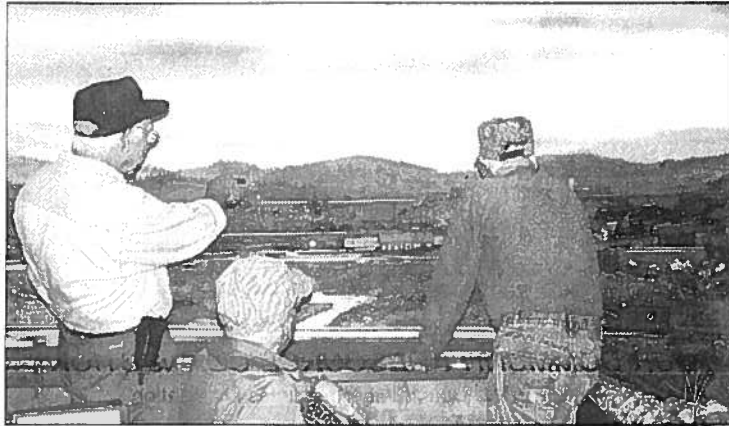


The Warm Beach railroad company



The overall goal of the train room design was to create a convincing mountain railroad scene, and the effect is remarkably genuine.

When Warm Beach Senior Community resident Don Spears went to former Executive Director Dave Fairchild and showed him his plans to turn an unused corner of the facility into a model train showroom, Fairchild's response was simple, "Go for it."

And so he did.

Spears and his wife had a train layout in every home they had ever owned. His father-in-law, Elmer McDowell, the founder of Warm Beach Senior Community and the namesake of the Elmer McDowell Health Care Center, was a bit of a "train nut."

Therefore, incorporating a model train showcase into the community seemed a fitting and fun project.

Turning a vacant outdoor area between the garden room (the dining room used by independent residents) and the nursing dining room into a showroom proved a difficult and time-consuming task.

First off, the residents had to build a removable roof for the area, and hoist it into place. The roof is similar to that of a greenhouse, so the trains are protected from the elements, but the workers and visitors can still feel a sense of the outdoors.

Resident volunteers developed the entire room themselves. With donations from Hamilton Lumber in Stanwood, they built a platform around the room for the track to be laid out on, with a higher platform in the back. They even included such challenging additions as a large working waterfall and a steaming volcano.

Model trains are classified by scale, referring to their track size, said Spears. The Warm Beach train room features O, HO, and N scale tracks. The two main trains, which travel all the way around the room, are the largest, while those on the back

platform are the smallest.

The tracks are controlled by two separate control panels that rely on direct current, low-voltage wiring.

The overall goal of the train room design was to create a convincing mountain railroad scene, and the effect is remarkably genuine. Minute attention to detail, including rocky mountains with train tunnels, small mining towns, tiny railroad crossing signs and people, and even trees, all added to the authenticity.

The back wall features a cloudy watercolor mural by Spears, which shows a starry

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Railroad

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scene under black light at night, completing the mountain effect.

Developing the train room has been an ongoing process, lasting several years. The vast majority of the memorabilia on display has been donated.

"It's kind of turning into a museum," Spears said.

People have donated anything relating to railroads, including signs and smaller models. They even received a century-old train from a Burlington engineer.

Warm Beach resident Ken Gray has created beautifully hand-made replicas of such fixtures as a classic water tank and

The residents who created and built the train room even named one of their engines the "Warm Beach & Pacific Coast RR." Another car features the name "Port Susan Bay Timber Co."

In 2006, as the yearly Christmas gift to residents, foam model trains were handed out.

Residents from the nursing center enjoy visiting the train room. "Everyone has a train story," Spears said. "It's fun to hear how trains bring up memories."

The train room is an ongoing project for residents. They continue to perfect and add details, but they've never logged the hours they have invested into the project.

"No one's keeping track," Spears added. "It's just fun."