

A BLOOMING RAILWAY

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Ron Medvescek / Staff

Gary Martin, holding a model locomotive and tender, looks at a section of what he says is Tucson's largest garden railroad. It's behind his and his wife Peggy's home.

Garden tour to include yard's model trains

By Joan F. Barrett

SPECIAL TO THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Dazzling flowers, spectacular cacti, cooling water features and intriguing landscape designs appear on next weekend's annual Tucson Botanical Gardens Home Garden Tour.

But one of the circuit's five stops displays a more whimsical treat. Behind Gary and Peggy Martin's North Side home, ticket holders will see model (G-gauge) trains traveling past a miniature Western town, mining area and logging camp.

About a quarter-mile of track contributes to the couple's 4,000-square-foot oasis, which Gary says is Tucson's largest garden railroad. He and Peggy embraced the concept in 1994 after Gary wearied of the seasonal labor required to install and to dismantle railway displays by an indoor Christmas tree.

"I decided if I was going to work that hard, I wanted to leave it up," said Gary, who laid the track around a palo verde tree at the bottom of the sloped yard. He kept making additions, using a 1/2-inch to 1-foot scale.

Garden greenery includes white, yellow and purple lantana, juniper, white pine, native cacti and Mexican poppies. "If the animals eat it, then we don't plant it," Peggy noted about nearby wildlife, such as rabbits and javelina.

The Martins have taken up what they call the fastest-growing railroad hobby in the country and belong, with at least 80 other families, to the Tucson Garden Railway Society. "The membership grows continuously," said Gary, a for-

mer president of the club.

During construction of his Eagle Mountain Railroad line, the 62-year-old retained the yard's naturally hilly terrain and narrow wash. Exquisitely detailed scenes appear about every five feet. Based on Gary's extensive research, the tableaux reflect slices of Arizona life between 1890 and the mid-1930s.

For example, the garden's lowest level depicts Jerome in its heyday as a mining town. Figures at the train station include a man in a top hat with a trained bear.

To the west, a hobo village holds four residents. The schoolyard has a swing and slides, as well as a man trying to capture a skunk.

On the east, a boy with a balloon trudges up a hill, pulling a wagon that holds a girl. The children head toward the town's center, where buildings include a Chinese laundry and a bakery that advertises "best buns anywhere."

To add to the authentic atmosphere, a voice within the Red House Saloon says, "Get the sheriff." An audio specialist in California supplied the battery-operated, custom-made sounds used throughout the garden.

Rosemary, trimmed to look like trees, appears on a higher level. Flatcars with stacked lumber look ready to be pulled away from an adjacent sawmill.

Dwarf Alberta spruce also contributes to this section, which has been designed to resemble the White Mountains. Behind the mill, a small lake features a female moose standing on a rock.

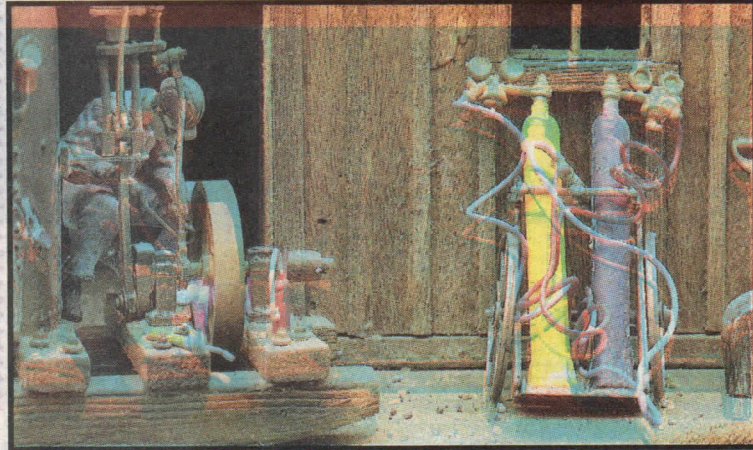
Four cabins, an outhouse and a main

If you go

- **What:** Tucson Botanical Gardens 17th annual Home Garden Tour; self-guided; five Tucson-area home gardens and admission to TBG.
- **Where:** Tickets include a map and provide one admission to each garden during the weekend.
- **When:** 10 a.m.-4 p.m. April 5 and April 6
- **Cost:** \$12 for TBG members (up to four tickets); \$14 for others, advance purchase; \$16 tour day.
- **Tickets:** TBG, 2150 N. Alvernon Way; Harlow Gardens, 5620 E. Pima St.; Mesquite Valley Growers, 8005 E. Speedway; B&B Cactus Farm, 11550 E. Speedway; Civano Nursery, 5301 S. Houghton Road; Rascon's Landscaping, 7974 N. Oracle Road; Rillito Nursery, 6303 N. La Cholla Blvd.
- **Information:** 626-5161



Many of the figures that appear in the tableaux were sculpted by Gary Martin



Ron Medvescek / Staff

A miniature welder works as a blue light glows to simulate sparks.

RAILWAY Tour to include garden with model trains

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lodge with a dining room make up the logging camp's residential section. Nearby, two men cut down a big tree.

Two fountains provide realistic waterfalls by the Emerald Mine. Radio control can quickly send a train with a load of gold ore whizzing through a tunnel.

Tracks end near the top of the garden, where cars with ballast and rails signify the work still ahead for earlier-era Chinese and Irish workers. Upbeat music spills from Big Bob's Saloon and Dance Hall.

The northeast corner features a train-maintenance area. Elements here include a repair shop, a fueling tower for oil-burning engines, a windmill, a water tank and an engine house.

This uppermost section requires the lowest maintenance because landscaping consists of rocks, native cacti and succulents.

At least \$20,000 has gone into the garden. For example, a kit to build the mine cost \$400; each foot of track represents \$2.50; one of the engines went for \$2,000.

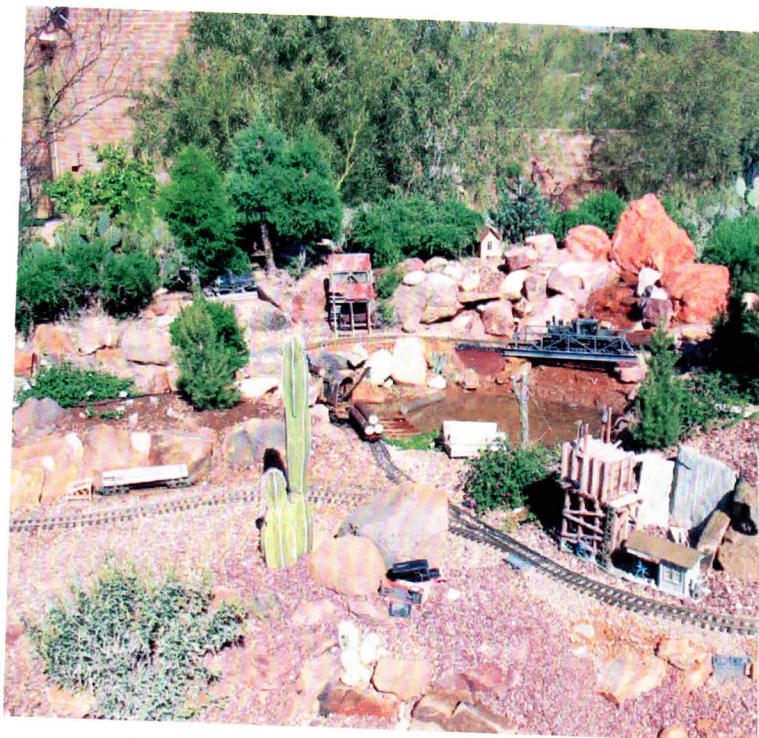
Many of the scenes' objects came from hobby shops, Ace Hardware on East 22nd Street, The Home Depot and Garden Railways magazine. But Gary also creates items.

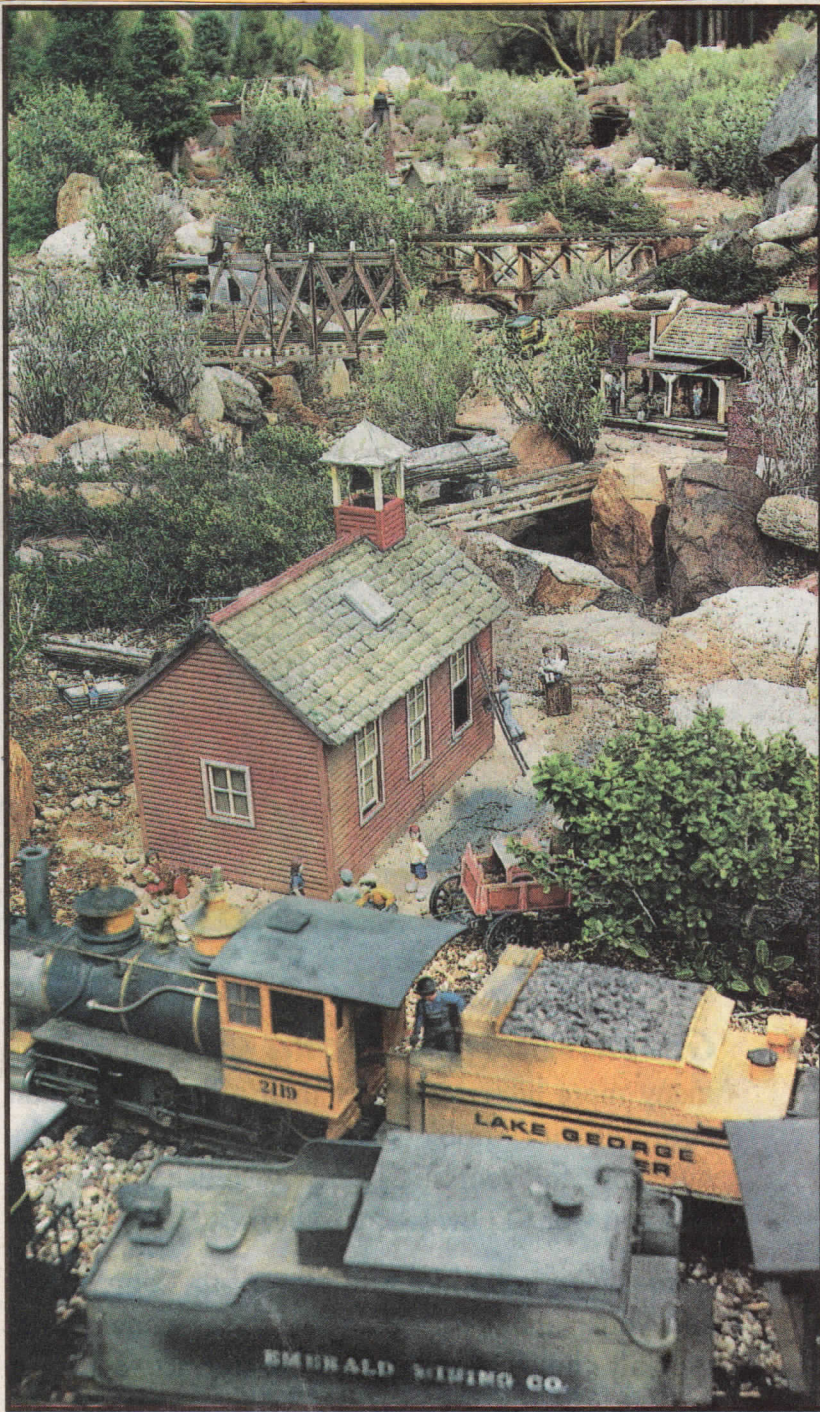
The retired engineer constructs tiny Styrofoam buildings such as Fagg's Fine furniture store, which appears in the garden and is named after club member Willis Fagg. The material holds up well in the desert climate.

Gary sculpts figures from clay and often handcrafts model railroad cars for customers in the eastern part of the United States. To avoid sun damage, most figures usually remain in boxes and only go outside for special occasions, such as the upcoming tour.

Gary suggests that visitors bring walking shoes for the tight garden trails and stay at least an hour to see all the scenes.

Meanwhile, he'll continue to devote at least one hour daily to garden maintenance. Routine tasks include cutting shrubs back and replacing ballast. "It is just like a real railroad. It is constant."





The Eagle Mountain Railroad line has about a quarter-mile of track, plus numerous scenes reflecting Arizona life between the 1890s and the mid-1930s.

Tucson Botanical Gardens

2003 Home Garden Tour



Celebration of Gardens

Saturday	Sunday
April 5th	April 6th
10 am-4 pm	10 am-4 pm

MEMBER TICKET

Admit One - \$12

- TBG: 2150 N. Alvernon Way
1. 4625 E. Cerro de Aguila
 2. 6237 E. Via de la Yerba
 3. 1544 W. Oak Shadows Pl.
 4. 2950 & 2980 E. River Rd.
 5. 2933 E. Helen St.