

# Tracks traced to Christmas pasts

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

**T**HE 4:05 to Helfred is running a little slow, and Fred Delgyer of Redford Township is starting to look concerned.

The elderly gent takes a peek down the track, then at his watch. No problem, he figures. He just turns a knob on the master control board of his HO model train, and the engine whistles in well on schedule.

Such is the life of a conductor of his own model railroad, a hobby whose tracks often can be traced to Christmases past. Delgyer, as is the case with a majority of model train enthusiasts, received his first toy railway as a yule gift.

But although it might have started out as a present, model railroading presently is an art form if you're someone like Delgyer. To say it's merely a hobby is almost like calling World War II a skirmish.

"It's a way of being creative," said Ronald Scannell of Westland, who is with the North Central Region of the National Model Railroad Association.

"You're trying to capture a bit of history in a three-dimensional setting. That's what's so satisfying."

"Plus there is something about trains which make them fascinating to watch."

**ONE LOOK** at Delgyer, 72, bears that out. As he stands at the controls, with a conductor's cap on his head, he smiles like a child as he watches his collection of model trains in action.

It's a scaled-down version of reality itself. The mile-and-a-half scale track is surrounded by hills, tunnels and buildings — with people in them. And Delgyer doesn't miss a trick in terms of detail.

Even the miniature lamp posts light up in Delgyer's city of Helfred (Fred's wife is named Helen, so hence the name Helfred). "I would've liked to have been a conductor and worked with the railroad," said Delgyer, who, appropriately enough for someone fascinated with tiny mechanisms, is a retired watchmaker.

"I used to ride the trains when I was in the service . . . You could take the Pennsylvania Railroad from Columbus, Ohio, to New Jersey, and ride it all night long. It was fun."

SO IS model railroading, which Delgyer said isn't expensive "if you're careful."

Basic HO or the smaller N scale sets run around \$19.95, according to Marion Ollar of Jonimo Inc. Hobby Shop in Livonia. The sets include an engine, cars, a transformer and track.

Lionel, which is the largest toy train manufacturer in the United States, does its best business be-

tween October and December, according to John Brady, director of marketing for Lionel.

Accessories, such as detailed scenery kits, make costs rise. Delgyer, for example, buys 150 plastic people for \$14. He paints them and then places them inside the passenger cars or buildings.

Some of stuff, such as buildings, are built from scratch.

**DELGYER'S CURRENT** set-up, which took 11 years to build, extends all the way around his basement. It's modeled after the New Jersey Central Railroad, which he is familiar with from his previous home of Plainfield, N.J.

His expansion plans for the Helfred Railroad, though, have been put on hold.

"I don't have any more room," Delgyer said. "Maybe another railroader would move in next door and we could dig a tunnel through the driveway. That would be good."

Space isn't a problem for Gary Miller of Westland. His N scale set is half the size of an HO scale, and takes up only half the space in his basement.

Miller's railroad, dubbed affectionately the Snowshoe and Lime Ridge Railroad Company, is the result of six years' work.

Like Delgyer, Miller isn't one to skimp on detail, which is more difficult to obtain on a smaller scale railroad. For example, one of the buildings he made from scratch took three weeks to construct — and an additional six months to put on each minuscule shingle with tweezers.

"You get to be an artist, a research engineer with the Ford Motor Co. You get to be an artist, a mechanical engineer and an electronic wizard."

"I work a high-pressure job. This is an outlet."

**THE METICULOUS** work model railroaders do requires a great deal of resourcefulness. The shingles which went on Miller's six-month project came from cedar cigar wrappings.

For the scaled-down mountains, he uses an assortment of materials including plaster, newspapers and paper towels. Even some of his train cars are scratch built from wood.

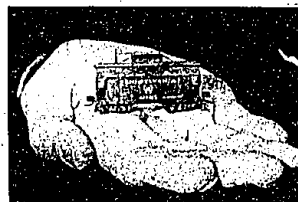
A caboose Miller built took second place at a regional conference of the National Model Railroad Association. Also, Miller, Delgyer and Scannell all belong to The Friday Night Railroad Club, which meets each week at a member's home to talk trains.

A love of trains and the railroad is what brings them together. They're probably the only group you would see smiling stopped in front of a railroad crossing.

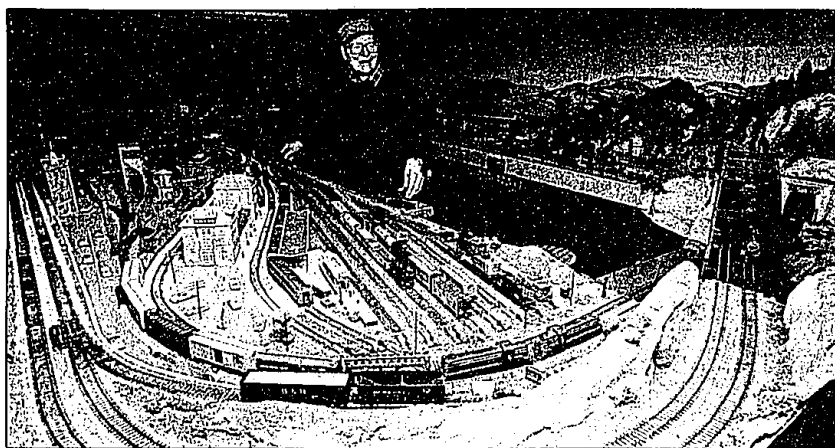
"Oh, no," Scannell said. "You get to see how the cars weather and how they run. I don't mind being stopped by a train at all."

**'You're trying to capture a bit of history in a three-dimensional setting. That's what's so satisfying.'**

— Ronald Scannell  
model train hobbyist



Model train hobbyist Gary Miller of Westland collects tiny, N-scale trains such as this miniature caboose.



## CAR members help needy in Appalachia

Members of Lexington Alarm Society, Children of the American Revolution wore the clothes they were going to give away when they attended their December meeting.

"Some clothes were tied on, strung on, or just draped on," said Carolyn Hartwig, who is senior society president for the youth who sent 65 pounds of clothing to Tarnate School, a boarding school in Appalachia, owned and operated by Daughters of the American Revolution.

Farmington Hills residents who are members of the society are Nicole Huard, Chrissy Huard and Susan Hartwig.

"These girls are state officers and committee chairmen," Hartwig said of the 9-12 year olds. "They are learning leadership skills as well as learning about our country, government, history and conservation."

In the past season, the society entered a float in the Farmington Founders Day parade they had built themselves; helped clean out the Rouge River last spring; and toured Henry Ford Museum and the Sloan Museum in Flint in a study of the development of transportation.

Just for fun, the state group scheduled its board meeting on Bobo Island. All state society members will attend the 54th annual Michigan State Conference in March.

CAR membership is open to those under 21 who can trace their ancestry to a man or woman who rendered aid to the cause of American independence. New members come into the society by invitation of one who already is a member.

Membership inquiries are taken by writing to Hartwig, 27851 Cranleigh, Farmington Hills 48018.

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## around Farmington

All announcements for this column must be mailed to Around Farmington, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River, Farmington 48024. Deadline is noon Monday for the Thursday publication and noon Thursday for the Monday publication. Requests for announcements will not be taken by telephone.

### HANUKKAH PARTY

Monday, Dec. 29: Hanukkah Party with traditional food, songs, games and a play, led by Barbara Cantor who tells the story of the Festival of Lights at 6 p.m. in Farmington Community Center, 24705 Farmington Road. Reservations, at \$5 per family, taken by calling the center, 477-8404.

### NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY

Wednesday, Dec. 31: New Year's Eve party hosted by American Legion Groves-Walker Post and VFW Post 199 opens with open bar at 7 p.m., followed by dinner and dancing in the American Legion Hall, 31775 Grand River. Tickets are \$22.50 each, purchased from members or at the door.

### ONE-WOMAN SHOW

Friday, Jan. 2: Evelyn Henry exhibits her work in a one-woman show in Farmington Hills Branch Library, 12 Mile Road east of Farmington Road, through Jan. 31.

### GED TESTING

Monday and Tuesday, Jan. 5-6: GED (General Education Diploma) tests given at 6 p.m. by Clarenceville Adult Education Department. Advance registration is necessary, made by calling the department, 473-8900.

### ROMANCE WRITER

Tuesday, Jan. 6: Marianne Willman, co-founder of Detroit Chapter of Romance Writers of America and a member of Western Writers of America, talks about her writing and publishing experiences at 7 p.m. in Farmington Hills Branch Library, 32732 12 Mile. No charge.

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The cornea of the eye does not grow and develop in an exactly round shape. It is easy to compensate for this unround or warped condition by prescribing corrective glasses or contact lenses that are curved or

"warped" in the opposite direction. This straightens the light rays out so that the image formed is perfect and sharp. Astigmatism usually stays constant throughout life. A corrective lens which is shaped just the opposite in curve to the shape of the cornea will correct the astigmatism and help to create a sharp image. Some forms of severe astigmatism can only be corrected with hard contact lenses. I have had patients with severe astigmatism who have been aggravated and uncomfortable with their vision while wearing glasses. After fitting them with contact lenses, their vision has been clearer than ever before. These patients are among the most grateful patients that I have.

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