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## Botanica a stop on Garden Railway Tour

By Annie Calovich  
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Bob and Nancy Marin travel often to Colorado, where they love to ride the narrow-gauge railways. Back home, they try to re-create a bit of the magic in their backyard.

The Marins have a model railway that harks back to the narrow gauges of the 1960s in Colorado – before they were converted to tourist travel. Their San Luis and Rio Grande Southern Railway will be open to the public Sept. 15 as part of the 15th Annual Wichita Area Garden Railway Tour. The tour will choo-choo to eight stops that day, including a new one this year – Botanica, which recently received the donation of a permanent garden railway. If you have a free copy of the tour map, you and your immediate family can get into Botanica for free during the hours of the tour.

The Wichita Area Garden Railway Society puts on the free tour rain or shine. The Marins, who live at 844 N. Westlink, have been on the tour the past few years, and this year, Bob Marin pushed the tracks the full length of one side of the yard, extending the railway as far as he can in that spot.

Rather than rely on kits to build the structures that populate his layout, he makes his own, from the replica of nearby Peterson Elementary School (an obvious Wichita exception to the Colorado rule), to a mine, to a silo made from PVC pipe and topped with a toilet-bowl float, to a water tower built around a tin can, to the new Holy Family mission, modeled on the church the Marins attend when they're in Colorado.

Because children are inclined to get in there and play with a model train layout as if it were some very-much-above-average playhouse, the Marins have thoughtfully included a farmyard section at the front of the layout that the kids can get down on the ground and get their hands on.

For the future, "I want to get a lot more garden in it," Bob Marin says of his layout. He also wants to build up a current Hobby Lobby water feature into a full-fledged waterfall, make his mountains more mountainous and lengthen a tunnel.

Botanica's new Gene E. Spear Railroad Garden runs in the sensory garden and was dedicated Aug. 18. It's named for a member of the railway society who donated his equipment to form the garden. The trains run anytime a volunteer engineer is on hand to operate them. (And train lovers can volunteer for the duty; call 316-264-0448.)

Tour maps are available at Engine House Hobbies, 2718 E Boulevard Plaza; Garden Railway Gizmos, 1425 N. Broadway; and other hobby stores, and at garden centers and other locations.

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