

Gotta catch a train

By **BILL MILLER**

for the Mail Tribune

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When Dave Herzog gets a day off from his line-cook job at a local restaurant, he can't get to Medford's Railroad Park fast enough.

"When people ask me what I do on my days off," he said, "I tell them I build buildings and play with trains. They just don't get it and probably think I'm a little crazy, but look at this place. What could be better than doing something you love in a place like this?"

For more than a year now, Herzog has been refurbishing and creating some of the buildings that line the tracks of the Southern Oregon Live Steamers train ride in the park.

His hands show a few traces of brown stain as he proudly points to his latest creation, a scale model of Eagle Point's Butte Creek Mill.

"I built it an inch-and-a-half to the foot," he said, "so it's about 4 feet by 8."

To get accurate measurements, Herzog worked with Bob Russell, Eagle Point mayor and owner of the actual mill.

"He was there helping me measure out the whole thing," Herzog said.

Pointing to the small, shake shingles on the roof of his model, Herzog said all the structures he's built this year are made from recycled material.

"I like using these used shingles because it instantly ages the building," he said. "I cut these from regular shingles that were donated to a businessman in Talent. He looked at me and said, 'You make old-looking signs and buildings, why don't you use these?' "

Herzog said he's been able to find old wooden doll houses in thrift stores and uses them to start new buildings.

He inherited his love of model trains from his father.

"I started model railroading when I was 5 years old, just playing with my dad's trains," he said. "I didn't even start building buildings until I was about 10 or 12 years old."

As he got older, the trains and the buildings started to grow bigger along with him.

"I kept telling my dad, we have 2 1/2 acres here. Why don't we build the big stuff. We're railroading now, let's railroad a little bit bigger."

After joining the Steamers as a volunteer last year, Herzog asked what needed to be done.

"Nobody was refurbishing the buildings they already had," he said, "so that's what they asked me to do, and that's where it all started."

Now he suggests what he thinks may look good in the park, and once he gets an OK, he builds it.

"My next project is old downtown Jacksonville," he said. "Six buildings, 18 feet long and 4 feet wide."

Herzog already has finished models of the passenger and freight depots from Jacksonville's long-gone Rogue River Valley Railroad. He used Southern Oregon Historical Society photographs to build them just as they looked in the 1890s.

He said his fiancée loves trains, too, but he regrets that they have different days off.

"I do try to spend a day with her whenever I can," he said, "but sometimes it's, 'hey honey, I'm off to the Railroad Park,' and luckily she's OK with that.

"Some people just don't get it. They think it sounds like a lot of work, but believe me, I'm playing here — and it's great."

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If you go

Dave Herzog was quick to point out that the Southern Oregon Live Steamers are just one of five groups at Medford's Railroad Park, with all the individual groups working together and adding their expertise and railroad passion to the park.

The other groups are the Morse Telegraph Club, the Rogue Valley Model Railroad Club, the Southern Oregon Large Scale Train Club and the Southern Oregon Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.

Railroad Park, which is open April through October, closes its season after today. The hours are 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission to the park is free, but donations are welcomed. The park is adjacent to Fire Station No. 4 at the intersection of Table Rock Road and Berrydale Avenue, near Rogue Valley Mall in Medford.

The Butte Creek Mill model is clearly visible just past the entrance to the park by the tracks on your left as you approach the pedestrian crossing gate. To see "old Jacksonville" under construction, you'll have to ride the train.

Herzog has photos online at the Steamers' website, <http://southernoregonlivesteamers.webs.com>.