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Modular train hobbyists find joy in the details

By Cathy Hollander

Chugging around Blue Ash basements, family rooms and garages, delighting children at Christmas time, train engines pull a line of cars through country sides and cities into freight yards and passenger stations. Some hobbyists set up and run toy-train-sized collections while other trains can range as large as a ride-on size. Some people run tracks and trains through a large garden around their- home.

“I got started like 95 percent of people do, I received a Lionel train set at Christmas time,” said Blue Ash resident Edmonde DeGregorio. “My earliest memories were when my father brought home the trains, and the story goes that he and my uncles and cousins were gathered around to set up the train on my behalf, but they were really playing with it themselves?”

When they were in high school, DeGregorio and his brother Phil had a Layout on the ping pong table in the basement. He always had trains and added to his collection, but he got more involved again when his first son was born. He joined his first train club.

Modular train clubs set up portable sections of a layout to form a much larger complete train layout. They set up at hospitals, nursing homes, and schools for everyone to enjoy. They share their hobby with their family and friends, inviting people over to see their latest scenery and train acquisition. Some travel with their families or other club members to see real trains and visit train museums in locations around the country.

“I’m thrilled he has a hobby that helps him relax and be with people he enjoys sharing his interest with,” said DeGregorio’s wife Grace. “It’s also great he shares the hobby with both our sons. Joe likes to run the trains with him. Anthony enjoys helping a club

Edmonde belongs to—Queen City HiRailers—set up and tear down their modular layout”

Different aspects of the hobby appeal to different collectors. Some people focus on a time period and a location, with trains from a specific railroad such as the Santa Fe, carefully replicating it with historic and geographic accuracy. Others prefer to create their own imagined scenes. One train collector constructed a Lord of the Rings scene. Another site specializes in an 1860’s vintage model railroad.

There’s the mechanical and electrical aspects of the hobby as well as scenery and building construction. Selling engines, cars and other components of model trains are big business, and print magazines about the hobby are still widely distributed and bought. According to DeGregorio, major companies that people might remember from their childhood such as Lionel and American Flyer along with several new companies, manufacture and sell more products today than in the 1950s and 1960s. Collectors go to swap meets to buy and sell their trains and parts.

“This hobby is enjoyable, but can get complicated,” said Grace. “Each manufacturer has its pluses and minuses in terms of quality and adherence to the true nature of the real trains they are replicating. Also, there is pre-War, post-War [meaning WWII, and Modern (post 1969), different types of track and scenery. But it’s fun”

There are almost 20 railroad clubs in the greater Cincinnati area. The Clubs might specialize in different scale (millimeter ratio as compared to a foot of the real train prototype) and gauge (the distance between the railway tracks). Some clubs specialize in specific railroads, geographic or time periods Clubs sometimes have operating sessions that simulate real railroad experiences complete with dispatchers and engineers.

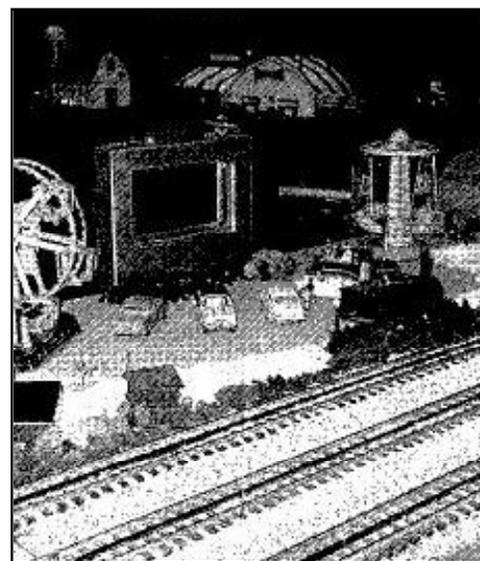
DeGregorio belongs to the Queen City HiRailers Club which puts together modular layouts that each person builds to specification and brings to meetings to assemble and run trains together. It can take 20 people to set up and take down the layouts. He also belongs to Train Collectors Association (TCA), the Lionel Operating Train Society (LOTS) and the Lionel Collectors Club of America (LCCA).

The hobby often is a lifetime interest where train enthusiasts grow with their train sets. An engine that might have sold for \$40 that they couldn’t afford as a child later becomes a treasured addition to their train setup. At a young age, there’s the joy of controlling the throttle and the train. Later collectors might enjoy putting together the tracks or wiring the transformer. Some people love to work on the scenery that the tracks traverse, whether it’s a village or a rural area creating mountains and trees. They focus on details, replicating every aspect such as the sound of engine for a realistic experience.

For more information about how to begin or learn more about collecting model trains visit www.queencityhirlers.com.



DeGregorio runs some trains on his layout



Modal train enthusiasts try to bring as much realism as possible to their layouts. This section of the Queen City HiRailers modular layout has a drive in theater – a scene from Ben Hur actually is running on the movie screen!

Queen City HiRailers promotes the love of modular trains

Queen City HiRailers is an “O” Gauge three Rail Modular Train Group. Its primary purpose is to construct and display a three-rail “O” gauge modular railroad used to promote interest in “O” gauge model railroads and to provide a model railroad for members to use and on which to operate their equipment.

HiRailer, or HiRailers, is a term commonly applied to toy train operators who prefer prototypical operations and a realistic operating environment on their model railroad, often including scale proportioned and detailed locomotives, rolling stock and accessories, even though the track itself may have three rails and/or a high profile.

The group displays its trains for the enjoyment of the public throughout the year at a variety of organized train exhibitions as well as community centers, hospitals, retirement homes and other venues. For more information on how you can bring the trains to your event or venue, please visit www.queencityhirailers.com



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