

A Fascination with Model Trains Is Alive and Well in Bloomington

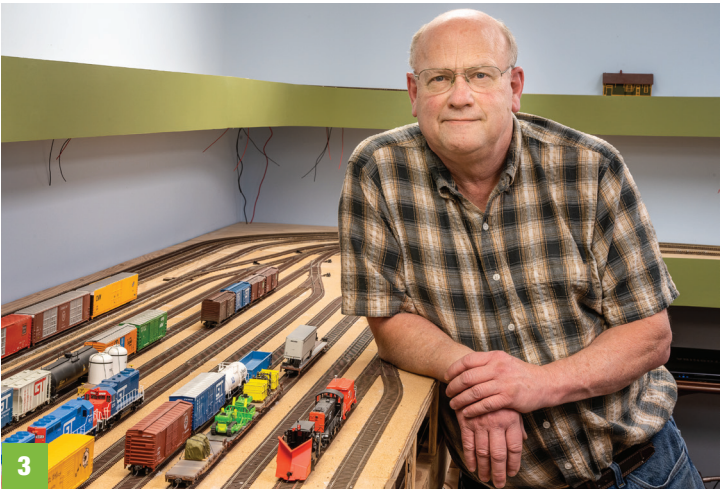
by Craig Coley
Winding through Trevor Jones’ basement is a train model of County Gloucester, England, circa 1960, that includes coal mines, cow pastures, castle ruins, and a hillside fox hunt. In his basement, Keith Clark, originally from Battle Creek, Michigan, is recreating the Grand Trunk Western Railroad from Chicago to Port Huron, Michigan, circa 1979.

Bloomington has a lively model railroading community. Clark, 67, publishes *The Rusty Spike*, the newsletter for the Central Indiana Division of the National Model Railroad Association. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, as many as 15



people would meet in a member’s basement twice a week to run trains or work on a “layout,” as the model set-ups are known. Jones says he can easily count more than two dozen layouts in the Bloomington area, and expects there are many more out there.

The hobby lends itself to solitary work, but many modelers appreciate the fellowship. For one thing, properly running a large layout requires several pairs of hands operating switches according to timetables. For another, each modeler has an affinity for a different dimension of the work, whether electronics,



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metalwork, woodwork, historical research, or scenery building. Although a lot of materials can be purchased for the layout, even those are generally customized. Modelers call this “kitbashing.”

Many have been modeling since childhood. Others, like Jones, took up the hobby as an



adult. The most common denominator is a childhood fascination with trains.

Since railroads have a smaller place in the American landscape today, it isn’t surprising that the Bloomington group comprises older modelers, but some young people still get into the hobby.

At age 5, Clark received a Lionel train set for Christmas. “I’ve had so many layouts since then I can’t count them all,” he says. “They never get done before I get off track—ha, ha—and go in another direction.” He says the Grand Trunk, the most ambitious layout he has undertaken, will be his last. “I’ll never see the end of this one.” ✱