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Display of trains starts at Cheekwood



Written by

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Mother Nature's fury may have temporarily shut down Cheekwood Botanical Gardens, but it didn't hurt the new Trains! exhibit.

According to spokeswoman Michelle Mowery Johnson, Cheekwood temporarily closed to the public last week after strong storms trekked through Middle Tennessee on Monday, causing downed trees and leaving thousands without power into Tuesday.

Cheekwood itself had at least 33 downed trees and had to call in a tree service for cleanup, Johnson said.

But the Trains! exhibit was not damaged.

The exhibit, which includes seven trains and 1,000 feet of track, was slated to open Saturday. It will run through Dec. 31.

It took Applied Imagination of Alexandria, Ky., one week to construct the model railroad throughout the one-acre Robertson Ellis Color Garden.

"All seven lines will be running at the same time all around the tracks," said Johnson. "It's pretty fun."

According to historians, garden railroading began not as a hobby, but as a planning tool in mid-19th century Europe, when builders of full-size railroads began making scale models to test track layouts and entice investors.

Toy makers began promoting model and toy trains, but since most people didn't have the space to house an indoor railway, the models were built and positioned as outdoor hobbies.

Over time, they lost popularity as new trends in gardening emerged.

In fact, garden railways became almost unheard of through the 1950s and '60s, but in the 1970s, they began to regain popularity in the United States.

Today, several large American companies make garden trains.

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In the Cheekwood garden, guests can see more than 2,500 tiny trees, shrubs, groundcovers and flowering plants in 250 varieties as landscape for the trains, complete with a 7-foot waterfall.

Tennessee historic sites, including Graceland, Alex Haley's boyhood home in Henning, the Parthenon, Cheekwood Mansion, the Hermitage and Carter House, are included in the display.

The G-scale trains, or models made many times smaller than full-size locomotives, will run rain or shine, all day on the following lines: Southern Line Mixed Freight Train; CSX Line Mixed Freight Train; East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Line also called the Tweetsie Railroad, Percy; the Troublesome Trucks; Thomas the Tank Engine; Lady Bug Train and Southern Crescent Passenger Train.

"This exhibition has something for everyone, the garden lover, history buff and train enthusiast. It is just a delightful way to welcome spring," said Jane Offenbach, president & CEO of Cheekwood Botanical Garden & Museum of Art

"We are excited to bring the garden railroad to Nashville. We wanted to add an extra educational twist to the exhibit by bringing in Tennessee history."

For more information about Trains!, visit www.cheekwood.org.

Contact Nicole Young at 615-259-8091 or nyoung@tennessean.com.

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