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Model trains attract enthusiasts

By Peggy Blackburn
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"I've loved model trains ever since I can remember," said Gary Moore. "I had those big Lionel trains when I was a kid.

"A great uncle worked for L&N, and I worked for Southern in the track department for a short time," he continued. "I decided then that it would be best if I kept trains as a hobby."

Moore was in his element Saturday, as children and adults streamed into the MGB Railroad Club open house in Prattville. Moore -- the "G" in MGB -- happily discussed the model railroad layout with visitors, and occasionally adjusted pieces of the display.

"We've had this layout under construction for two years," he explained. "The group has been together since 1995, and started with Brett (Scott), Matt (Harris) and me."

MGB's first home was a 12-foot by 18-foot storage building. But when the Scotts built a new home, the blueprints included a 49-foot by 18-foot train room over the garage.

The original project is now called Version 1 by the members; and the current undertaking is known as Version 2.

Work on Version 2 started in April 2005, and the club held its first open house in October 2005. Approximately 40 guests attended the inaugural event.

Club members were hoping for a larger turnout this year, and they weren't disappointed. By the close of Saturday's second annual event, 133 people had visited the layout.

David Thornton decided to attend with son, Caleb, after reading about the open house in the newspaper. The Tallassee residents are both train fans.

Dan Forman said Scott invited him to the event, and he was delighted to accept.

"I'm a big train enthusiast, and I brought my son, Sam, because he loves trains too," Forman said. "I'm in the Air Force and I've been dragging my trains around with me for years, but I don't have the opportunity to set up something like this."

Attendees had the chance to play engineer, using hand-held controls. They also received a quick lesson in the computerized system used to run the trains.

The railroad layout is operated through a Digitrax Digital Command Control (DCC) system. Locomotives are equipped with decoders to make the system work.

Since the 2005 open house when the layout encompassed about 184 square feet, the group added about 80 square feet to its creation. The railroad is currently in the second phase of a six-phase plan.

"We ordinarily spend two hours on Thursday nights working, and two or three hours every other Saturday playing," said Moore. "We're hoping to eventually fill this room with trains."

