



Workin' on the miniature railroad

Couple puts down tracks while enjoying time with family, friends

[By JOHN CHARLES ROBBINS](#)

Ron and Alyce Prins of Holland are workin' on the railroad -- the garden railroad -- and look forward to more miniature train work this fall when Ron officially retires.

Ron, who was first entranced by trains when he was a boy, has been tinkering in his yard for years with a garden train layout, also known as G-scale or G-gauge, which is 1:24th scale. The train locomotives and cars are about the size of a loaf of bread.

"I was originally exposed to trains when I was probably 10 years old," he said, when he got one for Christmas.

Ron and his wife are long-time members of the Southwestern Michigan Garden Railway Club.

Headquartered at the J&W Model Trains shop in Coloma, the club numbers more than 30 enthusiasts.

Members meet ever Tuesday evening and one weekend day each month. They share their love of the outdoor trains, and they work to expand and improve the club's track setup in Coloma.

Ron said the latest improvements include new trestle bridges, tunnels and buildings -- all to scale, of course.

The club's layout includes 700 feet of track winding through a landscaped garden setting. Four trains and a trolley are capable of running simultaneously.

Formed in the 1980s, the club's motto is: All we want to do is have fun.

Alyce said that's exactly what they do.

"Fun, that's what it's all about -- togetherness and fun," she said.

And the hobby is special because it can be for everyone of any age.

"The whole family can be involved in it," she said.

The couple said it's a hobby you can easily get caught up in. They talk about trains the way other people talk about food or TV shows.

Ron, 61, is a machine builder. Alyce, 58, is head cook for Holland Public Schools. They met on a blind date at a Holland roller skating rink. They have two sons.

They have a two-acre corner lot in the city's southern end, with a steep valley hugged by two creeks and shaded by towering weeping willows and catalpa trees. They have three gardens and a garden railroad layout.

It's modest now but plans call for extending the tracks, building a bridge and knocking a hole in the basement wall so the trains can travel inside, make a loop through a night scene with lighted buildings, then chug back outside.

Ron recently spent an entire afternoon at the Hamilton trestle over the Rabbit River. The railroad bridge and supports will serve as the model for a miniature trestle Ron has begun to construct for his layout renovation.

"It's really a satisfying thing to do, to create things in miniature," he said.

Ron believes G-scale trains are particularly fascinating because you use natural materials in the layout --real dirt, real plants, real rocks.

Ron said the hobby is downright therapeutic.

"You get out there, you lose track of time and some of your cares. It's nice to get away from things for a little while," he said.

The Prinses are excited about their club's upcoming open house, and invite those interested to make the drive southward.

The free event is set for noon to 5 p.m. Sept. 14-15 in Coloma.

For more information call 1-800-443-0440. For a map to the club's G-scale display check this Internet link: www.jwmodeltrains.com/directions.htm.

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