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# South Bend Tribune

September 10, 2004

## Garden railroaders

### Southwestern Michigan club has 'a lot of fun'

By **DENISE PERRY DONAVIN**  
Tribune Correspondent

COLOMA -- Playing with trains, boulders, bridges, buildings and greenery, the members of the Southwestern Michigan Garden Railway Club meet weekly to improve their garden railway systems.

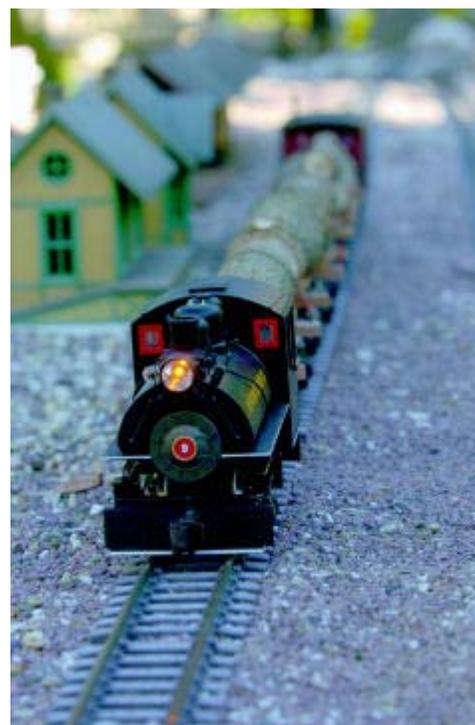
Members range in age from 12 years old to more than 80, and are from southwestern Michigan and northern Indiana. They share a love of trains and a passion for running them through a tamed wilderness.

The club's headquarters are next door to J&W Model Trains, 6450 E. Becht Road, in Coloma.

The members are often sprucing up tracks and town layouts for themselves and events like their fall open house, Saturday from 1 to 5 p.m. EDT and Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. .

The overall layout is 30 by 50 feet, and is two stories high with about 700 feet of track with G gauge trains, which are larger than the well-known Lionels or HO models.

"There are a variety of buildings and a waterfall, two creeks, and bridges have been built over the tracks so visitors can walk all the



**This G gauge train makes its way down the tracks on the Southwestern Michigan Garden Railway Club's layout in Coloma.**



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way around the garden layout," said Paul Ewing, a club member from South Bend and owner of Ewing's Hobbies. "When we started, over 10 years ago, visitors had to step up over the tracks or climb a few boulders."

That boulder-hopping has changed, though.

"We came out here with a can of yellow spray paint and some shovels in 1990," said Leonard Markstrom. "We drew a dog bone shape and started digging.

"Then we laid track. Dug the ponds. And laid more track over the years."

Markstrom, one of the original members, likes to build cars from scratch. He said that they call them Markstrom's Miracle -- "cause it's a miracle that they run."

Others like to construct or reconfigure the houses, churches, stores, mills and other scenic touches.

"You have to be a little bit creative to cut costs. But it doesn't matter if you spend \$300 or \$1,000," said Larry Myers. "The fun is just in the railroading."

David Hande is one of the youngest member.

At age 12, he has been a train fan since he was 2, according to his mom, Barbara.

She is a member of the club by default, since she has to drive him to the informal weekly meetings on Tuesday evenings and the club meetings on the second Saturday of every month.

"I like the realism of it. It is not realistic to buy a real locomotive so this is the next best thing. I enjoy spending time with the group," David said.

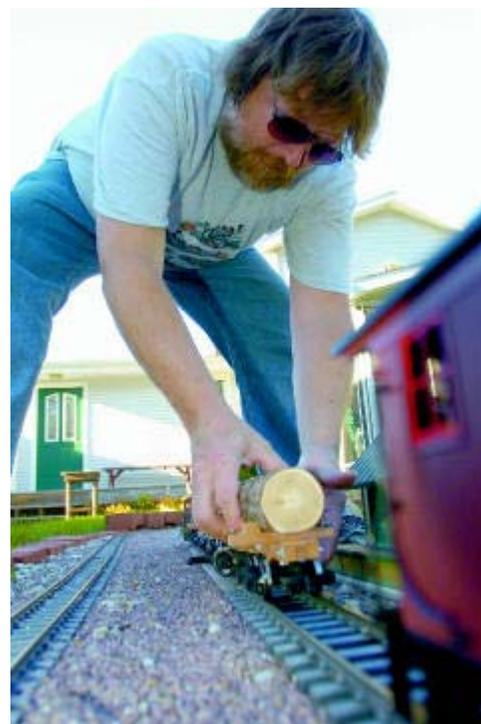
Membership is \$25 per year which goes towards track, rolling stock, trees and shrubs, and new items for the club's railway.

This year, they bought new remote control controllers.



**John Piehl adjusts a train on G gauge tracks at the Southwestern Michigan Garden Railway Club's layout in Coloma. The club is having an open house Sunday.**

Tribune Photos/SANTIAGO FLORES



**Grant Harper sets a lumber car on G gauge tracks on at the Southwestern Michigan Garden Railway Club's layout in Coloma.**

During winter months the club works on layout in the hobby shop that is about 15 by 9 feet. A waterfall is on the agenda for that two-story train layout.

"We have a lot of fun," Markstrom said.



**The Southwestern Michigan Garden Railway Club's layout in Coloma covers plenty of ground.**

Photo provided

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## Open House

The Southwestern Michigan Garden Railway Club is hosting its fall open house Saturday from 1 to 5 p.m. EDT and Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. EDT at its layout next to J&W Model Trains, 6450 E. Becht Road, Coloma. Club members meet weekly on Tuesday evenings and the second Saturday of every month. Membership is \$25. For more information, call (269) 468-5586 or (800) 443-0440.

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