



A village complete with lighted homes and street lights is one of the featured areas in George's layout. There are two houses under construction as well as a road crew working in the area. Note the train traveling along the right hand side of the village, next to the realistic mountains.

Christmas Tradition

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trips that he begins his layout pains each year.

George sets his goal to have the train operating by Christmas Day, although he said occasionally he will make some changes along the way. The first step is the plan, then the layout with tracks and trains and wiring. The village goes up last, along with other accessories to make the entire layout realistic. Houses have lights in them, as do billboards, and there street and signal lights along the way.

It is extremely difficult and expensive to get new equipment for an S-gauge railroad. George says he gets all his equipment used, although he can still purchase new accessories. He said they look for additional items throughout the year, often adding one or two new cars and a few new accessories.

This year he added a "working car," and is having fun with the two men pumping the car to move around the tracks to the scene of the problem.

There are many exciting cars in George's trains. There is a TNT

car which blows apart when visitors are least expecting it. There is a lumber car which can unload its cargo, and there is a man who uses a forklift to load oil drums. There are passenger trains and freight trains and one even carries missiles.

George says that today most trains have become so expensive that "they are more for collectors than for kids to run. At over \$15-\$20 per car, it is too much for a family."

He finds it sad that youngsters don't have as much interest in trains. He said television and video games have relegated trains to a less interesting status, but recalls spending hours operating his trains as a youngster, with his friends joining the fun.

He said working with trains helped him gain an understanding of wiring, since they require extensive wiring to operate correctly, and he feels they offer a creative outlet.

After the work of assembling the trains, does he have time to enjoy playing with the trains? George replies. "I play with the trains a

lot. It is a relaxing way to get away from everything."

He also enjoys sharing the trains with others, explaining, "Putting the train together is a lot of fun, but what really makes it worthwhile is when children enjoy watching it. It is worth it to see the young children." Shirley estimates that approximately 200 friends and relatives come to view the trains once it is set up at Christmas until it is dismantled in March.

While it takes several months to set it up, George says it also takes about a month to take it down. He and Shirley carefully put every train and accessory back in its original box, and then lovingly store the boxes until the next time.

Once the train is in position, George says there is little maintenance. "I clean the track and oil the locomotives and put oil in for smoke. There is not too much upkeep."

Trains are a very important part of the Swartzes' lives, and when they were looking for a permanent home, the size of the basement was of prime importance: it had to be

large enough to put up the train. Because it takes so much space they don't feel they can keep the train out year round, but George is hoping to finish the basement, and perhaps someday the train can be expanded.

These trains are obviously too large for under a tree, so last year Shirley gave George a miniature N-gauge train for under their family tree.

Both Shirley and George like the real thing, and they especially like riding steam railroads. George says there are a surprising number still around in the East, including the Strasburg Railroad and the East Broad Top Railroad. He also has a collection of lanterns from real railroads.

Trains have become a tradition associated with Christmas, and George's tradition has expanded into a year-long hobby. On Christmas day, his happiest moments will be spent running his trains and sharing the months of work with his relatives and others.



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