

## Blame It on the Trains

Local club proves that model railroads are far from child's play

[Enrique Limón](#)



Cover and his grand creation. - Enrique Limón

Chuck Cover gets a twinkle in his eyes when he leads visitors to the backroom of his Seton Village home.

“This space was the main selling point,” he says, walking towards the 25x50-foot space that holds his impressive model railroad layout.

“Most folks build their layout up against the wall; this is a little different,” he says of the display—the largest in the state. “This is a freestanding layout. You can walk all the way around it.”

“Back East, everything is in basements,” he says. “But out here, if you have a studio like this, it’s nice because you have natural light.”

A meticulous project eight years in the making, Cover’s display is modeled after 1950s central Pennsylvania towns along the Susquehanna River. He spared no detail down to a Texaco station, a church, a coal mine and a diner with a miniature “help wanted” sign propped against its window.

“My grandfather worked for the railroad in Harrisburg, and I liked that area,” the retired veterinarian says of his inspiration.

For Cover, who is the coordinator for the Santa Fe Model Railroad Club and will open the doors of his home to spectators this weekend, the love affair with trains has been a lifelong one.

“People of my generation—born in the ’40s and ’50s—a lot of the boys got trains for Christmas and we all had trains running around the Christmas tree—Lionel, American Flyer, that type of thing,” he says.

Pointing out “relatively new advents” in the hobby like computer chips and walkaround throttles, he hopes that the open house will expose model railroading to a fresher audience.

“A lot of us in my generation grew up with that—and of course, the railroads were much more important back then—and so the hobby is actually getting older. There aren’t as many young people in the hobby as we’d like.”

Modern developments also include trains with real-sounding noise. “Everything is more realistic now,” he says.

“I’ve done some paintings and I also enjoy photography,” Cover adds, showing off a couple of pieces hung on his wall, and noting that he painted all of the background scenery himself, using acrylic on masonite board.

“I get to use my artistic talents to do the model railroading,” he says. “Some guys have artists come in and paint their backdrops—I do it myself.”

Some vignettes feature historical photographs that he has recreated to a T. He also scratch-built most of the buildings and structures along his line, fashioned trees and bushes from old branches found in his backyard and created hills and slopes with a mixture of cardboard strips, construction paper and Elmer’s glue, which he calls “scenery goop.”

Besides flexing his artistic chops, railroading, he says, keeps his social life healthy, thanks to a monthly meeting of 10-12 enthusiasts.

“We deliver break cars to industries, we run passenger trains on schedule and everybody seems to have a good time,” he explains.

“It keeps him busy,” Cover’s wife Susan says. “Plus, there’s not a lot of women in this hobby, so there’s no chance of him straying,” she jokes.

Asked about the relevance of the model trains in today’s whambam, first-person-shooter-game world, Cover says, “It’s still an awfully big hobby,” though he does recognize that it’s “dying to some degree.”

“You’re competing against new technology, video games and that sort of thing,” Cover reflects. “When we were kids, we were outside most of the time. Now, they’re inside playing video games.”

But Cover’s confident that advances in the hobby have made it more appealing to the younger generation, mentioning that his neighbor’s grandkids, ages five and six, picked it up in no time.

“They learn how to run a train much faster than an adult does, just because they’re used to the technology.”

Pensive, he says, “I think there’s still hope.”