

Darwin Twine Ball Museum

The National Enquirer

They've got the world on a string

The fate of a small Minnesota town is hanging by a thread . . . a gigantic 11-ton ball of thread!

When Darwin, Minn., population 250, saw its only restaurant and grocery store close down, residents feared the tiny town was headed for extinction. So they rolled out their only asset — the world's largest ball of string.

The enormous 12-foot 9-inch tall twine ball had been collected over nearly three decades by eccentric resident Francis Johnson, who died in 1989.

Last year the town fathers transplanted the ball from Johnson's yard and enshrined it in a glass gazebo, where it's generated a booming tourist industry.

"The twine ball has saved Darwin," declares Hank Quinn, president of the Darwin Community Club. "Without the ball, the town would be dead."

THANKFUL
Darwin,
population
250, was
almost a
ghost town.



Dying town bounces back to life — thanks to 11-ton ball of twine

The bustling tourist trade has helped reopen the grocery and restaurant — now renamed The Twine Ball Inn.

"Some summer days will bring as many as 30 people out to see the twine ball," boasts proud resident Thea Underhill. "A registry book lists more than 3,000 visitors."

Visitors come from all over, she added: "We've had people from India, Thailand, Japan, Yugoslavia and Norway."

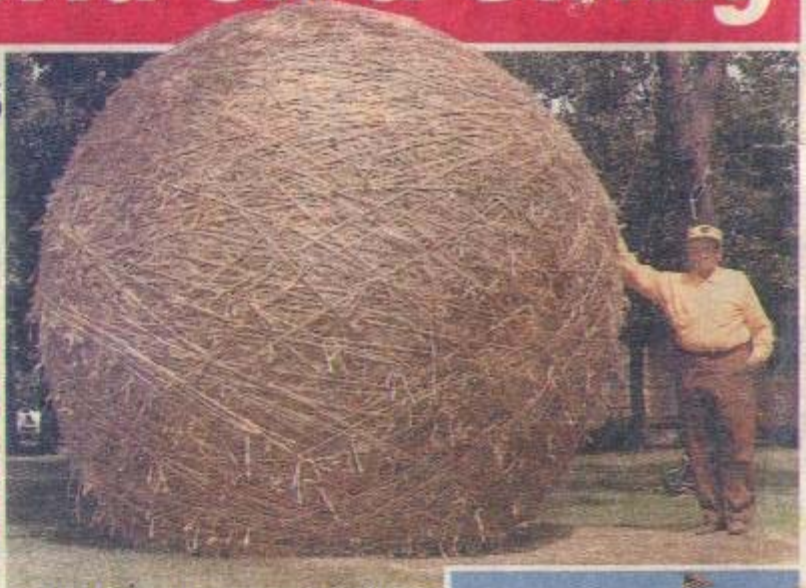
Tourists can purchase an as-

sortment of souvenirs, including T-shirts proclaiming, "I had a ball in Darwin — World's Largest Ball of Twine."

Francis Johnson started the twine ball in 1950, says his nephew Harlan Johnson, who donated it to the town.

"Francis was a very frugal man and never threw anything away. He lived on a farm with my father and there was al-

MAN-MADE MONSTER: Francis Johnson and giant twine ball that took nearly three decades to make. Now it sits enshrined in a glass gazebo (right).



ways baling twine around for hay. Whenever he'd see a string of twine, he'd save it and wind it around the ball later on."

Francis twined until 1979, when the ball reached an incredible 40 feet around the middle — earning it a place in the Guinness Book of World Records.

The town displays other odd items Francis collected, including 1,200 wrenches and 400 horseshoes — but it's the twine ball visitors come to see.

Grateful Mayor Chris Hansen



says: "Maybe the best thing is how it's brought everybody in the community together."

"We tell people that folks in Darwin are close by — it's the twine that binds."

— CHRIS RODELL