

## A bit more on 'Lloydstown at Children's Museum

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on June 29, 2010)

In the last column I mentioned the Knoxville Area Model Railroad Club, or the "train guys" as they are affectionately known by the Children's Museum staff. While I credited them, based on input from Gordon Fee, with the huge effort it took to move the elaborate model train from Milton Lloyd's basement and set it up in the west wing of the Children's Museum, there is more these dedicated individuals routinely do for the museum.

However, this donated model train exhibit they installed has proven to be a most popular attraction. When the children see all the villages and observe the trains in motion, they inevitably grow excited and want to run a train themselves.

They quickly climb into the "engine" and through their active imaginations are flying along the track themselves. The adults are amazed by the detail and exactness of "Lloydstown" and quickly appreciate the years of dedicated and devoted attention to detail of this special model railroader.

Thanks to the model railroad club members, this exhibit experience is available for all visitors to the museum to enjoy. Yet, that is not all they do. They have two rooms of working and meeting space near the "Lloydstown" exhibit where actual model train exhibit construction takes place.

It is here that the maintenance to keep the model train exhibit running smoothly and all the miniature buildings repaired and looking so good. Without that type of care from skilled and knowledgeable model train enthusiasts, the trains would not long run and the landscape would soon deteriorate. It takes constant attention to keep all things in order in the small world of trains known as "Lloydstown."

The two rooms on either side of the main exhibit have different size model trains, one side is the HO-scale (pronounced "*aitch-oh*") that is 1:87 scale and the other is the N-scale that is 1:160 scale. These two scale models are among the most popular sizes favored by model railroad enthusiasts and also what most of us are accustomed to seeing. However, there are several other scale models available.

Every third Sunday, the club members come to the Children's Museum and open their club areas to the public. They also open up the caboose and set up the G-scale garden railroad train which runs all around the garden and under the caboose. They also set up a collection of buildings for the garden railroad. The beautiful garden features a running waterfall, bridges and lots of plantings.

The garden setting for the caboose was completed in 2005 as a partnership effort with the DIY (Do It Yourself) Network. The installation was a featured segment of their "Working on the Railroad" series on train gardens. Mark Fuhrman, a club member who owns a landscaping company specializing in train gardens, designed the garden and did the landscaping.

These dedicated railroaders also conduct one of the Children's Museum's most popular summer camps known simply as the "Model Train Layout." This unique camp is a week-long experience where the campers learn to build their own individual model train layouts. Each camper gets to connect their track on the last day of the camp and run a train around the layout they have designed.

The model railroaders are also a key element in the annual fund-raising Gala at the museum. This event is held annually in December in the museum's gym. Each year the decoration includes a grand old train station theme.

This year the Gala will feature the grand Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus in India. Bet you never thought you would see that elaborate train station set up right here in Oak Ridge. That is just typical for these folks and something that our Children's Museum routinely does for our community...bring exotic visual displays to us.

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So, from the generous donation of a basement full of a lifetime's serious dedication to a fun hobby, to the insightful request of a railroad for a "rail car" and the adoption of the exhibits by a group of individuals who care deeply for what has become one of the truly signature exhibits of our Children's Museum, we have a world class children's experience that helps them learn about trains. Trains are a fascinating thing. They have a place in our country's history and seem to forever attract both young and old. We are fortunate indeed to have this mixture of talent, resources and art.

These dedicated model railroaders are always eager to share their expertise with the museum staff and visitors alike. They just naturally pitch in and help with projects around the museum. They obviously feel a sense of pride in their role at the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge. The museum staff members are certainly pleased with the partnership they have with the Knoxville Area Model Railroad Club!



Steve Childs and son Blake Childs admire the World of Trains exhibit – photo by Margaret Allard