

Working for HO scale at Willow Valley

Model trains are a serious hobby for three Willow Valley residents.

George Baile, Chuck Jones and Don "Santa Claus" Williams spend many hours of their time working with the model train display at Willow Valley Cultural Center.



Lori Van Ingen
Senior Citizens

Baile, who co-founded the retirement community's model train club with Bob Lebo and Floyd Carlton, said they had expressed interest in starting a train club to the president of Willow Valley before the cultural center was built.

A prime spot was found, not far from the information desk, for the train display. The model train club, which averages about 20 members, moved into its new home in 2002, and the C2R2 line was born.

The train display is now open to the public during marketing tours and open houses. "We love to show it off," Jones said.

Baile, 83, has been interested in HO model trains (1:87 scale) since graduating from college in metallurgical engineering.

"But then I got all wrapped up in work," he said. "When I retired in



Marty Heisey / Staff

From left, George Baile, Chuck Jones and Don Williams and the model train layout at Willow Valley.

1985, I got back into it and started a small layout in my basement."

Williams, 75, is a career railroad man, working 42 years on the railroad. He started as a towerman with the Reading Railroad in Sinking Spring in 1957 and later went on to be a train dispatcher, first with Reading and then with Conrail. He

retired in 1999.

As Williams' son grew up, Williams began working with HO models in addition to his full-scale railroad career, he said.

Jones, 78, said he got interested in trains "when I still believed in Santa Claus. My mom and dad put up an O gauge. Then I got inter-

ested in it myself and expanded our Christmas layout in the late 1930s."

In the late 1940s, Jones hooked up with HO trains, putting up a layout in the family house's unfinished third floor.

When Jones went off to Lehigh University, he didn't play around with it any longer and his father sold all the completed layout except for scenery.

"I got interested in other stuff, like radio-controlled airplanes and photography," Jones said. "But just before I retired in 1993, I built an HO layout in my home."

When he moved to Willow Valley, Jones gave his train layout to his daughter and son-in-law, who really weren't interested in model trains. So every time he goes to visit them, he brings some of it back for Willow Valley's train layout, he said.

"I'm pleased as punch to be here because my first love is trains," Jones said.

The model train club has developed a layout with 440 feet of track with two separate loops. Each can carry two HO trains plus one switching engine simultaneously.

The club has 11 operable engines and 113 cars — all donated by residents who had train layouts before they moved to Willow Valley,

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Trains

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according to Williams, the club's chairman.

"The trains are computer-controlled," Jones said. "In the old days, trains were not able to be run independently of each other. Now they are. That's a big bonus of the computer-controlled system."

They also have wireless controls, as well as toggles to change the track switches, he said.

The layout also has a tiny camera in a Pennsylvania Railroad F-7 diesel engine so the viewer can see real-time movement from the engineer's perspective on a 26-inch television set attached to the wall. The club also has DVDs of train movies that can be played instead of the train camera.

The train layout, which was built in sections, is set in a fictitious southeastern Pennsylvania town, circa the early 1950s.

Among the town's features are a band playing a concert in a bandstand, a church wedding, a hobo fire with banjo music, an airplane taking off on a runway, a stone quarry and an Amish farm.

The layout also contains

an automated trolley line that makes two stops in the town; four-way traffic lights that work, operating signals as trains go by; crossing gates that work with infrared beams; a movie theater with a lighted marquee for "The African Queen;" and lighting for the buildings as darkness arrives.

"We never had assigned times to work," said Baile. "You worked whenever your wife kicked you out of the kitchen."

About a half-dozen or so of the club members did most of the work on the layout, each working six to 12 hours a week for the last six years.

Baile and Jones work on the electrical parts of the layout, including all the lighting and sound signals, as well as switches for the track.

Williams works with the "rolling stuff," making sure all the engines and the tiny couplers work.

Next on the list to add to the layout is putting in a thunderstorm sans the rain and having a free-flying airplane.

"We need to do some research first," Jones said.

The club also hopes to find another room so they can add more to their layout.

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