

www.baltimoresun.com/features/bs-gl-goodworks-schumm-20111118,0,907264.story

baltimoresun.com

Family forgoes Thanksgiving to run model trains for charity

Train garden consumes Thanksgiving week

By [Mary Gail Hare](#), The Baltimore Sun

5:57 PM EST, November 19, 2011

Model trains, not turkey, top the Thanksgiving menu for the Schumm family of Harford County.

They have, for the past nine years, forgone the traditional dinner so they can treat thousands of others to a visual feast at the Kennedy Krieger Institute's Festival of Trees, which opens Friday at the Maryland State Fairgrounds in Timonium.

For the past several months, the Havre de Grace residents have been building a massive train garden in a storefront space donated by the operators at the Perryville Outlet Center in Cecil County. Jeff Schumm directs the effort that involves his wife, two teenage sons, some extended family and a few friends.

"It is for a good cause," said Jeff Schumm. "That is one of the reasons, but the biggest reason is the smiles on the faces of the kids who see this."

Now in its 22nd year, the festival has grown into Kennedy Krieger's largest fundraiser. More than 45,000 attended the three-day event last year.

Each year, Kennedy Krieger assists more than 16,000 children who suffer from brain and spinal cord injuries and disorders.

"The garden itself is an extraordinary feat of engineering and one of everyone's favorite things at the festival," said Lainy LeBow-Sachs, vice president of external relations at Kennedy Krieger Institute. "This family is also extraordinary in that they really exemplify volunteerism."

Organizers say the train garden has grown into a major attraction. Schumm responded to a request for help with a small layout in 2002 and has expanded every year. Now he estimates the space he needs, and the festival makes room. This year's entry will occupy more than 1,000 square feet in the Cow Palace.

"It always gets bigger, better and more interesting," LeBow-Sachs said. "They put it all together for us, and

advertisement



they don't say, 'See you Monday.' They stay the whole weekend to run it."

The volunteer builders have anchored six train tracks onto long sheets of painted green plywood. The pieces lock together into a wide oval. Tethered to the underside of the plywood are connector wires that link to a main operations board.

"It looks like a bird's nest underneath, but it communicates everything to the control panel," said Eric Schumm, 19. He and his 17-year-old brother, Zachary, are the family's fifth generation of train enthusiasts.

The layout grew even larger once their neighbor, Alan Betz, and his 13-year-old daughter joined the effort. Julia Betz was just 7 when she started working on the trains. Now she deftly handles an electric drill.

"I like spending this time with my dad," she said.

The group will soon take the pieces apart and haul everything to the Cow Palace, where they will rebuild the platform system. They can lock the plywood pieces together in a few hours and then tackle all the miniature wonders that will fill the inner circle. Trains will whistle and whirl constantly around miniature villages, farms, mountains, forests and waterways.

"It is always different," Jeff Schumm said. "We don't let it get stale. We know we will have crowds that are three-people-deep for most of the weekend. We want them to keep watching and get the kids counting the cars behind each engine."

His sons take over the remotes.

"It really is like putting on an amusement show," said Eric Schumm, a computer science student at Harford Community College.

The sons plan to carry on the family tradition started by their great-great-grandfather, whose circa-1910 trains are still in working condition. Their mother, Denise, is also into trains, but prefers "the whimsical stuff," she said. A Western Pacific car she purchased crossed the line, though. Her husband immediately changed the lettering to B&O.

"I don't have a man cave," said Jeff Schumm. "We have a family hobby we all do together."

All storage at the family home is a train garden in waiting.

"Our basement is lined with shelves filled with trains and is stacked with utility boxes filled with components," Denise Schumm said.

The festival undertaking has consumed most of the family's spare time for the past several months and will take up this entire week.

"We would all be sitting home playing with trains anyway," said Jeff Schumm. "It really is a family thing for us. Why not run trains for a good cause?"

Shoppers will find a winter wonderland with more than 600 decorated trees, wreaths and gingerbread houses, entertainment, crafts and games at the event, which runs from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday,

and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$12 for adults and \$6 for children and seniors. For more information, visit festivaloftrees.kennedykrieger.org or call 443-923-7000.

mary.gail.hare@baltsun.com



[Text NEWS to 70701 to get Baltimore Sun local news text alerts](#)

Copyright © 2011, [The Baltimore Sun](#)