

Lyons garden provides showcases garden railroad

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Duane Lyon fell in love with trains and model railroading as a child. And it is that love of trains that will provide one of the most unique garden experiences in the area.

Lyon had the opportunity to ride in the caboose of the last steam powered freight train, that ran from Grand Rapids, Mich. to Chicago when he was 11-years-old. Not long afterward, he had the opportunity to ride in the last mail car to the Straights of Mackinaw, when the famous bridge to Michigan's Upper Peninsula was nearing completion.

In the 80s, he bought a German-made stainless steel train for a future garden railroad, but it wasn't until about five years ago that the train made it to its "destination."

"Many garden railroads are designed to exact realistic scale," Lyon said. "This railroad, however, is designed more as a kinetic garden sculpture. The landscape is inspired by natural features."

The tunnel hill is Lyon's version of "Big Rock Candy Mountain," and is made from quartz rock gathered near Hot Springs, Ark. Lyon said the gorge is based on a natural feature in Arkansas called the Pinnacle Rocks.

Lyon also enjoys woodworking, so many of the structures in the railroad garden were hand-crafted, representing buildings from the copper mining region of Michigan, where he grew up.

Plants featured in the railroad garden represents trees, bushes and general ground cover that are roughly to scale. Lyon said the plants are a work in progress, with new items added each year to gauge survival and beauty.

It is the only railroad garden on the Art in the Garden tour set for May 21, and may be the only railroad garden in the Golden Triangle area. The Lyons' garden is one of five gardens that will be on display for the annual event, sponsored by the Starkville Area Arts Council. On the day of the tour, local artists will create a work of art in one of the five gardens. Community members who have tour tickets will not only have the opportunity to tour some of the most amazing gardens in Starkville, they will also be able to interact with the artists as they create.

"This well-tended garden in Timbervale reflects the well-traveled homeowners' creative talents," said Wanda Thorne, co-director for the 2011 Art in the Garden event. "An elaborate arbor with unusual wind chimes, fashioned by Duane, greets you as you enter the back garden. He also built a kid-friendly garden that showcases a working model train."

Thorne said Diana Lyon's creative talents are also highlighted throughout the garden.

"Diana, an artist, made the stained glass inserts in the belvedere at the right rear of the garden, where the Lyons enjoy

refreshments while overlooking the garden. The garden shed (on the right) is her refuge, and the workshop (on the left) is his. The lion theme on signs and objects in the garden is a tribute to their last name.”

In their travels, they discovered the belvedere in gardens throughout Europe. In their own garden, Duane and Diana created their own version, allowing for a little more circulation.

“We call this the Southern belvedere,” Duane Lyon said. “Down here, we need as much air moving as possible.”

The Belvedere is one of the Lyons’ favorite spots in the garden. It is where they sit and enjoy the garden with their beverage of choice.

Suzy Turner, co-director of the 2011 Art in the Garden event, said the Belvedere is a lovely addition to the Lyons garden.

“One of my favorite aspects of the Lyons’ garden is sitting in the Belvedere with a glass of wine and watching the fabulous train run,” Turner said. “This is a garden not to be missed.”

For ticket information about the 2011 Art in the Garden event, contact the SAAC at 324-3080.