

Rail museum aims to 'save our history'

By NICOLE BAUTE
MERCURY STAFF

GUELPH

"Ding, ding, Jimmy," says conductor John French to the man in the motorman's cap.

The beautiful green train glides away from the station, making its way through woods blanketed with pink and purple-hued flowers.

No, it is not a spring afternoon in 1922. It's Victoria Day weekend at the Halton County Radial Railway museum, and the seats of the London and Port Stanley inter-urban are full of visitors wearing windbreakers and holding digital cameras.

Affectionately known as number 8, the train has a restored wooden interior with yellow stained-glass windows and hanging light fixtures.

Max Farfaras, 8, and his sister Olivia, 5, lean up against the window in the motorman's compartment, peering over the track disappearing beneath them.

They're all smiles when asked why they've come to see the trains.

"I just like the design, how they look," Max says.

"And it's fun to ride on them!" Olivia quickly adds, bouncing up and down.

Their father, Peter, says there's a constant association with trains at the Farfaras house. The kids watch the popular children's show "Thomas the Tank Engine," and know that Dad takes the train to work each day. It has become a hobby for the family; they even have a small

electric train set of their own.

But Bob Johnson and his brother, John, who have worked at the streetcar museum since long before it was even opened to the public, worry kids just don't care about trains like they used to.

As soon as Bob was old enough to walk, he would hike two and a half kilometres through Toronto to the Danforth train station to ogle the trains.

"I'd sit there all day," the 72-year-old recalls, demonstrating by slouching back in his chair with his eyes wide and his mouth open.

"I was a steam engine fan," he remembers. "I liked trolleys too. I liked anything on rails."

In the summer of 1960 Bob joined the Ontario Electric Railway Historical Association, a small club of young Toronto men who spent their weekends restoring a few old trains out in Milton. There had once been track there, running from Toronto to Guelph, but it was torn up during the Depression. Bob says that back in the '60s they found a few rail spikes out in the woods, relics from the train's heyday.

Eventually the club purchased a few acres of land for around \$200, money out of their own pockets. They slowly acquired more cars and land, and officially opened the museum to the public in 1972.

The museum now has about 40 trains and streetcars, but is still run almost entirely by volunteers — train enthusiasts like Johnson who come in from Toronto, Brantford and environs and spend their



John and Marcie Fisher and their children, Samantha, 5, and Michael, 3, visited the Halton County Radial Railway Museum on Guelph Line in Milton Sunday.

weekends playing with trains. Many even spend the night, bunking in a 1940s Via Rail sleeper.

Bob's brother, John, also remembers the summer of 1960, when he was first dragged out to the Milton site, which had "no water, no hydro, no nothing," he says. He was only 15, still in high school.

"We'd come with our lunch and we'd spend the day here fiddling around," says John, who was still fiddling around on Saturday, scraping rusted paint off a

1951 TTC streetcar destined to become an ice cream shop.

"I'm not sure what motivated people to come here," he mused, holding a yellow paint scraper. "I'm not sure what motivated me to come here."

He thinks about it for a few minutes.

"We saw this like a giant model railroad," he finally says. "You start with nothing. You start building the track and you have this vision of what it will look like."

"When you're young it's easy to think it's going to happen."

Faded black-and-white photographs in the museum's restored Rockwood station show people in their Sunday best, boarding 1920s streetcars in London, Brantford, Guelph and Niagara Falls, where service ran along the bottom of the gorge. During the Depression, nearly all the streetcars were taken off the tracks and replaced with buses.

"The whole idea, of course, was to save our history," Bob says, looking at the photographs.

"You know who we built this for? The kids. Because they wouldn't get to see it."

While Bob is happy to see some kids still get excited about antique trains and streetcars, he says the museum's biggest fans tend to be people closer to his own age.

Peter Borphey, 78, can attest to that. He comes to the museum every year or two, and keeps tabs on what the volunteers are working on.

In a dark old barn with high wood beams, the Guelph man points out an old train that once ran on Montreal tracks, where he grew up. He shows his grandson, 10-year-old Sean, who only has one thing to say about the streetcar museum: "It's cool."

"What's that saying," Borphey wonders, "the only difference between men and boys is the cost and size of their toys?"

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Catherine Toth spins her yarn web at a Barber Gallery art show Saturday.

DAVE CARTER, GUELPH MERCURY

Web of art on display at Barber Gallery

BEN GELINAS
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GUELPH

Taking turns wrapping red, purple and yellow yarn around lengths of taut rope tied to tree trunks and limbs behind the Barber Gallery Saturday, 23-year-old Catherine Toth and friends wove a web that stretched about three metres.

Toth and her boyfriend, Takashi Hilferink, have spun more than 50 similar webs since the summer of 2005, when Toth first wove a white one in her North York backyard.

Soon, she was spinning yarn between trees in Barry's Bay backwoods and downtown Toronto parks at night.

"It began as something to obstruct public space," she says. "Takashi was my partner in crime."

The pair would load up backpacks with yarn balls, grab a step ladder or lawn chair, and find a silent spot in a park to weave in the dark, their work revealed uncredited at sunrise.

Hilferink says it was artistic vandalism. It

was meant to jar passersby, accustomed to spider webs, maybe, but not yarn webs. Most would be torn down in a day.

Taking a ball of string in hand, Hilferink begins to wrap a new colour, Toth calls it "phlegm yellow," around this latest web. He pulls the strand tight around each stretching rope, making octagons.

"It's, like, totally relaxing and then it's, like, knot," he says. The yarn ball tends to tangle.

Barber is the first to show the webs in a gallery setting. Co-owner Leslie Hayes says she discovered Toth's web-work in an article clipped from Barry's Bay This Week, slid in among photography Guelph-born Toth submitted for potential display in the gallery.

"It's not just a matter of walking through nature," Hayes says. "You're actually participating in it."

Toth calls her work performance-based sculptures. As she spins, people come to watch. The braver among them can weave part of the web themselves.

Toth's friend Dave Renauld untangles a knot in the ball of red string in his hand. As the

web grows larger, it begins to shift, and looks as though it's melting.

"How do you want to proceed with this?" Renauld asks.

"Oh, a lot of kicking and whisky," Hilferink quips.

He says every spin requires the same degree of tension or the web will start looking funny. A lot of people helped weave the Barber Gallery web.

Toth climbs up on a ladder to reach the top. She unties a rope and tightens the web up. She says she's getting sick of weaving these webs with yarn.

Toth has tried weaving with phone cords, but they don't hold. She's keen on trying to do a web with piano wires. It would become an instrument: "something to play," she says, "like a huge harp." Though Hilferink says he worries the wire might cut up his hands.

Toth is organizing a community web weaving in the wooded area by the Boathouse June 2. Anyone's welcome, she says, especially kids.

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Sentencing for Cambridge doctor who assaulted prostitute delayed

KITCHENER

A Cambridge doctor convicted of assaulting a prostitute won't be sentenced until later this summer.

Dr. Nikolay Kaplan was originally scheduled to be sentenced Friday in Kitchener's Ontario Court. But his case has been delayed until July 27 because his lawyer needs more time to gather materials for the sentencing hearing.

Lawyer Brennan Smart said yesterday he wants to show the court that, "this is completely out of character and he doesn't pose any ongoing threat to the community."

An assessment of the doctor is being done, he said, without being specific.

Kaplan pleaded guilty last December to assaulting Patricia Cousins on a Kitchener

street late the night of Oct. 26, 2005 after she aborted an agreed upon sexual act.

The doctor said he gave her \$60 to have sex before she ran from his vehicle. He said he went after her to get his money back. He got angry when she wouldn't return it and admitted to hitting her once and kneeling her once.

But a judge believed Cousins who said she hadn't received the money before she ran.

Justice David Carr also concluded the assault was more serious than admitted. He said the doctor grabbed Cousins from behind, then slapped, punched and kicked her as she lay curled in a fetal position on Charles Street near Borden Street.

A waitress at a nearby Tim Hortons restaurant witnessed the assault.

• The Record

Pit bull sniffs out garbage fire

GUELPH

A city woman says her dog is to thank for discovering a fire beside a variety store early Sunday morning.

Barb Roy was walking her pit bull Julia near Grange Plaza around 1 a.m. Sunday when the dog began to pull in a direction they don't usually walk.

Roy thought Julia was being difficult, and she scolded her dog. But Julia kept pulling, and barking. When Roy submitted, the dog led her to a garbage bin on fire next to the mini mall's variety store.

The fire had spread to the edge of the store's sign damaging the bottom corner.

Roy and Julia ran down the hill to the No. 5 fire hall to tell firefighters, who extinguished the fire.

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