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This Backyard Model Railroad is Large Enough for You to Ride

Dave Rasdal/SourceMedia Group News

DELAWARE — The whistle blows, the locomotive chugs and it's "All aboard!" the Cinder Curve and Northern railroad.



So we climb onto Tom Steffen's 1/8th-scale outdoor model railroad for a third-of-a-mile journey over a bridge, through a tunnel and among Maggie Steffen's fall flowers.

"It's something I've wanted to do for a long time," says Tom, 65, a retired carpenter. "The best I can recall, in 1979 I ordered a catalog of this stuff. That ignited the idea."

But it would take another 20 years before he'd buy the \$10,000 locomotive kit, an additional five years to build it and the ensuing years to construct the track by hand — preparing the raised rock bed and laying the 10-foot rails one at a time on ties he'd cut from scrap wood.

"You sawed them up from shelves in the closet," laughs his wife.

"You know how it is when money is tight," Tom laughs back.



Beginning with 1,000 feet of track, Tom has added another 700 feet. The layout includes loops at each end with manually-operated switches so he can circle them clockwise on one trip and counterclockwise on another. The north loop features a bridge over a valley; the south loop a 60-foot tunnel that he completed this summer by using a skidloader to move field stone around it for aesthetics.

As cold weather closes in, it's about time to put this toy train away for the winter. But that will give Tom time to think about what he'll add next. For, like all model railroaders, he laughs as he says, "You're never done."

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