

# **All Aboard! World of trains comes alive**

**(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on June 15, 2010)**

Frank Peishel wants you readers to know that he “got the idea” for the tugboat from Mary Ann Dumas, the Executive Director of the Children’s Museum. Evidently she came up to him one day and said, “Frank, I would surely like a tugboat here in the Waterworks exhibit.” So, Frank went to work.

That is how it is done at the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge. An idea is mentioned and a staff member, a volunteer or a board member takes the project and runs with it. The rest of the folks associated with the museum just pitch right in and help make it happen.

There are several examples of this behavior, one of which is the various train related exhibits. It is an amazing example of love for trains, dedication to preserving one man’s life-long hobby that almost took over the entire basement of his home and a fortunate outcome from a de-railed train incident.

First let’s look at the fortunate outcome. Margaret Allard says, “The Caboose is an example of every cloud having a silver lining. Back in 2002, I was at the museum when my husband called and said we were being evacuated from our home because a train had de-railed and spilled sulfuric acid. After the event was over, Norfolk Southern set up in a church to reimburse families for expenses such as hotels, meals, etc.”

“I took the opportunity to hand them a request for a train car for the Children’s Museum. I kept up with reminders and amazingly they decided to send us a caboose. The caboose, which they cleaned up and repainted, arrived at the Blair siding near K-25.

“Thanks to the donations of time and services by several people, businesses and organizations in the community, on October 4, 2003 the caboose was delivered on a truck and lifted by crane onto tracks set outside the museum. There was a crowd of people watching as they set the caboose into place.

“Since then it has been incorporated into the World of Trains exhibit and is opened for visitors the third Sunday of every month by the Knoxville Area Model Railroaders.

Gordon Fee, longtime board member of the museum tells the story of the model train exhibit this way, “Milton Lloyd, a long time Oak Ridge National Laboratory employee, was a model train modeler for over 30 years and modified his house in order to build a large HO model railroad that took up two full, and I do mean FULL, rooms of his house. Every square inch of the two rooms was filled with railroad.”

I was privileged to actually see this exhibit when it was running in Milton’s home. His daughter, Carol, is a friend of our family. She is the one who contacted the Children’s Museum when it came time to decide what to do with her father’s life-long hobby as he was becoming too ill to remain at home.

Carol had talked to Fanny and me about Milton’s model railroad and we went to his home to view the trains in action. It was an awesome arrangement of multiple railroad tracks and several trains all running at the same time.

Milton had created this miniature world of cities, railroads, stores, industries, road signs, homes, people and vehicles with miniature trains running seemingly every which way. I was amazed by the display. I also remember thinking, what in the world will happen to this most unusual set up when Milton is no longer able to take care of it.

Gordon continues, “When it became obvious that Milton was going to have to relocate to an assisted living apartment, his daughter (our friend Carol), called Carol Welch and asked if the Children’s Museum

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would be interested in relocating her father's model railroad layout from the basement of Milton's home to the museum. Carol contacted me because she knew I had a long term interest in model trains and I went and looked at it."

"I was blown away by the layout and began thinking about whether or not it was feasible to consider moving it. I knew the Children's Museum had the space because at that time the entire west wing where at one time the kindergarten kids had been located was now empty and in terrible disrepair.

"It was obvious to me that the Children's Museum did not have any volunteers that had the expertise and the time to move a model layout of this size so I went looking for help. I contacted the Knoxville Area Model Railroad club who at the time was meeting at a church on Papermill Road in West Knoxville. They would meet once a month, literally pull their layout out of storage closets, put it up work on it, and then put it back in the closet at the church.

"The President came out to the museum and looked at the space and he looked at the model in Milton's house and determined, like me, that this opportunity was too big to pass up. So I went to work on Selma and the Board to see if they would agree to provide the model railroad club space for club activities for free, in exchange for them moving the Milton Lloyd layout into the museum for public display.

"The club members were very much interested in the idea but had to think through how many members they would loss because of the distance they would have to travel from Knoxville and whether or not they were biting off more than they could chew. The Children's Museum had to think about whether they were really interested in devoting the kind of space that this would take and whether it fit their mission. "

"Both parties decided it was a go and a long term lease document was signed. We went to work. For the first winter, literally for weeks on end, a number of us worked in the Lloyd house to dismantle the layout and to box it up for transport.

"Originally we had planned to try and rebuild the Lloyd layout as it existed in his house. However the very first night it became obvious that this was not a possibility. When we learned that the mountains were made out of plaster and newspaper with no intent that they would ever be moved, that stopped us in our tracks.

"Thus was born plan two and that was to use as many of the buildings and materials that could be salvaged but to rebuild most of the mountains and the scenery. Ultimately the layout was packaged in about 70 cardboard boxes and transported to the museum where they were stored in a closet for about a year.

"The model railroaders then developed a design for the space and began the demolition work to get all the damaged structure and piping in the west wing removed. Over the winter the pipes had frozen in that wing and buckled the floor, the ceiling was falling down because of earlier water leaks, critters had chewed up insulation and all of the old cast iron plumbing fixtures were still there and useless.

"Night after night club volunteers would work on the space to make it habitable. They provided the labor and some of the money for building materials but the Museum, mainly Selma, raised the money for drywall, new windows and new lights.

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"While this was going on another group of the club members came up with the concept of building the Museum "Lloydstown" layout inside a wooden rail car pulled by a simulated diesel engine cab that kids could play in. This is the display that was ultimately built and can be seen at the Museum today. As many as possible of Milton Lloyd's buildings and scenery elements as well as rolling stock were built into the layout. Only two or three new buildings were required.

"To raise some of the money needed to build the simulated railroad car we came up with the idea of selling naming rights to various buildings and folks like, The Comedy Barn in Pigeon Forge, Sexton Automotive in Harriman, TN Bank in Oak Ridge, Oak Ridge Utility District, Heritage Railroad Company, CROET, Pfizer Chemical Company, Oak Ridge Hardwood Company, Visionary Solutions each paid \$1,000 for naming rights for various buildings in Lloydstown. Other donations came from private individuals like Dr Edward Kahn and his wife (The Railroad Car carries their name on the side) and Bill Manly.

"To provide an interactive experience for visitors, a series of animation features were added that came be activated by push buttons. Today the Knoxville Area Model Railroad Club maintains both Lloydstown and the DIY Mark Fuhrman Garden Railroad in exchange for two large rooms adjacent to the Lloydstown layout. In these rooms they have an ongoing project to build a gigantic N Scale layout and another HO layout.

"When the club first located to Oak Ridge and the construction was ongoing at the Museum they needed a place to locate. The Children's Museum helped them rent one to the vacant stores in the Oak Ridge Mall and a number of operating train layouts were installed there. The public was invited to tour them several Sundays a month.

"The model railroad club paid a modest rent for this space and the current management allowed them to stay until the final store in the mall was closed. By this time there was no space left in the current museum allocated area for the large scale layouts i.e. the Lionel Size. So they were placed once again into storage.

"Today, the museum and the railroad club have a dream of putting a new building wing on the backside of the museum to expand the model train display. This project is just a dream because so far no source for the funding needed to put up the structure has been identified.

"This saga is just a repeat of many other stories of how exhibits come to be at the Museum. Someone has an idea and a passion to make it happen. A group of volunteers work together to raise the money and to build the exhibit. There has never been a single exhibit build by a professional museum exhibit construction firm. Everything is a labor of love by one or more people.

There you have the heart and soul of our special museum. There you have what makes it tick. That is the kind of dedicated support and zeal for learning that several individuals in our city have demonstrated for years. The Children's Museum of Oak Ridge is special! It is unique. It is ours!

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Carson and Davis Gardner pose with the bright red Caboose donated by Norfolk Southern



Carson and Davis Gardner and the Children's Museum's most visible display, the Caboose and garden