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North Barrington amazing garden of trains on rare display

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"Train Lady" Elaine Silets and her private model railroad gardens and museum will be open to the public June 23. The rare public showing is a fundraiser for a scholarship fund created in honor of Silets' late husband, attorney Harvey M. Silets.

BOB CHWEDYK | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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By Clara Bush

Elaine Silets is known as "The Train Lady" for the amazing display of model train railroads winding through her North Barrington garden and museum.

This weekend the public can get a rare glimpse at the display when Silets, an internationally acclaimed professional designer of railway gardens and indoor model railroads, opens up her gardens as a fundraiser in honor of her late husband, Harvey M. Silets.

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On Saturday, June 23, her company, Huff and Puff Industries Ltd., will hold its Garden Walk and Model Railroad Display at her Wandering Tree estate, 125 Arrowhead Lane in North Barrington.

The event, taking place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., benefits the Harvey M. Silets Memorial Scholarship Fund, created this year to fund scholarships for children and teens to attend Interlochen Arts Camp in Interlochen, Mich.

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Along with the garden railway, Japanese garden and Harvey M. Silets O-Scale Railroad Museum, there will be booths set up by Interlochen, Fiore Nursery and Landscape Supply, Stillman Nature Center and Operation Lifesaver. Singers and a woodwind quintet from Interlochen will perform in the gazebo by the property's four-acre spring-fed pond.

The booths will offer learning opportunities as visitors peruse Silets' intricate, hand-built creations. The Stillman Nature Center is bringing baby owls, and Operation Lifesaver will have train safety information.

Silets said she's expanded the event this year to make it more family-friendly.

"Harvey would've liked it that way," she said of her husband, an attorney who died in 2007.

Between 5,000 and 6,000 people came to 2011's public opening. A cash-only \$10 donation is suggested for adults, but children 16 and under are free.

With trains and displays interwoven through the gardens, Silets said wandering her 10-acre property can be an inexpensive full-day event. Visitors can chat with Silets and buy refreshments or bring their own food.

"It's become a family-oriented event, which is great," she said.

Silets said Interlochen was her former husband's favorite charity. Although he never attended as a student, she said, he visited several times and "fell in love with the place."

Famous alumni of the camp, which offers opportunities to learn from world-class teachers in the creative fields such as dance and film, include singers Josh Groban and Norah Jones, and cartoonist Cathy Guisewite.

Because Silets expects large crowds Saturday, there will be free parking off-site with shuttle service to and from the estate.

Shuttle parking lots are at the former Kmart at the corner of Rand and Whitney roads, Lake Zurich; J.J. Twig's Pizza & Pub North on the west side of Rand at Golfview Road, Lake Zurich; and the Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital Doctors Building off Route 22 near Kelsey Road in North Barrington.

For more information, visit trainlady.com.

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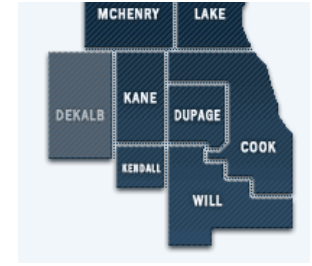
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