

Gathering 'Round the Railroad

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Bob Evans in his backyard

Photos Doug Kohen



Each train stands about six inches high, and winds over bridges, through tunnels and around elaborate scenery. Evans' model includes 110 live trees, one hundred buildings, about fifty cars, over two hundred people and dozens of other carefully placed props. The scenes surrounding the train tracks "are things that I just imagine," he says. "For example, there are kids playing in the sand lot, [and] there's a couple gardening. We have a policeman eating a doughnut over there, and we have a funeral scene, with the grieving widow clutching her head and crying as her husband is lowered into his grave."

Evans, like many, nurtured a love for trains in his childhood. "I always used to have model trains when I

was younger," he says. "When my son got to be five or six, I used it as an excuse to go out and buy some for him. They became mine." The railway that currently inhabits the Evans' backyard has been evolving since 1994. When asked about the parts of railroading that he enjoys most, Evans says: "I like recreating reality on a miniature scale." The gardening, construction and fresh air are also pleasant.

Evans belongs to the Bay Area Garden Railway Society, whose members periodically hold open houses to view each other's railroads. About five years ago, after their son left for college, Norma Evans suggested that the couple do the same for their friends and neighbors.

Now the Evans family holds an annual open house to display their railway and make lasting connections within their community. While the attendees are mostly neighbors and work associates, any train enthusiast is welcome to come, share lemonade and cookies, socialize and even participate in a scavenger hunt that highlights the detail that Evans has incorporated into his model. Kids are welcome too; in fact, they seem to be the most delighted guests as they run back and forth and shriek with each passing train.

"Kids are intrigued [by the trains]," says Evans. "Sometimes they just get locked in, and sit and stare for hours."