



The TCA Division and Chapter Connection

"Night at the Museum 2012"

By Lillian T. Witmer

(written by a parent-participant)

Inside this issue:

NATM 2012 2

2012 Lionel Workshop 3



It was a night to remember! A score of elementary school-aged children along with their parents spent 15 hours packed with age-appropriate locomotive activities all at the National Toy Train Museum in Strasburg, PA. The mini-engineers jumped at the opportunity to help plan the group's layout. They rotated among the three stations: laying and wiring tracks, creating scenery, and assembling buildings! It was a grand time for all!

Generously hosted by TCA Volunteers, the night started off with a young person's favorite meal: pizza! That was a great ice breaker for the families as well as a fun way to introduce staff and the night's agenda. The mini-hobbyists separated into 3 groups. One group started with an interactive lesson by TCA Volunteer, Paul Edgar, on the differences between gauges of toy trains (HO, S, O-27 and O). He advised the children to consider their circumstances and surroundings when starting on platform building, like available space and storage ability. One interesting option was using a pulley system to store your platform in the ceiling of a garage! (And you thought you'd seen everything!)

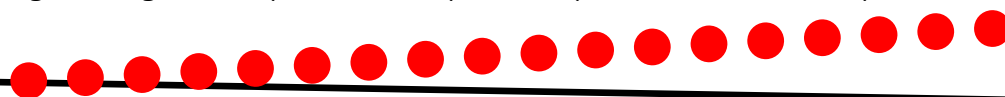
This was followed by a lively presentation by a most special guest, Joshua Lionel Cowan, who transported the wide-eyed kids back to the early 1900's. He gave them an attention-grabbing history lesson they're likely to remember for years to



TCA Mission

Statement

To develop an appreciation of and to preserve an important segment of history — Tinplate Toy Trains — through research, education, community outreach, fellowship, establishment of collecting standards, and to promote the growth and enjoyment of collecting and operating toy, model, and scale trains.



(continued from page 1)

come! Dressed in period costume, Mr. Cowan reminisced of his insatiable curiosity in how things worked, his inventive nature and how his perseverance and versatility during even the harshest of times of the Depression benefitted him and ultimately made his company the major toy manufacturer that it is.

The next station involved learning how to create their own trees - super cheap!! TCA Volunteers Christopher Haag and Paul Edgar showed the kids how to transform one large clump of branches into literally hundreds of life-like trees. The kids pruned, painted, glued, sprinkled and twisted! And Voila! They had their own scale-sized life-like trees to plant on their layout!

Moving along, the children chose from a great variety of Plasticville buildings. With their selection in hand, the children started constructing their pieces with the assistance of TCA Volunteer, Kurt Windlebleck. There were houses, stores, greenhouses and more! One could almost hear the hammering of nails in the business of that station!

Finally, there was the backdrop of scenery to create. TCA Volunteers, Joe Carr and Gary Bell donned the kids in paint "smocks" and taught them the importance of bringing their layout to life. They instructed them on painting the large canvas with sky, clouds and wild animals. Little artists went to town dabbing seagulls and clouds in the sky and wildlife on the mountainous ledges. They "carved" mountains from foam blocks and then stacked them so they tapered. They glued them together and rounded the edges

edges with a file, and again, Voila! They had an authentic mountain and tunnel!!

As the hours ticked by, the mini-engineers were kept energized with a combination of healthy snacks and sweets. Nonetheless, most of the participants had parked their cabooses in their sleeping bags and drifted off for a few hours of sleep. The 3 or 4 children that persevered through the final station were able to put the finishing touches on any unfinished pieces of work. Defying sleep, they enjoyed the wee hours of the morning operating their layout- bells and whistles and all with the guidance of TCA Volunteers Frank Rowan and Dave Linton. One could almost see smoke rise from the smokestack as the locomotive rounded the bend and exited the tunnel! And the familiar chug-chug-chug of their locomotive pleased those little ears making them smile from ear to ear! It was the best play time, and the greatest reward of a "hard" night's work!

At 6AM, the showing of *The Great Locomotive Chase* began. Children stirred in their sleeping bags while their parents tried to snooze just a little longer. Happy faces with tired eyes enjoyed the movie followed by a farewell breakfast, complete with a goodie bag, including a complimentary Family Pass to the Choo-Choo Barn, various literature on model trains, and best of all, a Lionel BNSF Single Dome Tank Car! The children were ecstatic! Squeals of delight interspersed with "Wow!" and "Cool!" erupted throughout the room! Toy train enthusiast, Nathaniel Witmer, exclaimed, "This was sooo coooo! Can we do this

again?!" His sister, Desiree Witmer, shared the same sentiment. "I want to do this again next year! Can we, Dad?!"

The time, expertise, and enthusiasm of the TCA Volunteers put into this program was absolutely phenomenal! Their diligence paid off 100 fold in the smiles on the faces of both children and parents! It was indeed a night to remember, and one that children, parents and staff can truly boast, "I survived a night at the National Train Museum and built a train layout with Lionel!!!" Just like the t-shirt "awarded" to children and parents alike said!

Note: Lillian is the mother of Nathaniel and Desiree Witmer. Joshua Lionel Cowan was portrayed by actor, Neill Hartley.



Lionel Intermediate Workshop

For our second year, TCA hosted the "Lionel Intermediate Workshop" for 9 to 14 year-olds — this time at the Railroad Museum of PA who offered us an air-conditioned space for the day.

Our friend, Tom Nuzzo from Lionel was on hand for the day and instructed everyone on the basics of electricity and how to troubleshoot electrical problems on your layout.

TCA member, Tom Groff who also owns the Choo-Choo Barn and is an amazing talent, taught the children how to build an animation for their own layouts and how to create realistic scenery for their animated piece.

The children loved the day and learned how to greatly improve their own layouts at home. Many thanks go to our volunteers, Tom Nuzzo, Tom Groff, Joe Carr, Christopher Haag and Gary Bell. We couldn't do it without you guys!



Nathaniel Witmer busy working on the tunnel



Desiree Witmer putting the finishing touches on her tree.

Special Note: I can't resist including here a photo of one of the participants (who will remain anonymous) at home after the "Lionel Intermediate Workshop" event. His parents sent me this photo. He had asked to set up his train when arriving home after the Workshop. After about an hour or so, his parents didn't hear the whistle anymore, only the whirring of the train. Upon checking, they found him asleep in the middle of the oval under the bed! Now there's a dedicated train enthusiast!



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