

Riding the rails

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Greg Franko runs trains in the back yard of his Canton home. / Bill Bresler | staff photographer

Railway tour

What: 8th annual Garden Railway Open Tour **Who:** Sponsored by the Lakeshore Garden Railway Club **When:** 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday, July 21; admission is free **Why:** Seven homes that feature garden railways displaying a variety of plants, trees and water features that enhance train gardens. **Where:** Homes are in Canton, Highland, Whitmore Lake, Bloomfield Hills (2), Brighton and Huntington Woods. Find a map of the locations at www.lakeshoregrc.org **Contact:** Rick and Shirley Breitzman, 248-887-5208

One of Greg Franko's favorite things to hear from his wife, Jane, is a request to expand the gorgeous garden the couple has cultivated in their Canton back yard.

That's because Franko, who retired from his job as a Tower Automotive

planner three years ago, knows when his wife gets new plants, he gets a new piece for his garden railroad.

Thanks to Jane's love of gardening, Franko, who has loved trains since his dad gave him his first Lionel train in 1957, has built an impressive, nearly-200-foot garden railway that weaves its way among the plants.

"My dad gave me that train; I had it in the basement, and I've had it ever since," Franko said. "I've always liked the larger trains. When the G-scale came out, I thought, 'I have to have that.'"

The couple has lived in their Tyndall Drive home for some 38 years, but the train track is only about 10 years old. It started not long after Greg and Jane were married, when Jane got him the first train for the railway (which still runs today). The couple set up the track around just one tree in the back yard.

Bonding time


Over the years, the railway has grown. Franko and his son built much of the backyard, and he and Jane have planted everything in the garden. The 60x120-foot yard is filled with beautiful flowers and plants, and the railway.

Tending the garden, and the railway, is something Franko said he and his wife do together.


“That’s our hobby together,” he said. “Instead of watching television, we’ll come out here and do some planting.”

Jane Franko said the railway and the garden help bring “a lot of interest” to the back yard.

“It started as a cottage garden, but as the trees came in, it converted itself to what I call

 organized chaos,” Jane Franko said with a chuckle. “The trains really add something to it.”

The railway hobby expanded a few years ago, when Franko read something about the Lakeshore Garden Railway Club on the Internet. He joined the club about three years ago, and is now getting ready for the eighth annual Garden Railway Open Tour, a seven-home traveling

 tour of garden railways, mostly in Oakland County.