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Conductor Bud's railway is a miniature marvel in Eagan

Article by: LIZ ROLFSMEIER
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Though Bud Lutz's hometown of Bowman, N.D., was an early railroad stop, trains pass right by the town these days without slowing.

"They just blink their eyes and miss the town," said the Eagan resident.

However, in his backyard garden railway, Lutz has re-imagined Bowman as a bustling railroad stop. His G-scale train runs up to an elaborate handmade cedar depot with shingles the size of a fingernail, each one carefully laid by Lutz.

"It probably took me longer to put the roof on that than it would for someone to roof my house," he said.

Conductor Bud's railway garden has long been a destination in Eagan. In warm months, he opens it on select Sundays to the general public, attracting, he said, about 100 to 150 visitors a day. The last one of the season is next Sept. 15..

His train runs past miniature alpines on mossy hills, waterfalls turning water wheels, petrified wood cliffs. (He brings them back from a relative's place in Bowman, which is full of petrified wood, he said.) The beauty is in the details: a mosquito coil is lit to make a thin stream of smoke come out of a chimney. A pond mister hidden in a volcano causes it to steam lazily.

Clad in his red T-shirt and conductor hat, Lutz uses a remote control to stop and start the cars and blow the whistle. As the train rattled by, he clicked a button and from the cattle cars came a low mooring sound.



Bud Lutz's G-scale train passes by waterfalls and over miniature truss bridges he builds himself.

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“There’s something new this year,” he said, motioning to an area underneath a cable car lift bringing passengers up to a mountaintop resort. He pressed a button, and from a tiny lake, a geyser shot up.

Lutz said he often lies awake on winter nights thinking about new additions. “It’s a never-ending project,” he said. He spends the offseason in his basement workshop building cedar truss bridges or searching online for little motors and tiny townspeople.

“I’m kind of a scavenger,” he said.

In the spring, he meets with members of the Minnesota Garden Railway Society. “Members bring in what things they have made for bragging rights,” he said.

Though he tries to use G-scale size accessories, he’s not a purist. People have given him birdhouses that resemble tiny village buildings, which he’s incorporated into the setting.

“If something looks good, then I use it,” he said.

His only frustration: squirrels that shell nuts on the track and threaten to derail the train. “They run up and down the tracks just like it is their own private sidewalk,” he said.

Lutz, who also spends his holidays working as Santa, said he recently invited some of his fellow workers out to see the railway. “I couldn’t find him, with all the Santas,” said his 10-year-old granddaughter, Alexa.

Alexa, his “second in command,” as he calls her, helps give tours and answers questions, and at the end of a day, runs the train around the gold mine — named Alexa’s Gold Mine — up the electric elevator and into the train shed.

“It’s pretty much where I live,” she said. “I’m here a lot. When the water runs, it’s just kind of peaceful.”

Lutz and his late wife, Ayako, created their elaborate backyard garden with ponds, waterfalls and waterways in the 1970s. He started installing the railway in 2001 at his wife’s prodding, and she saw the train cars in operation one time before she died.

“She got to see them run once,” he said, “and now she sees them from way up.”



Lutz

Feed Loader,

if you go

The Lutz Railroad Garden

What: Open house, next Sunday, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Where:
2960 Egan Av., Eagan

Liz Rolfsmeier is a Twin Cities freelance writer.

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