

Creative Living

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They've been workin' on the railroad

By Cathie Bredendach
special writer

WHEN MICHAEL DOBOSENSKI is a little guy of five in Auburn Heights, Michigan, the Grand Trunk tracks lured him several miles away from home and his mother's watchful eye. He followed the tracks to watch locomotives switching into the two lumber yards in town.

His passion for trains both large and small hasn't waned through the years. Many Saturdays, he and his wife Pat drive to Owosso, a town west of Flint, where they do hard labor renovating a 401-ton steam locomotive called the 1225. The locomotive is being restored by the 400 member Michigan State Trust for Railway Preservation, but 30 "hard core" active members do the brunt of the work and devote their Saturdays to rebuilding the locomotive.

Michael, who heads the math department at Bloomfield Hills Lahser High School, tinkers with "N" sized Lionel and Marx model trains in his basement, and some Sunday mornings he still follows the call of the rails to watch the diesel locomotives pull into the lumberyard near his Birmingham home, but the 1225 outtakes lesser trains in the time and enthusiasm he expends on them.

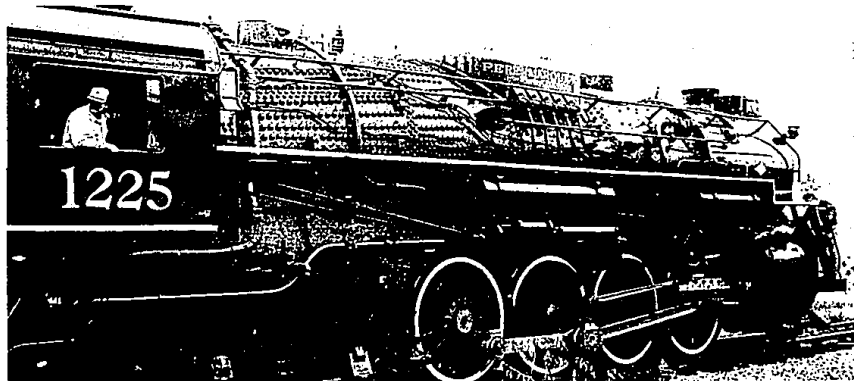
"When you stand beside the 1225, it's massive," he says of the Berkshire-style steam locomotive

that's the largest engine ever run on Michigan rails. What's more, the locomotive symbolizes a bygone era when steam locomotives dominated transportation.

Pat Dobosenski, who works as an enrichment specialist at Pembroke School in Birmingham, thinks of the 1225 "as an endangered animal," a dinosaur out of the technological past that the Railway Trust is fighting to keep from extinction. She recalls the thrill of a test run this past Labor Day weekend. "We kept watching for the smoke from the engine to appear first, and when the 1225 finally came down the track, we all had goose bumps seeing this thing alive again."

"THE ENGINE'S BEEN running naked," Michael says of the uncovered locomotive with its exposed boiler vessel. On recent Saturdays, Michael's worked to cover the locomotive with the sheet-metal jacket that provides insulation for the boiler and gives the engine a shiny, cosmetic look. He explains that heavy-gauge sheet metal must be cut to fit around the myriad pipes and tubes on the engine. The metal is then rolled in a press to give it a curve, placed over a layer of fiber-fax insulation much like angel hair and bolted down.

Pat has worked on everything from attaching ladders to the side of the engine, to sorting tools, cutting sheet metal with powerful electric shears, and chiseling off layered grease that's been accumulating on the floor of the engine



Renovating the 1225, a 401-ton steam locomotive, is a labor of love for members of the Michigan State Trust for Railway Preservation.

'When you stand beside the 1225, it's massive.'

— Michael Dosenski
engine restorer

pending on destination, are being planned for the summer months. They'll tie in with festivals and art fairs in St. Charles and Chesaning, home of the Chesaning Showboat.

The 1225 was built in 1944 during the anxious days of WWII, when rails were the busy arteries supplying the "Arsenal of Democracy" and people told time by the whistles of the frequent trains on their way through towns across the nation.

In those days the 1225 carried freight between Detroit, Saginaw, Grand Rapids, and Chicago on the Pere Marquette railroad, which merged with the Chesapeake and Ohio in 1947. The locomotive worked the rails until 1951 when steam engines were replaced by diesel-electrics and the steam era ended. The 1225 was retired from service and stood on display, immobile and silently rusting on the Michigan State University campus — until a group of students took over.

IN 1971 SOME enterprising MSU students decided to make the old 1225 run again. They hoped to steam up the locomotive to transport fans to Michigan State football games. Restoration in the early years moved slowly due to frequent turnover as student workers graduated and moved away. In 1981 the Michigan State Trust for Railway Preservation was established, and the 1225 moved from East Lansing to a dilapidated railroad machine shop in Owosso.

The shop, built in the 1890s, once belonged to the Ann Arbor Railroad. Michael Dobosenski says,

"fortunately, when the Ann Arbor Railroad went bankrupt, it left all the original equipment to maintain steam engines in the building. We have one of the best-equipped engine houses in the Midwest, complete with a wheel lathe."

He says the engine house, "is one of the five places in the country that can do engine repairs." Renovation is moving at a faster clip than it did in its early years, and Michael and Pat predict the 17-year project should be completed by the end of this winter.

Restoration hasn't been without headaches, humor and hidden costs. During an early fire up of the boiler, leaks were discovered and had to be repaired because leaks not only cut engine efficiency, but a fateful one could cause an explosion. On 1225's first run under its own steam since 1951, the crew had difficulty with the reverse mechanism and couldn't get the engine to back up. Getting out to push wasn't an option with the 401-ton locomotive.

Loading water into the boiler for a fireup required ingenuity because the water towers that once bridged tracks at regular intervals during the heyday of steam locomotives have been gone for years. Volunteers formed a bucket brigade and hoisted buckets to the top of the engine to fill the boiler. Filling the tender with coal presented another challenge. At capacity, the tender holds 23 tons of coal. The crew came up with a modern solution to the gargantuan task of taking on coal; they now use a large mechanical shovel to load coal aboard the

1225's tender.

The locomotive is a heavy-weight, which means track must be in top repair to support her. The renovated 1225 could have sat outside its Owosso engine house all steamed up with no place to go unless run-down sections of track were repaired. So this summer the Railway Preservation Trust sent out track repair crews to ready the tracks for the 1225's hefty weight.

Many armchair railway buffs donated money for the project, paying \$2.50 for each new tie on the track. Volunteer gandy dancers, a railroad term for track workers, worried more about the poison ivy growing rampant on the tracks than they minded the strenuous work of laying new ties. In retrospect, an itchy case of poison ivy may seem humorous, but Pat, who is intensely sensitive to the plant, chose not to work on track repair because even her memories of poison ivy aren't funny. The faces of crew members after a stint on the 1225 are a different matter. "They're black with soot," Michael says. "All you can see is the whites of their eyes."

Pat and Michael Dobosenski speak with enthusiasm of friendships they've made working with other railway buffs to restore the 1225. Because they relish being part of an organization devoted to keeping alive memories of the days when mighty steam engines ruled the rails, they savor memories of faces grimy from engine soot, the tension of fireups and test runs, and Saturdays filled with strenuous labor.



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Mike (who heads the math department at Bloomfield Hills Lahser High School) and Pat Dobosenski spend many Saturdays tinkering with the 1225, a steam locomotive. Mike has had a lifelong love affair with trains.

Dimensional watercolors
Artist sculpts canvasBy Mary Rodriguez
staff writer

Louise Nobili's dimensional watercolor has a curious beginning.

The long-time Wayne State University painting instructor was "playing around with mail order catalogs one day, tearing them up."

"The way the pages flew open fascinated me," she said. "I started to get serious, tearing and bending them, doing little sculpture pieces and lining them up on the kitchen counter."

Nobili's husband, Marco, was impressed and encouraged her efforts. "I'm a painter but I wanted to do sculpture, too," she said.

Working on an enormous canvas one day, Nobili looked down from a stapler and saw a reflection of her work in a wastebasket, noticing a three-dimensional appearance.

"I thought, if only I could put that into a painting."

The creative seed was planted. What evolved was Episodes, a sculptural, multi-dimensional painting loosely based on scenes from an Italian church panel series.

The work uses multiple layers of handmade Italian paper, each painted on both sides, folded into shapes and torn, combining painting and relief.

Nobili unveiled the painting at a WSU faculty show to rave reviews. "I was very excited about it," she said. "It was a hit. That encourage-

ment was so wonderful."

A new medium was born. That was nearly a dozen years ago. And Nobili has been turning out her work ever since.

More than 20 of her dimensional watercolors are on exhibit at the Rubiner Gallery, 7001 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield, through Nov. 12.

The trendsetting Episodes is the only work from that period in the show. Later works have less layers of paper and expose the color underneath in bolder, brighter fashion.

"The older works are more subtle," Nobili noted. "The newer paintings have more action, surprise, they are more definite and clear cut."

Nobili describes her work as "100 percent me."

She is an artist who pursues each project with an abstract idea, not a concrete image of the finished work.

"If there are no surprises, I don't like it," she said.

Although Nobili has a small studio in her Grosse Pointe home, she prefers to work out of her studio on Michigan Avenue in Detroit. Reams of paper are involved in each painting.

"Technically, it's a long process," she said.

Each work takes about three months. And with the folding and tearing involved, Nobili admits that just as much ends up being tossed out

as "Morpheus," a female figure appears standing, then seated in a semi-reclining position, and finally, floating through the air. A man on a horse is in the background. Purple, black, plum and peach meld together.

"Escape Into the Night" prominently features a dimensional staircase.

"Cliff's Edge" is robust and lively, with gold, turquoise, reds and purples. "Curious Seascapes" has browns and reds and curious sculpted pieces that look like seashells.

In addition to color, Nobili creates texture and movement in Circumlocution, which features a round centerpiece spewing orbs of various sizes.

This is Nobili's first major show in five years.

"I'm getting itchy to go into oils or watercolors again," she said.

Nobili retired from WSU a few years ago to devote herself full-time to painting.

She has exhibited in over 125 regional juried exhibitions, including 21 solo shows. The most recent was at the Ruth Vold Gallery in Chicago.

She is the recipient of the Founders Society Award from the Detroit Institute of Arts, which now includes her watercolor in its permanent collection. She has received numerous awards during her career, which spans 40 years.

The Rubiner Gallery is open Tuesday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Phone 626-3111.



Louise Nobili with "Episodes," nine separate panels tied together in a single work. It is one of her first paintings in the dimensional water-



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

color style. Her exhibit continues through Nov. 12 at Rubiner Gallery, 7001 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield.