

## Railroad club looks for new, passionate members

December 6, 2019



When children visit the annual Holiday Fair, which returns to the Del Norte Fairgrounds Dec. 6-8, there are two popular attractions that annually draw their attention.

“They go see Santa, then come in here,” said David Walrath, president of the Crescent City Railroad Club. “They look at me and go ... okay.”

Walrath gets that reaction because his other side hobby, besides model railroads, is playing Santa.

But as the driving force behind the railroad club, he’d like to see today’s kids develop more than a passing fascination with the club’s activities.

He said the club has been around for more than 20 years and he’s been with it for 15. But it has just 10 active members. And it takes a lot of effort to set up for the Christmas Fair and, in August, the Del Norte County Fair.

The club needs additional members to replace those who are no longer involved.

“There’s a lot of train buffs in this town. But they’re not joiners.

“It’s not surprising how many people in this area love model trains. Unfortunately, it is surprising how many don’t want to join the club. They’ll donate stuff, they just don’t want to join the activities,” he said.

Current members range in age from the upper 80s to lower teens. Walrath said their lone teenager is particularly excited about the hobby. “He loves creating landscaping. He makes a lot of his own landscaping material. He’s burned out three or four blenders chopping stuff up,” Walrath said.

The club has been slowly adding to the railroad layout over the last five years in its current location at the fairgrounds. It’s an inexact recreation of this region. “In our world, the railroad actually made it from Grants Pass to here,” Walrath explained.

“The only reason we did that, we wanted two yards: Crescent City Yard and Grants Pass Yard.”

The rail lines run HO-scale trains, or 1/87th actual size. The tracks stretch from Grants Pass to Cave Junction, Smith River, Gasquet, Hiouchi and, ultimately, Crescent City.

Most of the buildings labeled with actual landmarks along the way are not accurate, Walrath said. “These buildings do not represent Crescent City very well. But some of them do, like the Rumiano’s Cheese Factory we built from scratch.

“Eventually, the others will get replaced. One thing at a time,” he said.

“I’m working on a building now to replace La Jolla Market in Smith River, because this (pointing at a building from a model kit) doesn’t even come close.”

Walrath said he wants to install a small building to represent the Coast Guard command that is home to the USCDC Dorado on Whaler Island, and replace the inaccurate model cannons with more-accurate shipboard cannons that Battery Point Lighthouse once had.

“I would also love to get a Thomas the Train and cars for the kids, but a good (digital command control) engine and train will run you \$500 to \$600,” Walrath said. “Right now, the highest priority is a new roof and replacing the most-obvious mismatched buildings.”

The railroad club meets every Saturday at 9 a.m. at the Apple Peddler restaurant, 308 U.S. Highway 101. To learn more, call Walrath at 707-954-8009.