

Open-house holiday railroad tours are on track

by **Weldon B. Johnson** - Dec. 8, 2011 12:24 PM
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Members of the Arizona Big Train Operators group have been working on their railroads in preparation for their annual Christmas Open House Tours.

Members will open their homes to the public this weekend and the next to show off their garden railroad layouts and raise money for Cardon Children's Medical Center and Phoenix Children's Hospital. The home tours are from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday and Dec. 17 and 18.

Donations last year totaled more than \$5,000.

Rich Hull of Sun Lakes has spent the better part of the past month getting his model railroad layout ready for public viewing.

"I've been working about three solid weeks now," Hull said. "It's quite extensive. The trains are quite temperamental with the weather we've been having. For anybody to get a layout presentable to the public, it takes quite a while."

The Hulls have been participating in the home tours for the past six years. He said the challenge is keeping things fresh for repeat visitors.

"We've had little kids come out who have been here the past two or three years," Hull said. "They recognize when you **change** things up. We try to have two or three little things different that they can look for or do

things like have them look for the Santa Clauses. We have kids who will follow a train around the entire layout."

The group gets its name because members run model trains about 1/25th the size of real trains on G gauge tracks that are about 1.8 inches (45 millimeters) wide. The trains and tracks are bigger than the typical model trains that many enthusiasts start with as children.

The bigger trains require more space to put together a realistic looking layout, which makes them more conducive to operating outdoors. Some club members have layouts that include bridges, trestles, other **vehicles** and water features as well as more elaborate touches.

Hull's layout includes a model refinery that burns liquid propane gas.

Fifteen members of the club are opening their homes for the tours although not all members will be available both weekends. The layout at Cardon Children's Medical Center will also be part of the tour.

"This is the 13th year we've done it," member

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Ennis Thompson said. "The kids love it."

Details

Members of the Arizona Big Train Operators are celebrating the holidays by opening their homes to display their garden railroad layouts from 5:30-8:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday and Dec. 17 and 18.

Tax-deductible donations will be accepted during that time with proceeds benefiting Cardon Children's Medical Center and Phoenix Children's Hospital.

There are layouts open to the public in Chandler, Gilbert, Gold Canyon, Mesa and San Tan Valley in the East Valley as well as Glendale and Phoenix. There is also a layout in the lobby Cardon's Children's Medical Center in Mesa.

For more information, including detailed maps with the locations of all of the open layouts visit www.azbigtrains.org.

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