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VIDEO: Recreating the Argent Lumber Company railroad

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By JESSICAH PETERS

The Greater Hardeeville Chamber of Commerce wants to recreate the 1938-1959 scene of the Argent Lumber Company through a model train garden.

The only memory left from the Argent Lumber Company is Engine No. 7, located on Main Street, and many old photographs. Ava Comer, chamber executive director, along with board members, decided an outdoor model train garden could enhance tourism.

“Train enthusiasts across the U.S. would love this garden, new residents who aren’t familiar with Hardeeville’s history could learn more and then there are residents who had families work at the Argent Lumber Company and could reminisce on the rich history,” Comer said.

The Argent Lumber Company was a cypress lumber operation that abandoned using mules to gather the swamp trees. Modernizing the operations, the company bought old steam trains to transport the logs.

The company’s narrow-gauge railroads were constructed to deliver timber to a processing area, where the lumber would be lifted onto standard railroad cars and be delivered across America.

The garden would recreate the Argent Lumber Company’s rail system with model trains and even a water aspect mimicking the Savannah River and swamp land. Although a location has not been set, Comer is applying for grants and plans to ask City Council to fund part of the \$20,000, 800-square-foot garden.

The first step in the project is funding.

“It’s a great idea that will gather people from all over who are interested in the history of what made Hardeeville what it is today,” Comer said. “With the engine No. 7 being so close to the chamber office, I see people taking pictures of the train. I always go out to ask what their story is. Often times it is train buffs who want to learn more about the company, but there’s just the engine and not much more.”

Chamber volunteer and Sun City resident, David Spisso, asked the Sun City Model Railroad Group to get involved. Nick DelPozzo, group president, said the group will offer consulting to the chamber.

“We’ll need to know what kind of trains, buildings, vegetation and any other details so we can know what to look for when we research prices,” DelPozzo said. “We’ll advise Ava and help the project to add the realism since we have many talented train members.”

The Sun City Model Railroad Group is made up of 28 members and the group has a 400-square-foot model train railroad inside the community. Jay Hubelbank, group member, said the Argent Lumber model train garden is a great concept for Hardeeville.

“It will make people come to Hardeeville instead of going through it,” Hubelbank said.

While the proposed Argent Lumber train garden may not be the exact replica of Engine No. 7, the group said it’s vital to be precise.

“To draw in train enthusiasts, you want to have the trains look as close as possible to the real thing,” DelPozzo said. “I’m sure we’ll have members who could help modify the trains purchased for the project to look similar to the real train.”

Comer hopes after the model train garden is built it will lead the way to an annual weekend event. She’s received unpublished photographs of the Argent Lumber workers.

The second phase of the Argent Lumber project is to host an art gallery event to reveal the various photos. Comer said an artist is willing to make a watercolor replica of one of the photos and auction it off.

“The purpose of the project is to focus on the ingenuity and determination of this business that made Hardeeville,” Comer said.

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