

The open-air shop of the 'Broom Squire' is front-and-center in a popular neighborhood featured at the Clay County Agricultural Fair. And the neighborhood is the *Early Florida Village*. This charming patchwork of rustic outbuildings, sheds and weathered storefronts transports visitors to a simpler time. The Squire's broom-making workspace stands beneath a tin roof, the wood beams checked and aged as if they too have absorbed a lifetime of stories.

The scent of fresh straw fills the air as bundles of broomcorn dangle from those rafters, their golden strands catching the dappled sunlight filtering through the trees that line the quaint earthen 'Main Street' of the Village. Broomcorn is the tassel-end of a corn stalk, with the seeds raked out with a curry-comb after the stalks have been hung to dry. Unlike plastic brooms that just push dirt around, these brooms actually absorb dust and dirt and wear very well. Among his prized recent creations, old tools, some older than the Squire himself, are scattered about his workspace, hand-forged knives, spindles, and clamps, each with their own role in the art of broomcraft. A worn wooden bench sits in the corner, covered in sawdust and stray bits of straw, the grooves and notches witness to decades of work.

Nearby, an iron cauldron once used for dyeing the broom straw sits dormant, more decorative than functional these days, though the Squire will occasionally point to it with a knowing smile and whisper about "the days of color wars," when brooms of every shade were all the rage. The walls are lined with brooms of all shapes and sizes, from long-handled sweepers to sturdy whisks, some plain, others adorned with intricate weaving and knotted designs. They hang like trophies, symbols of his craft and passion.

A small hand-painted sign reads "Clay Broomworks: Keeping Florida Swept Since – Whenever," adding to the shop's offbeat charm. Visitors stop by out of curiosity, but they stay for the stories, and for a chance to see the Broom Squire in action, hands skillfully

binding broomcorn to handles, while he spins tales of a bygone era when sweeping was a matter of pride, not just practicality. The ambiance is as much a part of the experience as the brooms themselves, a place where time slows, and even something as ordinary as a broom feels steeped in history.

While there is plenty to keep him occupied, the comments and questions over the years are a true source of entertainment.

"Do your brooms sweep better than my Swiffer?" asks a young woman with a skeptical squint, her phone poised for Instagram photos. The Squire chuckles, never breaking from his task. "Well, darlin', a Swiffer might be quicker, but this here broom has personality. And if you

talk to it sweet, it'll even get under the couch."

Another visitor raises an eyebrow. "Do you have one with Wi-Fi? I need it to sync with my Smart Home."

The craftsman nods seriously, playing along. "Sure thing. It connects right to your Bluetooth, and if you whistle the tune from 'The Andy Griffith Show,' it'll sweep the kitchen for you."

Then there's always that one visitor, eyeing the handmade brooms askance, "Do these work on carpet?"

The Squire gives a mock-thoughtful pause. "If your carpet's older than me, sure. If not, well...your arms will get a good workout."

Every comment, no matter how strange, gives him, and his visitors, another chance to spin yarns and make broom-making surely the most mystical and practical craft in the world.

- EDITOR

