

Barber Gives Alternative Currency a Try

By: Jacqueline Weaver
Ellsworth American
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The American Liberty silver piece was minted in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho. The private, voluntary, barter currency has been available since 1998.—STAFF PHOTO BY JACQUELINE WEAVER

ELLSWORTH — Customers sitting in Peter Warren's chair at the High Street Barber Shop can't help but notice a passion of his — a wall full of alternative currency. Warren has both Liberty Dollars, minted in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and Ameros, a North American currency of silver, gold and copper coins minted outside Denver, Colo.

Warren first stumbled across this world at a Freedom Festival in New Hampshire six years ago when he bought a \$10 silver Liberty Bank coin for a lark.

About a year later, he started investigating U.S. currency and alternative forms of currency.

During most of the 1800s, the United States had a gold and silver standard, but very little silver was traded. The Gold Standard Act was passed in 1900.

In 1971, President Richard Nixon ended trading of gold at a fixed price of \$35 an ounce. For the first time in history, formal links between the major world currencies and real commodities were severed.



Barber Peter Warren cuts and trims in the shadow of his other passion — a wall full of alternative currency backed by silver, gold and copper.—STAFF PHOTO BY JACQUELINE WEAVER

The gold standard has not been used in any major economy since that time.

“Now, I would say, the dollar is backed by military might,” Warren said. “Anyone can issue a paper dollar, but it doesn’t mean anything unless the country has standing in the world.”

Warren said he has about 250 ounces each of Liberty Dollars and Ameros. The paper Liberty dollars are backed by silver and gold coins. The Ameros are minted in coin form only.

Late last year, federal agents raided the offices of Liberty Bank charging money laundering, mail fraud, wire fraud, counterfeiting and conspiracy.

The paper “Liberty Dollar,” its issuers maintain, is backed by one-twentieth Troy ounce of .999 silver held in their vault.

Silver this week was trading at close to \$17 per ounce.

Warren has spent a little of his alternative money here and there, including a few times in the Super Wal-Mart in Brewer. It all depends who is at the register and how receptive the individual is, Warren said.

“There is a proven method that works best,” Warren said. “Drop a silver Liberty coin in a cashier’s hand. Don’t offer any explanations. If they won’t want to take it they don’t have to.”

“They usually ask, ‘Is it real?’”

“I say, ‘Yes, it’s one ounce of silver.’”

Alternative currencies can be created by virtually anyone and are fully taxed. The tax must be paid in the national currency.

There is nothing new about this currency. For instance, gift certificates as a form of currency were popular during the Depression.

Warren’s wife, Stacey, thought it was all pretty goofy — “She thinks I’m a nut” — until he bought 400 worth of a special low production coin issued by Liberty Bank.

He was able to turn around and sell the coins for about \$4,000 on eBay.

“She doesn’t make as much fun of it anymore,” he said.