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A model of the former Nickel Plate that ran through Hoopeston now runs near the ceiling in Anderson Funeral Home's children's room.

Train celebrates past, provides joy for young, young-at-heart

You might say Ryan Anderson is "training" kids about the cycle of life.

Anderson, owner of Anderson Funeral Home in Hoopeston, has added a new feature to the funeral home's children's room - a model of a train that might have run through Hoopeston on the former Nickel Plate line.

The train is comprised of the engine, coal car, boxcar, grain car, flatbed, coal tender and caboose. It runs on a wooden trestle suspended from the ceiling, its speed determined by a remote control.

The idea for the train came one day when Anderson was looking at old photos that decorate the funeral home. A photo of the former depot got him thinking. "I

thought 'we'll do something on the ceiling, try to do
 See TRAIN on other side

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Train continued from other side

something outside the box of a funeral home," he said.

Once Anderson decided to get a train, he contacted Chad Thomas of the Hoopeston-based East Central Illinois Model Railroading Club. Thomas coupled Anderson with Steve Malan, of the Effingham area, who provided the train.

Those who knew about the project, kept tabs on its progress. One of those people was Robert Danner, who was battling cancer. His usual question "are you going to get this thing going before I die?," became a joke between the two men.

When Mr. Danner died on July 12, the train was not yet running, but Anderson wanted it going for the visitation. He turned again to Thomas, telling him, "I want this to run. I need this to run."

In Mr. Danner's honor, the train ran on time.

Since then, Anderson runs the train three to four times per visitation. Sometimes it's run for children and sometimes it's run for adults, who are equally interested in it.

One time, a youngster was having so much fun with the train during a visitation, he asked his mother to leave and come back to get him. Anderson knew the boy's family and granted the request. "We're ministering to kids about life and death," he said.

It is looking at his business as a ministry that causes Anderson to offer activities that make his funeral home less funereal and more fun.

Another of those activities is holding trick-or-treating outside the funeral home. Anderson started that tradition in 2006, when about 100 youngsters showed up for treats that include hotdogs and hot chocolate. Last year's event drew 550, he said.

Anderson also has plans to remodel part of the funeral home to resemble a train car, where families can gather for meals after services.

To go along with the train, Anderson is collecting information and memorabilia from the Nickel Plate, properly known as the New York, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad.

Anyone with information, photos or other mementos is asked to contact him by phone at (217) 283-6696 or email at andersonfh427@hotmail.com.



Photo by Willis A. McCaleb/
Center for Railroad Photography & Art

A piece of history Ryan Anderson found in researching the former Nickel Plate Railroad is this photo of railroad workers at the Hoopeston station, including, from left, James Hoover, Agent Fred Flora and Don Tranbarger. The photo appeared in the September 1953 issue of the Nickel Plate Road magazine.

Weather

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