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### Trains of thought - Exhibit is model of city's locomotive history



Dustin and Kaity Hammons are mesmerized by the exhibit at Tipton-Haynes. (Dave Boyd / Johnson City Press)

By Rex Barber  
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Johnson City's history is intimately intertwined with locomotives.

In fact, the city was originally named Johnson's Depot, which was built by Henry Johnson in the mid-1800s along the railroad that runs through town.

Now, at Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site, everyone can see part of that history and that of the region as a whole, on a smaller scale, of course.

Paul Haynes, a member of the Mountain Empire Modular Railroaders, was at Tipton-Haynes Saturday, along with several other members of the club, running a large 40-foot by 20-foot model train layout of a 1950s to 1960s era town and countryside scene.

"Basically, what we're modeling is an Appalachian mountain summer,"

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Haynes said Saturday as onlookers milled about watching his and others' trains slowly chug around a nostalgic country town, through tunnels, over bridges and near work sites.

The club has been in existence since 1993 and its members and their trains have appeared at venues across the region, including the Appalachian Fairgrounds in Gray, Erwin's annual Apple Festival and East Tennessee State University, where they had been on display at the Reece Museum before moving their setup to Tipton-Haynes over the past few weeks.

The grand opening was Saturday.

"We were actually invited to set up," Haynes said. "We'll be here approximately a year, then we'll move back over to ETSU."

After that, Tipton-Haynes plans to have at least a notion of what they want to display permanently in the room that housed the train club.

Near the end of next summer, the club will move into a permanent home on ETSU's campus in what is now the College of Nursing building.

The facility will be renamed the John L. Carter Railroad Museum. Carter was the president of Clinchfield Railroad at the turn of the century, and Haynes said it just seemed appropriate to name the museum after him because of his contribution to the area.

"And the property where ETSU now sits was donated by him," Haynes said.

Haynes has been interested in trains his whole life and this hobby is an opportunity, he said, to help preserve the rich history of trains and get people interested in modeling.

"Oh, I thoroughly enjoy it," he said as he gazed over the room at the massive display. "My interest was first sparked back about 1961. My grandfather, on my mother's side, was a civil engineer for New York Central Railroad for 50 years."

Though Haynes has been a member since the club's founding, newcomers like Jack Cope, Jonesborough, had no trouble fitting in.

"A friend of mine joined this (the club) and talked me into coming over," he said. "And I've been here three weeks and I enjoy every minute of it."

Randy Richardson and his son, Hunter, Jonesborough, also were at the grand opening.

"We're thinking about joining next week," Randy said.

He and his son came out to talk to some of the members and see what they needed to bring and when they could join.

**Hunter was fascinated by the gigantic, moving scene, staring as his father hoisted him up for a better look.**

**“Yeah, it’s huge, but I’m ... ,” Hunter paused as he wandered around the edge of the display table, taking it all in. “I’m impressed by it, I’m impressed by it,” he said with wide-eyed wonder.**

**The club meets every third Tuesday of the month at the Tipton-Haynes site and every Thursday to work on the display.**

**Anyone is welcome to come by and join or just admire the model.**

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