

Trains Chug Through Spectacular Outdoor Gardens

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YORK (York Co.) — A trip to Eugene Boll's Southwestern-style home overlooking a good share of York County from atop a hill along Ridgewood Road in Springettsbury Township not only provides the visitor with a breathtaking view, but also the scene near his house is inspiring.

Boll, a member of the Susquehanna Valley Railroad Garden Society, which boasts about 50 members from eastern Pennsylvania, has plotted and planned and built extensive railroad gardens in his own yard.

He said the society numbers 15 garden railroad layouts among its members with several in its ranks just in the construction phase. Cost of membership is just \$4 a year and the group meets monthly at a member's home on a social basis. Boll said the group is not a formal organization.

"I think what's pushing the hobby is it's a family thing. The women plant the flowers and do all the gardening and the fellows run the trains. Most of the train buffs for years had their trains in the attic or the basement and the old man went down and that was the last you saw of him. In this type of thing the whole family gets involved," he said.

Boll explained that a garden can be installed inexpensively or "you can spend a whole lot of money."

It's an all-weather thing too, Boll said. "You can take the engines — the trains are G gauge — and dip them in a bucket of water and put them back on the track."

However, he noted that electronics has made inroads into the hobby and can be a problem because of the moisture. "We have cattle cars that have chickens, turkeys, cattle, and pigs. It's a sound board and that board can be a moisture problem. You must protect it," he said. Everything else is able to stand up in wet weather.

Boll started with his hobby, he said, "Because we have a nursery — Springettsbury Mountain Nursery — and we have a lot of dwarf plant material." Garden railroaders use the dwarf plants in their railroads so it was the perfect avenue for his business.

"The scale is 1/2-inch to the foot, which means a 6-foot person is 3-inches high, so your tree would be small as would the buildings," he said.

His railroad garden started with one engine given to him five years ago as a birthday present from his daughter. "She said, 'Here, you were talking about trains, here's an engine,'" he said as he chuckled and then added, "That's how a lot of people got started."

He laughs at how people in the hobby start out with a small layout and continually expand. He counts himself among them because he has had major expansion in the past four years. He has 700 feet of tracks in the one garden that measures "80-to-90-feet long and 40-feet wide."

As he takes the visitor on a tour of his layout located on the side of the hill just below his home, he gets a twinkle in his voice as he points out, "There's Indiana Jones being chased by a bear and Pocahontas is down here in the Lost River Canyon."

Next, Boll who worked at one time in construction "and ran a bunch of factories" moves onto

the main feature — two trains sitting in a train barn over the tracks and the various dwarf plants in the layout that also includes a waterfall and large trestle bridge. He built it all, even the Painted Ladies — Victorian houses — that sit inside the track. All are lighted and at night he said when you sit on the deck atop his house "it looks like a little town."

He notes that you can buy kits for the houses, but they are made in Europe and are either European or Western style, he didn't want either one so he built his in the Victorian style. One of the houses is a replica of a home in the valley below his property.

The garden also includes a replica of the York Railroad Station on North Street in York City. There's also a firehouse.

Boll tells how track was added yearly and finally when the area was about covered with tracks, plants, and buildings, his wife, Mary, said, "Well there's nothing over here," and he points to another railroad garden up the hill. "So we put the cog railroad in," he said with a chuckle.

This garden has a boulder he dragged by tractor out of a wooded area near his home sunk three feet into the ground on its end. On the end rising up from the garden is perched a monastery from which monks walk. Here there is also a castle, which sometimes finds its way to various events in the York County area such as the Christmas light show at Rocky Ridge Park and the spring garden show at the York Fairgrounds.

Boll said requests for train lay-



A small-scale train weaves through miniature garden plantings and built-to-scale houses in one of several outdoor displays by Eugene Boll.

outs for area events have been so numerous recently they've had to refuse some.

One of Boll's trains is a replica of the Liberty Limited that used to leave Washington, D.C., every day at 5 p.m. and arrived in Chicago 18 hours later. The Liberty Limited had two engines — as does Boll's — in order to climb the Parkton grade coming into New Freedom as the train made its way through York County, he said.

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A monastery is built on top of a large boulder, which Boll dragged by tractor from the nearby wooded area. The monk figures have acorns for heads.



Railroad under tree is a cog railroad and has a castle that has been used in display at York County's Christmas light display held annually at Rocky Ridge Park.



The houses, called Victorian Painted Ladies, were built by Eugene Boll.

HOMESTEAD NOTES