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Train enthusiasts see dreams come true

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Brett Scott had long dreamed of the day when a model railroad empire would fill a spare room in his home. Slowly, but surely, that dream is becoming a reality.

The journey that has become the MGB Railroad has not always been an easy one.

At the age of 7, Scott ate a lot of breakfast cereal just so he could get enough proofs of purchase to buy a \$19.95 electric train for Christmas.

He returned to the hobby after his teenage years, building a loop of track on a 4-foot by 8-foot piece of plywood, just to be able to run trains.

But his serious model railroading began with a wedding gift from his father-in-law -- a 12-foot by 18-foot toolshed.

Armed with some trackplan books and unbridled enthusiasm, Scott enlisted the help of two of his friends. Matthew Harris and Gary Moore agreed to help build the miniature empire, and the MGB Railroad was officially formed in 1995. If you haven't guessed, it gets its name from the first names of the three founding members.

Now dubbed Version 1, that railroad was just the initial phase of a much larger and more aggressive undertaking. But from the pieces of lumber and track that became affectionately known as the "bomb shelter" arose lifelong friendships and a hunger for a bigger and better model railroad.

When Scott and his wife, Jeanne, began planning to build a new home, he coaxed her into letting him follow his dream. With a laugh, he admits today that he first planned his train room and then built a home around it.

In April 2005, work began on Version 2 of the MGB. The goal was to construct enough trackwork to host an open house in the fall. In July, Darren Scott (no relation) signed up for the final push get three sections of the layout finished enough to allow trains to run during the October 2005 public event. They made it with two weeks to spare.

About 40 people showed up for the club's first open house. They had the chance to submit entries in a contest to name two tunnels -- Pixley Pass and Cherokee Hide -- and watch trains circle Mount Pilot, cross an eight-foot straightaway and negotiate a temporary loop that sent the train barreling back toward Foggy Bottom Station.

It was a great success. But club members are hoping for an even bigger turnout Saturday. And they promise that those who saw the layout a year ago will be amazed by the changes that have resulted from the hard work of the existing MGB members - Brett Scott, Darren Scott, Gary Moore and David Welch.

*The new HO-scale layout is operated through the use of a Digitrax Digital Command Control (DCC) system. Eight of the club's steam and diesel locomotives have decoders installed in them, so visitors can expect to see up to four trains running at once.

- Willing engineers will be given the chance to operate a train in Bardstown yard.

*The layout has expanded. Last year, the layout took up about 184 square feet of space in Brett Scott's 18-foot by 49-foot room above the garage. Another 80 square feet has been added to the mainline run.

*A year ago, the 13-foot by 8-foot Mount Pilot section was a painted shell loosely resembling a mountain. More than 100 trees have been planted on the sides of the mountain and rock outcroppings have been added. The mountain section, which is the first scene to greet visitors as they enter the room, is 144-scale feet tall.

- Temporary structures and roughed-in scenery help mark the location of the outskirts of Bardstown and Bardstown yard - one of two major yards planned for the railroad.

In January, the MGB was incorporated as a nonprofit organization with tax-exempt status. The club owns the layout, but Brett Scott hosts it. Work sessions are held weekly and two times a month the group meets on Saturdays to run trains.

"Our objectives are to raise awareness of model railroading and draw interest in club membership," said Brett Scott as members made final preparations last Thursday for this weekend's second open house. "We need artistic types - those interested in building structures, painting, rolling stock and locomotive detailing."

There's plenty still to be done. The railroad is in its second phase of a six-phase project, leaving lots of track to be laid and scenery to be completed. Control panels still need to be built for the two yards, and there's lots of electrical work included in updating the railroad for DCC operation.

"We keep everything lighthearted and fun," said Brett Scott. "Our policy is not to get hung up on being so particular about the way it is done in the real world. That's why our motto is: 'MGB - Where Life Is Nothing But Fun'"
