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Model trains, tracks and towns of all sizes displayed during 36th annual Holiday Rail Fair

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The middle section of Athens' Market on State's mall walkway was dominated Saturday and Sunday by model trains circling around switch-savvy tracks and bustling miniaturized towns, to the delight of passersby who could not get enough.

The event was the highly popular, 36th annual Holiday Rail Fair, featuring model train owners with trains sets scaled to various sizes.

As attentive passersby walked slowly down one side of the train displays, and then took some time to shop in stores on that side, they did so knowing they could circle back around to view the engines, cars, and cabooses from the other side.

That brings up a model train truism that Tony Magill, in his 16th year bringing his train sets to the Holiday Rail Fair, is more than happy to share. And that is: Young and old folks love trains equally, but for different reasons. For the kids, it's all about imagining playing with such wonderful toys in the house.

"I do get a lot of adult interest," said Magill, who lives in the New Marshfield area and said his train set — trestle, towns and all — would be twice its 10-by-23 foot size if he brought the entirety of it from his basement to the mall.

Like all the train set creators on hand, Magill belongs to the Railroad Model and Historical Society of Southeastern Ohio, Inc. Involved

in train modeling since he was 5 years old, Magill tends to take his model trains and the sets he builds for them most seriously: One trestle alone is an impressive 47 inches long, taking nearly three weeks to make. The handrails are made of guitar strings.

Another trestle on the switch-heavy track is made of toothpicks. Magill has more than one train set he brings that chugs along from the make-believe town of Green River, Kentucky, to the fictitious town of Maristein, Ohio. The lead engine in one of them is a Chessie System model from 1956.

He also has a lighted train set, and, a Chicago and Northwest Line set that — amazing as it is to see — has tiny people sitting in it.

"You have to look very close to see them," Magill said.

Way down the mall walkway, on its opposite end, the last train set is displayed, one that is certainly not the least. Owned by Kirk Depeel of Albany, it is a large, O-scale Lionel set. It features buttons one can push for horns and bells — children loving pressing those — and has 10 lever-controlled switches.

Like many model trains on display, Depeel's has many special "pieces" placed in it. One is a train car carrying a Saturn 5 rocket.

"That's the one they went to the moon with," he said.

Roger Crigger, a model train developer who recently moved from New Marshfield to Logan, dotted his train set "scenery" with dinosaurs and lots of popular culture characters — the Batmobile, King

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Kirk Depeel's large, O-scale Lionel train set at the Holiday Rail Fair over the weekend featured one rail car carrying the Saturn 5 rocket. "It's the one they went to the moon with," he said.

MESSENGER PHOTO BY LARRY DI GIOVANNI

RAIL FAIR

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Kong riding a skateboard, and even Kaiju monster favorite Godzilla.

Crigger loves collecting Godzilla pieces — he has 20 at home — as is well aware the giant gorilla and behemoth lizard with radioactive fire breath are set to "duke it out" in a moving coming up in 2020.

"I love model railroading

and science fiction," Crigger said. "So I decided to mix the two." His train set is scaled to size N, which is among the smallest in size.

Bree Trembly of Athens, enjoying Crigger's train set with children Caroline, 2, Tyler, 4, and her husband, Jason, pointed out a favored feature to them.

"You see the black car over there? It's a Batmobile," she said. It must be Gotham City."

Jason said all of the train

sets were amazingly impressive. Asked which ones are the most impressive, he said "I am pretty interested in terms of their switching (rails)."

Heather Stack enjoyed a large train set owned by Rick Crigger, Roger's brother, who received it from long-time friend Sam Ellis. Ellis was a model train stalwart who had been attending the Holiday Rail Fair since its days in the early 1980s. The simple oval-

shaped track went around a Christmas tree with a small town underneath.

"He gave his set to me so I can keep up the tradition," Crigger said.

Stack enjoyed Crigger's Christmas-themed set with her children, Jayden, 6, and Allyza, 5, along with their grandparents Chuck and Jackie West. They called the Holiday Rail Fair a great family experience to enjoy while holiday window shopping.