However, that's where the Beverly Hills, Calif., resident keeps his puzzle collection.

The first floor contains Slocum's library of more than 3,000 books — some dating to the 17th century — on the history of toys, games, mathematical recreation and the origins of puzzles.

The second floor is where the staff vice president for Hughes Aircraft keeps his collection of more than 15,000 puzzles.

Slocum, who has stumped Johnny Carson on the "Tonight Show," will be on hand tonight through Saturday for the opening of "Puzzles Old and New" at the Children's Museum, 3000 N. Meridian St.

The author of "Puzzles Old and New," which was published simultaneously in English, Dutch and German in 1988, admits his collection is unusual.

"It certainly does not compare with collections of stamps or toys or dolls, but that makes it more interesting," he said.

Readers appear to think so. Slocum said first editions of his books sold out in all three languages nearly as soon as they hit store shelves.

The father of two and grandfather of two said he has collected puzzles for as long as he can remember.

"I can remember getting puzzles from my parents from trips that they took . . . and still have some of the puzzles from the 1930s. I just didn't throw

them away," said Slocum, who will be 59 in July.

Since then, he has traded and bought the rest from antique stores and other collectors. "I've also gotten family heirlooms through people who've saved puzzles from the 1800s," he said.

Slocum said his wife is supportive of his hobby and even was the one responsible for the traveling exhibit, which began its tour in L.A.'s Craft and Folk Art Museum where she is a volunteer.

"She's a bit overwhelmed — the puzzles take a lot of my time," he said. "She shares the social aspects of the hobby. I've had puzzle parties at my house and know puzzle collectors from around the world quite well."

Slocum — who said he was unable to place a value on his collection — added that he's not certain where it will go from here.

"There's really no end . . . I do try to be discriminating about it," he said.

— Rebecca Bibbs

Pieces of the puzzle

The 10 types of puzzles included in the Children's Museum Exhibit are:

- Put-together puzzles — These include pyramid, jigsaw and packing puzzles, which allow youngsters to figure out how to put them together.

- Take-apart puzzles — Lock boxes, secret opening boxes and puzzle locks prove that taking things apart can be as much of a challenge as putting them together.

- Interlocking solid puzzles — Burr and key chain puzzles illustrate how taking apart something and putting it back together can be one puzzle.

- Disentanglement puzzles — Freeing or attaching pieces of Gordian knots, Chinese rings and nail puzzles are part of the solution.

- Vanishing puzzles — Explaining the vanishing or

changing image is the special challenge of line puzzles and vanishing devils.

- Folding puzzles — Folding sticks, sunshine tots and hexaflexagons reveal their mysteries.

- Sequential movement puzzles — Moving parts of the triangle solitaires and sliding block puzzles in a particular order is needed to accomplish the task.

- Dexterity puzzles — Practicing physical skills help solve cup and ball or glass-topped rolling-ball puzzles.

- Puzzle vessels — Novelty toys such as puzzle pitchers and dribble glasses test the user's ability to pour without spilling.

- Impossible object puzzles — Uncovering how puzzles such as ships in jars and arrows through bottles are made is the key to the solution.