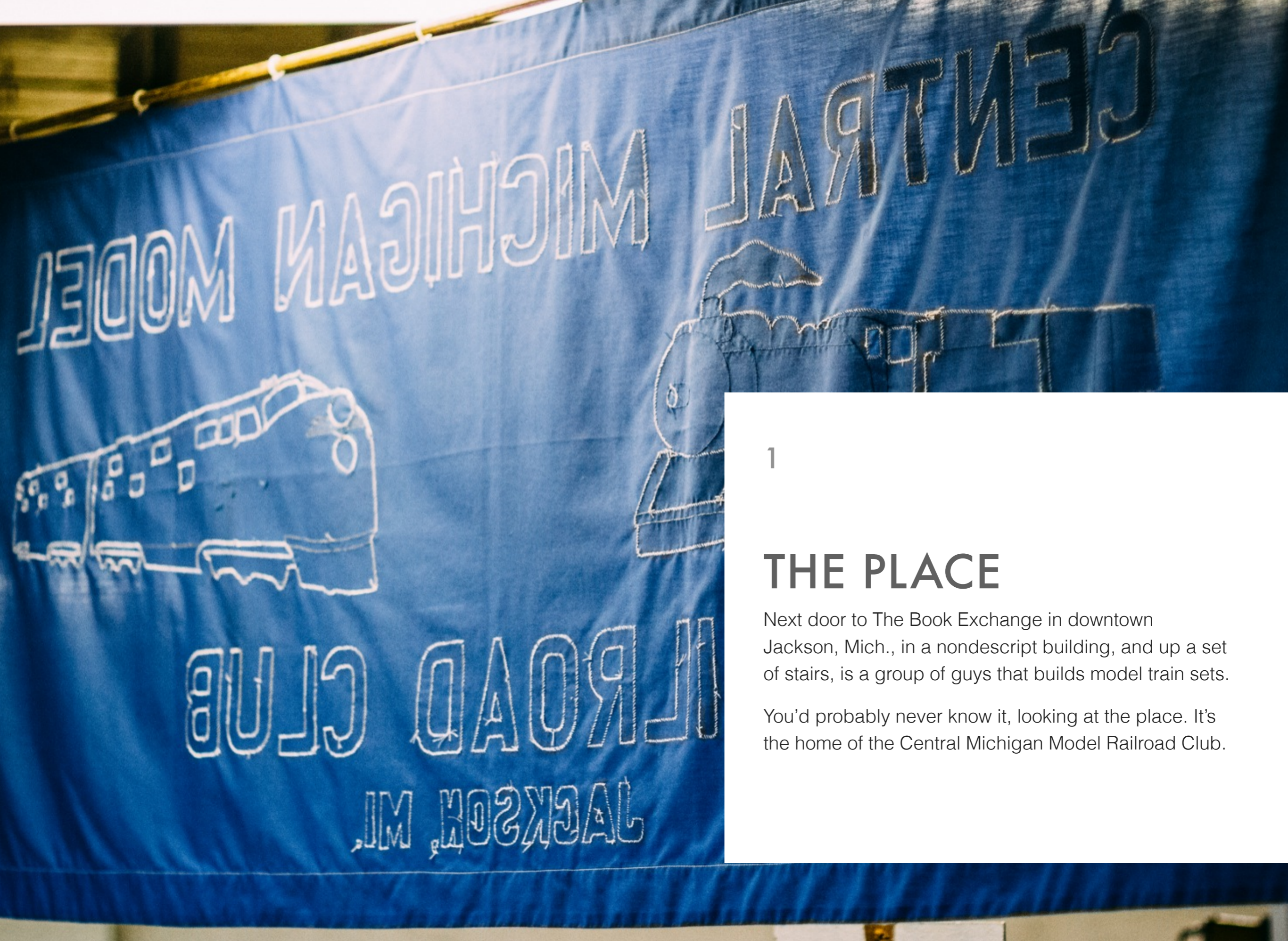




MODEL TRAINS IN JACKSON

CENTRAL MICHIGAN MODEL RAILROAD CLUB

BY DAVE LAWRENCE



1

THE PLACE

Next door to The Book Exchange in downtown Jackson, Mich., in a nondescript building, and up a set of stairs, is a group of guys that builds model train sets.

You'd probably never know it, looking at the place. It's the home of the Central Michigan Model Railroad Club.



THE PROJECT

When I was a member of the Jackson Breakfast Rotary Club, our weekly program was one of the highlights of the meeting. Each week we had a different visitor come and speak to our club about goings-on in Jackson.

On special weeks, we took a field trip and get out of our usual meeting setting at Steve's Ranch House. The Central Michigan Model Railroad Club was one of those meetings.

I remember climbing that rickety back fire escape stair set, and making my way into this studio-style floor with so much...what? Energy? Commotion?

The floor was humming.

It was such a neat experience, walking around and learning about the club and the model train sets. That experience stuck with me, and I tucked it away into my memory. I didn't know then what for, but I figured this special place, and these guys, would come up again.

As I got more into photography, I began looking for projects to challenge myself. Many photographers do this: they tackle creative themes to explore the art.



INTERESTING HOBBIES

I've always been interested in quirky hobbies. Hell, I had one myself for many years, fixing up old Macintosh computers and blogging about the Newton MessagePad (a proto PDA). I collected what others considered junk, fixed them up, and played with years-old Macintosh software.

For fun.

So I knew what it meant to have a hobby not many other people thought about, let alone *knew* about.

One of my projects, I decided, was to highlight interesting hobbies in my hometown. And then I remembered that model rail club we visited in Rotary.

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GOING BACK

On a whim, I sent an email to the model train club's Facebook page asking if the group would be interested in me visiting and taking some photos.

Almost instantly, [Louis Globensky](#) got back with me and agreed, without question.

It was March 2014, a bitter cold winter, as I climbed that fire escape again – this time in the dark of night – to visit the guys during their weekly meeting.

What I saw was just as spectacular as that first visit with fellow

Rotarians. Trains trucking along, little village scenes set up like some Dickens novel, and the guys (they're all guys, naturally) enjoying their fellowship.

For the project, I interviewed each guy about his train set, how he got started, and other little tidbits about life. Mostly, I let them talk.

It was a lot of fun, chatting with the club and learning about their passion. They worked hard, and spent a lot of time, on these train setups, and they were proud of their work.



2

THE GUYS

A lot of the guys started their model train hobby as kids. Jackson being a stop on the way from Detroit to Chicago, a few had grown up around trains, the rail yard, and engineering.

And more than a handful had a shy reserve about their "collection at home," in the basement or garage, in spite of their wives' wishes.

DAVID

They call David "The Conductor."

He joined the club at 16. A wunderkind who became the club's treasurer.

"I still live in my childhood home," David says. "I just kicked my parents out."

David is the first one in on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and usually the last one to turn out the lights.

The club meets at night in a second story loft in downtown Jackson, Mich. The hours come from the club's old location at





Jackson Crossing, the local mall. It used to be they'd meet on Mondays and Fridays, but David says they started using Wednesday as a "work day."

Though "work" is always code for "social."

"It's more social than anything. This is my social club," David says.

CRAIG

Craig grew up across the street from the Pontiac, Mich., rail yards. He's been watching them for a lot of years.

When he was 18, he got into model trains, but never really had a place to run them. In 2002, he moved to Jackson, and found the Central Michigan Model Railroad Club.

"Then I had a place to play with them," Craig says.





Before then, Craig studied geography in college. He also collected stamps and license plates. “It’s an OCD thing,” he says, with all the colors, symbols, and numbers.

Organizing. Categorizing.

Craig works in the travel industry in Novi.



 The One Who Dies 
With The Most Trains
AND A Loving Wife *WINS*

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BLAIR

Both sides of Blair's family has worked on the railroad. He has five family members riding the rails.

"I love seeing my brother drive by on the train," he says.

Blair's been collecting train memorabilia since he was young. He has an O-gauge train set at home, and the GTs are his favorites.

He's grateful for the Central Michigan Model Railroad Club.

"I can't personally work on the railroad because I'm deaf, so this is the next best thing."





ART

Art has been collecting model trains all his life.

His mom and dad got him started as a kid, and he still has the original toy train. “It still runs,” he says.

After his children left the house, he converted their bedrooms into train rooms.

“It keeps me occupied.”





After 20 years in the club, with everyone placing trains on each other's sets, how does Art know which train is his?

"We just know."



GENE

Gene is 85 years old. He's been seriously collecting trains for more than 55 years. It all started with a \$5 set during the Depression.

He served two tours of duty in World War II and in the Korean War.

"When I got home from the service, I started collecting more."

Since then, he's worked in a number of jobs: pest control, fencing (as in fences), antiques.







Gene's been with the Central Michigan Model Railroad Club since the beginning, in the 1960s. It's the tradition – the idea of keeping these old trains alive – that keeps him interested.

He likes the G-gauge trains: “The big ones.”

His set is full of moving parts, like a talking car wash, and a tornado that spins around on an old record player (left).

Gene also collects barbed wire.

LOUIS

Louis is more than willing to pay \$300 for an individual train car, if the model is right.

“That’s how it works,” he says.

Louis manages the rail club’s online presence on Facebook. His passion for model trains helps him inspire others at the local toy shop, in their hobby department, during the holidays.





“There’s lots of years of knowledge here,” he says of the club. He laughs that, like a lot of hobbies, what you acquire can get quickly out of hand.

“You should see what I have at home.”



BOB

Bob's been collecting model trains since he was eight years old.

He always loved trains, but it was when his dad bought him a Lionel – a familiar story in the Central Michigan Model Railroad Club – that he added model trains as a hobby.

Bob has fond memories of railroad travel, like when he rode the Orient Express during the Korean War.

He was able to see the world.





Now he's lucky to see his trains.

"N-gauge is getting too small," Bob says.
"I need a magnifying glass to work on it."



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LEARN MORE

You can learn more about the Central Michigan Model Railroad club on [their Facebook page](#).

Yes, model trains come in many sizes. They're called scales (for the trains), or gauges (for the rails). You can learn about the [different sizes at the National Model Railroad Association \(NMRA\)](#). A good visual guide is at the [Lionel site](#), and at [Wikipedia](#) (naturally).

Jackson's own Toy House store has a selection of model train kits for purchase.

ABOUT DAVE LAWRENCE

I'm a hobbyist photographer from Jackson, Michigan. I like to tackle portrait projects about the personalities in my community.

This project originated on my blog, [davelawrence.photo](#), in 2014.

I also completed on project on artists in Jackson, appropriately titled [Artists In Jackson](#).



MICHIGAN CENTRAL MODEL RAILROADERS

JACKSON, MICHIGAN

