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The penny press is here to stay coin collectors, manufacturers say

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Robert Hoff was amazed the first time he saw a coin press machine in action in the 1970s. Hoff was in his twenties when a person passed him while carrying the machine and watched as they pressed pennies for a quarter a piece.

That moment created a lifelong collecting hobby for Hoff and his family, shared by people around the country and the world who love to feed their pennies into a slot, choose a unique design that mirrors whatever attraction they are at, and crank an arm around and around until a flattened, bronze coin is spit out.

It is a pastime that could be impacted by the recent U.S. government [decision earlier this year to stop producing pennies](#). The U.S. Mint stopped making the coin after President [Donald Trump](#) ordered the Treasury Department in February to stop minting the one-cent coin because it costs more to mint than it's worth. Each penny [costs 3.69 cents to make](#), according to the U.S. Mint's annual report.

The end of production leaves an air of uncertainty for the penny and its future, including how it is spent by customers. Despite some stores [already seeing shortages in the penny](#), coin collectors and penny press machine manufacturers alike both say there's no need to worry about the nostalgic souvenir activity disappearing.

"There are millions of machines around the world," Hoff, who now runs an online penny press community website, told USA TODAY. "They're very popular in other countries and all parts of the country. Here, some of them run on pennies, but there's also a coin press machines that press nickels, dimes, quarters."

What other coin press options exist?

While some posts of concern regarding the future of the penny press have [circulated on social media](#) and community forums, manufacturers of the machines insist the method will not disappear anytime soon. With pennies still in circulation and other ways to press available, there's no need to worry, they say.

Brian Peters and his father, Joe, have run The Penny Press Machine Company in Minnesota for almost eight years, and both share a similar sentiment to Hoff. There are alternative methods to keep the hobby alive, they say, and some are already in use in the U.S. within their machines.

Some of the most popular alternative methods include using other types of coins for pressings, including nickels and dimes. The company also has machines that come stocked with copper "tokens" that are stored inside the press, are distributed when the customer pays, and act as the penny during a pressing, Brian Peters said. This can be used when a customer has no coins at all, as well.

"In this next 20-year time frame here when there's still a lot of pennies out there that people have, but maybe some people don't have one and they can't go to the (cash) register and get one, they can pay with the credit card," Brian Peters said. "The machine will supply the penny or the token, or they can still use their own on that vending feeder. So, we're giving them both options."

These methods are also at play already internationally. Alan Fleming, owner of international company Penny Press Factory, said the coins in his machines vary from country to country, including brass coins in Dubai. While Fleming has heard some concerns from customers about the machine's futures, he also does not

foresee the attraction diminishing, especially with the alternate coins and electronic payment methods available.

While he is not worried, Fleming added that the antiquated nature of the penny press could play a role if it were to diminish in popularity. It's a very "analog thing in a very digital world," he said, but that also is what keeps it interesting to customers.

"I think that the appeal is either because its retro, in a sense the same way that perhaps a photo booth is retro or interesting," Fleming said. "The other thing, and this perhaps points to the lifespan of the penny press, is I think millennial parents will sort of point to them and say, "Oh I used one of them when I was a kid."

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What makes penny presses special?

For coin collector Hoff, the appeal of the elongated coin remains the nostalgia of making a souvenir you get to take home, he said. While switching to alternative methods might change the process slightly for the consumer or collector, the feelings the coins create will remain, he added.

"If you watch people waiting in line to press a penny, you oftentimes see a lot of laughter, smiles, and generally that's something they want to take home and they'll have for a while," Hoff said. "...it's a fun family thing. It's wholesome and it's interesting. It introduces family members to places and venues, and it's inexpensive."

For the Peters, coin pressing is truly a family affair. Beyond the business, an interest in elongated coins has been shared through generations. That can be passed down for any family and keeps the allure alive, Joe Peters said.

From Brian Peters' perspective, the action of pressing the coin is what makes it so unique. "It's more than just a souvenir," he said, an idea also echoed by Fleming and his machines in Europe and other locations.

"You didn't just buy something in the store. You actually made it. So, you have an ownership of it. You have a memory with it. And it's the memory of that visit," Fleming said. "...memories are something that, in a lot of senses, we can't really buy, we have to make."

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While it's true that the number of pennies will slowly diminish, it will likely not all happen at once. Even if people do decide to be choosy with what they do with their coins, Brian Peters is still hopeful for the future.

"As the coins are being used less, I kind of like the idea that people are going to decide, hey, I don't really need to spend this penny, but I'm going to save it and make it into a lifelong lasting souvenir with a penny press," Brian Peters said. "I think could be a great kind of end use for all these pennies."

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