



WITH ONE OF HIS LIONEL TRAIN IN HAND, Jim Buchholz (above) said he became interested in model trains as a child. This engine was the first one he owned. An engine, (below) which is smaller than his original model train, rounds the corner near the grain elevator on the layout in the music teacher's basement.

# Models keep rail era alive

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

The silver train, with two diesel engines, two pullman cars, a mail car and a diner, pulled out of the small town, rolling along the track, over the bridge and through the mountains with New York City as a backdrop.

The train is 187th the size of a real train, like the ones Floyd Lotker used to travel on. Most of those trains are just memories today, but his models fill a small room off of the Lotker house. Trains also fill the basement at the home of Jim Buchholz. And while the two share the same hobby, model trains, the two men are very different.

Mr. Lotker farmed for 50 years, while Mr. Buchholz teaches music at Oberlin Elementary School. When Mr. Lotker and his wife Dottie moved to Decatur County they lived in a home without running water and electricity in the country. Mr. Buchholz and his wife, Jeri, live in town in a home they remodeled in order to allow for his train room downstairs.

Both owned a Lionel train when they were young and run model trains now. Unlike Mr. Buchholz, Mr. Lotker remembers when trains were the main mode of transportation.

Mr. Lotker, 80, recalls riding trains when he was young. It was the way to travel in that era, he said. People didn't fly and gas was rationed, so cars weren't used much.

He and his wife would board the train in McCook at 7 p.m. and be in Chicago at 9 a.m. the next day, then were in New York by the next morning.

Mr. Lotker said the whole experience was classy with women dressing in their best clothes and men in suits.

"Dinner on the train was first class," he

recalled. "It was like eating in a four- or five-star hotel, with the white table cloths, fresh flowers, waiters and great food."

Traveling back to McCook from New York, he said they would get on the local train into Oberlin, which stopped at all the towns on the way down from Nebraska.

Mr. Lotker has been collecting model trains almost as long as he has been riding the big ones. He says he bought his first model in 1934, when he was in the sixth grade and it sits on a shelf in his office today. It is about three times the size of the models which he now runs. The train has one engine, three large cars and a smaller one. He said, it cost \$20 and was made by Lionel trains.

Like Mr. Lotker, Mr. Buchholz said, he became interested in trains as a child. He had trains when he was a kid, and about 25 years ago he got into model trains as a hobby.

"I always thought trains were just fascinating," said Mr. Buchholz. "I always like big machinery."

In a 32-by-20 foot room in his basement, Mr. Buchholz has about 1,000 feet of track with a main line that runs about three miles and takes about three minutes for one train to complete. He runs about 600 cars and close to 100 locomotives.

His layout includes small towns, a grain coop, lake and mountain scene and several other places which the train travels through.

Mr. Buchholz operates the track on a remote which is plugged into a phone jack in the side of the layout, allowing him to unplug the remote and move around the room to see every angle and part of the tracks.

Engines and cars, with the exception of a

couple, represent real trains from real railroads, including the Northern Pacific, Union Pacific, Burlington Northern, the Northwestern and the Rio Grande. Mr. Buchholz assembles each piece of equipment, using every part found on a real car or engine.

He said most car kits take about 30 minutes to assemble, but some can take up to three hours. He said he only has three of the cars which took the maximum time.

"It's a hobby," he said. "I don't want it to become a job."

Model buildings can be assembled by hand, he said, but some come already assembled. Mr. Buchholz has built some of his buildings from materials from around the house.

Most of the model train accessories he buys from catalogs, which have up to 700 pages of merchandise. There are hobby stores, in which Mr. Buchholz shops, but it is hard to find train items in this area, he said.

Mr. Buchholz said he learned about putting the train and tracks together from books and others who run trains, including a friend from Norton, with whom he goes to watch the real thing at least once a year.

At one time, there was a model train club in Oberlin where interested persons could get together in a building downtown to run the trains on a shared layout. The club no longer exists, but there are several others in Oberlin who enjoy running trains, including Doug Fair, Jerry Lohoefer and Derrick Bolliger.

Mr. Lotker said each man is in a different phase with his railroad. Some are just beginning and others have an entire layout.

He said, "The hobby takes 'patience and perseverance and a love of trains.'"



Herald staff photos by Kimberly Brandt



THREE LINED UP ENGINES, 187 times smaller than a real railroad engine (above), wait to be added to the tracks at Mr. Buchholz' house. Floyd Lotker (right) uses a hand held remote to run small passenger trains in his home.