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Model train traces local history

BY KATHY MELLOTT

The Tribune-Democrat

PORTAGE — The whistle sounds at South Fork and a train, loaded with goods from the Midwest, moves toward Portage. It passes a bony pile at Sonman and through the Gallitzin tunnels before making the big turn at Horseshoe Curve.

Sporting a striped engineer's cap, Charles Edwards is at the controls.

But rather than in the engine, Edwards sits behind a control box on the second floor of the Portage Station Museum, along Lee Street in the borough.

It's an HO scale train that is making the trip – part of a permanent display depicting life along the railroad during its heyday from 1930 to 1950.

Although it isn't

quite finished, the model railroad display is open to the public – while Edwards and others work on hundreds of trees covering the mountains and spruce up the ground areas.

"I hope it will bring more people into the museum, and I hope it is something people will enjoy," Edwards said.

Edwards is largely responsible for the intricately detailed, hand-crafted display which fills most of the second floor of what was once a train station.

The display, built with the spectator in mind, includes a 15-inch-

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high platform to one side for those who want a better view of the action.

The trains run on 225 feet of track.

Hundreds of hours were spent building the tree-filled mountains, tunnels, rail beds and towns that surround the tracks.

Edwards hopes it will provide visitors with a realistic glimpse into some of what he remembers as a child.

He vividly recalls his youth, living in South Fork where the railroad played a significant part.

"As a kid we had to walk over the tracks to get to our house from school, and I'd sit at the front window and watch the tracks and look out into the valley and see a mile of the Mainline," he said.

Much of the display features Edwards' private train collection, but more has been added through donations.

Money to build the base for the display and to purchase basic supplies came from the sale of sports memorabilia contributed by the late Robert "Bing" James of Portage.

Frank Serbian, a local artist specializing in landscape, donated his time to the project.

Al Moore, another local resident, built 90 percent of the display's buildings and assisted with the scenery.

Regis Huschak, president of the Portage Area Historical Society, which owns and operates the museum, hopes the display will bring plenty of visitors.

"It should draw people in," he said. "There are people who will go anywhere to see trains."



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Charles Edwards poses with the HO scale train display he has been working on since February at the Portage Station Museum. **John Rucosky/The Tribune-Democrat** (Click for larger image)

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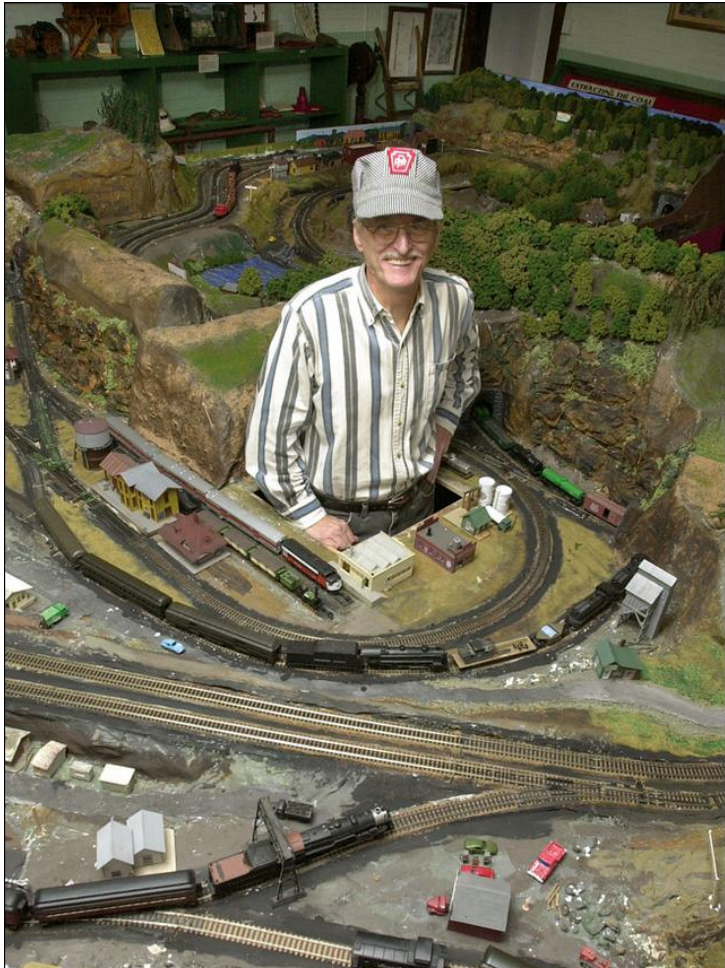
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Charles Edwards poses with the HO scale train display he has been working on since February at the Portage Station Museum.
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