

Our First Layout

By John (RM 6510) and Karol Morris

IT'S TRUE: The train bug bit us! A childhood Lionel train set, more boxes of other Lionel trains, along with accessories, and scenery material merged with a new basement waiting to be used all yielded the setting for a new retirement goal: HAVING A LAYOUT!

We greatly enjoy our retirement home in Jackson, Michigan; it is the first one we've had with a basement and it provided the perfect setting for a layout. Now, in just 2½ years, four trains run independently amidst 75 lighted buildings and scenes featuring 75 vehicles and over 300 people. The layout has four separate themes: a village, rural area, mountains, and a circus. Included in the scenes are a farm, orchard, parks, schools, playgrounds, churches (with a cemetery), industries, woods, etc. A full-length wall mural makes the layout come alive.

My wife, Karol, and I built the layout's benchwork, track and scenery. Engines and cars from the 1940s and 50s comprise most of the rolling stock. Fifteen buttons help children (and adults) activate various accessories and become interactive with the layout. I wanted to avoid crawling under the layout, so we built the flip-up farm, a hinged section which I can open to walk into the center of the layout without disrupting the operation of the trains.



The very talented Karol did much of the layout's scenery. Many of the ideas came from Dave Frary's excellent book "Realistic Scenery For Toy Train Layouts". We used a wide variety of materials for the scenery including Styrofoam, crumpled newspaper covered with plaster-cloth and LOTS of ground cover glued on with diluted Elmer's® glue. Some trees, as well as ground

cover and shrubs are store bought while others are hand made from sedum stems and other materials. Karol painted the 34 x 4 foot backdrop made up of sheets of primed Luan plywood.



She painted the upper portion dark blue and lower portion white and then blended the two colors together to achieve the shading you see. The clouds were painted using stencils and white and light gray spray paint. She also painted the mountains then oversprayed them in white and light gray to add the illusion of haze. The mountain at the right end of the layout is built of layered Styrofoam and can be lifted off for access to the track inside. You can see the results of all of our work in the panoramic photos on the facing page.

I am a retired clergyman of 40 years with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Karol was a choir director for 45 years. We are still involved in community activities and in May 2004 put our trains to work. We held an open house with free will offering contributions towards Habitat For Humanity. In all, 85 persons came to visit and play with the layout and, we raised \$1438 that day!

Our enthusiasm for the hobby really came alive this year after joining LOTS and attending our first convention in Cincinnati. We were thrilled with the reception by the LOTS leaders and fellow Members as well as the activities and the layouts we visited. The convention also inspired future changes. Our next project will be to install wider radius track to handle the five new circus cars we bought at the convention. We'll also make the circus/zoo larger. We are also planning to be able to run a recent purchase of some vintage 1917 trains in a unique setting.

So – the trains roll on – with LOTS of work and fun in the future.

