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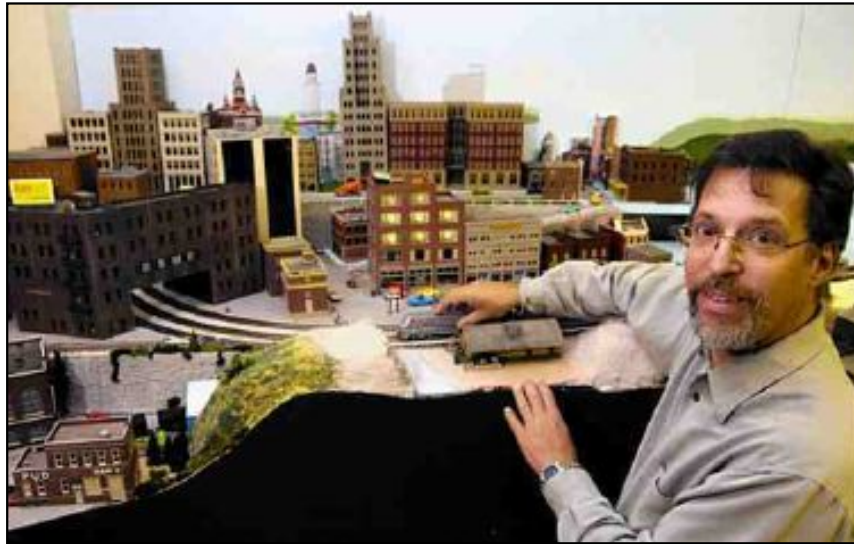
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Saturday, October 9, 2004

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GETTING TO KNOW DAVID COHN

Model railroad display switches to new home



READY TO ROLL: The Bellingham Society of Model Engineers has moved its location to 1469 Silver Run Lane in Alger in the old Alger Grange building. The society's treasurer, David Cohn, pictured, and the rest of the members have worked hard to complete as much of the track as they can for their open house today from noon to 5 p.m. *RACHEL E. BAYNE*
HERALD PHOTO

Michelle Nolan, For the Bellingham Herald

After more than a few members' tears and more than a little frustration, the Bellingham Society of Model Engineers is back on track.

Club official David Cohn can't contain his enthusiasm about the club's first open house today at its new home, the former Alger Grange. Club members have not been able to share their passion for model railroading for a year and a half, since being evicted from their longtime home in downtown Bellingham when the building's



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ownership changed hands.

Cohn, 51, and his family have lived in Bellingham since 1991. He spent 10 years as an architect in Memphis, Tenn., followed by eight years as editor of a computer drafting magazine. He also ran his own software company. He now edits a series of journals for Cyon Research Corp. of Bethesda, Md.

Question: It must feel pretty good to be back in action, right?

Answer: Right! The open house is a preliminary event to our major series of weekly open houses, which will start Nov. 27 and run through Dec. 18. The Alger Community Church has leased the old Alger Grange to our organization since April, and they've been absolutely wonderful to work with.

Q: How far along are you in reconstructing your layouts?

A: We're amazingly far along, in large part because we had a bunch of members who worked like dogs all summer. We're at a stage that we didn't reach for three or four years when we were on Grand Avenue. Our wood-and-steel benchwork is built and the track is in place. Some of us are collectors, but most of us are model builders because we want to create something that's prototypically correct. The new facility includes an HO-scale railroad with lots of mountains and several large city scenes, and the N-scale railroad is built on two levels. Both include state-of-the-art digital command control and sound effects, as well as incredibly realistic scenery.

Q: Since your club spent 10 years in your old basement digs in Bellingham, it must have been traumatic to be evicted.

A: It was very, very tough on us, especially since we had been so very much looking forward to hosting large groups of people who would be attending the national model railroad show in Seattle in July this past summer.

On the schedule

What: Open house by the Bellingham Society of Model Engineers.

When: noon to 5 p.m. today.

Where: the old Alger Grange, 1469 Silver Run Lane, next to Alger Community Church near the corner of Alger Road and Old Highway 99. That's less than a mile off of exit 240 on Interstate 5.

Admission: Free, but donations accepted.

Details: 733-0711 or www.bsme.org.

- Image recovery tool saves the digital day
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We had the largest layout in the state and the people we leased the basement from, Mindport Exhibits, had been great to work with. But they moved to Holly Street and the building's new owner gave us 30 days to vacate, so we were suddenly out in June of 2003. Yes, there were some tears when we had to tear down that wonderful 3,000-square foot layout.

Q: How many members does the club have?

A: We have some 30 members now, all men and all but one are residents of Whatcom County. We used to have a couple of women members, but they lived well out in the county and wanted to create their own layouts. We'd be happy to have potential new members inquire, including women. We meet every Thursday evening at 7 p.m. We also encourage junior members 18 and under, accompanied by parents.

Q: Are you affiliated with the Bellingham railway museum in the Parkade?

A: They were started by another group in town, though we have links to each other's Web sites. They opened last year.

Q: How does your group see its mission, besides providing sheer fun for "little kids" of all ages?

A: We're a nonprofit organization. We help educate the public about the importance of railroads and their role in the history of our country. We also stress the unique role railroads have played in the development of Bellingham, along with all of Whatcom and Skagit counties.

Michelle Nolan is a freelance writer. For questions or story ideas, contact Neighbors editor Dean Kahn at dean.kahn@bellinghamherald.com or 715-2291.

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