

## **The Children's Museum's special model train garden**

**(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on October 5, 2010)**

On Sunday afternoon, September 19, 2010, I happened to drop by the Children's Museum and found a special happening going full swing. The "G" for "Garden" scale model trains, named "G" for the German word for garden, are amazing to see. They are large by comparison to what you might think of as model trains. Several "G" scale model trains were running outside in the garden where the big red caboose is located. What fun!

I immediately got my camera and began taking photos of the activity. Trains and kids, what joy! The model trains seem to capture the kids' imagination and for some strange reason cause the kids to run and run and run. Right along with the trains, they ran over and over. When the trains go into a tunnel, they stop running and walk back to where they know the trains will come out again. When the trains reappear, the kids run along with them again and again. Such fun!

But the kids were not the only ones having a great time that Sunday afternoon. The Knoxville Area Model Railroaders who bring the model trains each third Sunday of every month were obviously having a ball too. It was hot and the railroaders had erected large umbrellas to provide shade and had electric fans blowing right on them. They had been here before and knew how to beat the heat.

Mark Fuhrman was the first person I spoke to and he was most willing to share with me explaining all that was going on. He proudly pointed out which train was his. He also admitted, when I asked, that his company had created the landscape. You see, Mark has a landscape company that creates exclusive gardens for many of the more elaborate homes and businesses in and around Knoxville.

He has been working with the Children's Museum for some time. The garden we have at the big red caboose was created when the Knoxville based television program approached Mark and wanted him to create a garden and water feature they could film showing how such a garden was built. So, thinking of where a garden would be most appreciated, Mark suggested they create a garden for the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge.

The result is a fine garden with running water creating a picturesque waterfall and several very fine plants as well as three main train tracks. The television show got its garden building show and the Children's Museum got to keep the resulting finished product. It is a beautiful setting and Mark continues to take care of it.

He spoke to me about the next actions he planned to take to keep the shrubs healthy and the invasive vines under control. Mark is another of the people who have a soft spot for our museum and who puts his own personal time and efforts into assuring the museum gets what it needs. We certainly are blessed to have such individuals giving of their talents and time to support the museum.

Mark spoke of a huge project to landscape the rear of the building and also proudly mentioned the new parking lot that is planned. He is going to remove the trees and keep them safe until the parking lot construction is complete and then replant them. Amazing what can be done when you know what you are doing and care about a place enough to help assure the success of its every effort. Such a man is Mark Thurman, obviously. I was proud to meet him and to get a chance to spend time talking to him.

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Soon, Larry Burkholder came and sat down next to us. After we had talked a bit he introduced himself as the President of the Knoxville Area Model Railroaders.

Mark pointed out that Larry was also the president of the Board of Directors for the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge. When I introduced myself, the name rang a bell with him and he spoke kindly of the recent Historically Speaking columns on the history of the Children's Museum.

The Knoxville Area Model Railroaders were not the only people having a great time on that beautiful Sunday afternoon. Several families came and went during the time I was there. Each family had children with them who were obviously excited to see the trains. Model trains have an amazing attraction for kids.

Isaac Rodgers and Matt Rodgers were there enjoying the trains. Kama Elijah Ball, a delightful young boy, was enjoying the trains immensely. A young Amber Adams was there also and she ran from one end of the train area to the other challenging the boys to run with her. There is just something magic about trains and kids.

Landon Soloman had his AristoCraft "Little Critter" train engine running smoothly. With his remote control he gently coaxed the engine and several rail cars that he had built to do his bidding. While he has only been a member of the Knoxville Area Model Railroaders for approximately three months, on this day he was very much a part of the team that presented the trains for the kids to enjoy.

He was careful to keep his "Little Critter" under tight control. I got the impression that this small but powerful engine could easily have pulled the series of cars much faster, if Landon had allowed it to have its head. It is eye catching with its bright green color and its unusually small size compared to other "G" model train engines.

Cary Clark had several very large "G" model train engines that kept the kids running all afternoon. They just cruised around the track constantly and seemed to effortlessly pull the load of several cars for hours on end. While Cary sat off to the side and talked with many of the families, he constantly kept an eye on his trains and knew exactly what his trains were doing all the time. I think he may have had a sensory connection as the minute a problem developed on the track, he immediately spoke up regarding the situation.

As I am sure you can tell I had a blast watching the young kids and the older ones too as they both played with their model trains. If you have children, you will want to mark on your calendar the third Sunday of each month and bring them to the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge to experience the "G" model trains and while they run with the trains you can get to know the members of the Knoxville Area Model Railroaders who are just kids at heart and really great people.

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The "G" Model train engine "Little Critter" struts its stuff



Kama Elijah Ball runs with the train while Amber Davis runs to catch up

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Matt Rodgers runs with his favorite train