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Christmas, Trains, and Garden Railway Clubs

by Katharine Dokken

Christmas is probably the single busiest time of the year for a Garden Railway Club, short of hosting a convention.

My local Garden Railway Club, the Washington, Virginia and Maryland Garden Railway Society, started the Holiday season with a bang! During the very first weekend in December we put on running layouts at three different local shows: Fairfax Station Holiday Train Show in Fairfax, Virginia; Gardener's Holiday at Green Spring Garden Center in Alexandria, Virginia; and lastly at the Greenberg Show in Timonium, Maryland. Whew!

With that said and done, and barely a chance to breath, we then started setting up for the Holiday display at the United States Botanic Gardens, in Washington, D.C. The USBG is reopened to the public after a lengthy \$33.5 million renovation project that lasted four years and was the first significant renovation they had ever had. The Palm House had fallen into such disrepair that it had to be torn down in 1992. Electricity and plumbing were updated, the building is now handicapped accessible, has air conditioning, heating, and a ventilation system. Setup for our display had originally been set for November but the USBG had been taken over and used as an Anthrax Response Center during the recent outbreak of Anthrax terrorism in our area. That led to quite a delay in our setup for the grand reopening of the USBG, which was rescheduled to December 11, 2001.

Major thanks is owed to Jonathan Meador of LGB of America for providing the WVMGRS with track, power, and three trains to run at this display which ran daily through January 5, 2002. Our club display included a pond, waterfall, a mountainside, and a charming small town complete with streets and lawns.

Then our club and various members made the Washington Post newspaper two days in a row, once in regards to our holiday display at the United States Botanic Gardens and the other mention was for the National Christmas Tree. One of our club members was lucky (or unlucky?) enough to get his picture on the front page of the Metro section as he worked to help set up the traditional layout around the National Christmas Tree. This layout was a joint venture between several members of the WVMGRS and members of CAB (Chesapeake, Allegheny, & Blue Ridge LSRS), led by Bill Frank.

Then after those club members still feverishly setting up at USBG, took a quick shower and change, our club then put on our annual Christmas Party at the Folk Art Studio of Bowie, in Bowie, Maryland with a sumptuous feast, complete with a large sheet cake frosted with the clubs logo, and a wonderful Christmas Gift exchange game that gets wild every year. This years most "stolen" gift was a 7 VCR tape set of Railways in America, and the second most "stolen" gift was a wonderful large coffee table type book on Western Trains in the US. The annual gift exchange is the highlight of the party. If you haven't ever taken part in one of these exchanges, they can really be a riot. The basic rules are: Person 1 takes a gift from the pile and opens it in front of the crowd. Person 2 then has the option of taking a gift from the pile OR taking Person 1's gift... Leaving Person 1 to go back to the pile. Person 3 then has the option to take Person 1 or 2's gift or take one from the pile. Each person who has their gift "stolen" throughout the course of the game then can either take any other person's gift (except the one they lost) or go back to the pile

for a fresh one. The fun really gets going when two people conspire together to tag-team to get the presents they each want!

Then lastly we wrapped up the month with a 2 day pre-New Year's Eve display at the Greenberg Show in Chantilly, Virginia. Our theme for this show was "The Circus Comes to Town." Many great club members took the time to come out and help set up all day long on a Friday, members donated their circus rolling stock, and various circus tents, animals, circus wagons, etc., to create yet again another truly memorable display. Photographs of some of our recent events can be viewed on our clubs website at: <http://www.wvmgrs.org>