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Train delights young, young-at-heart

BY ALISON STANTON

Tom Henrickson was attending a reunion in Houston, TX, when something caught his eye: a trackless train.

Inspired by the sight of the colorful train, Henrickson decided to learn how to build one that was similar and open his own business that would allow customers to rent it for parties and other events.

In the fall of 2011, Henrickson began building his trackless train.

"It took about three to four months to go from concept to train," he says.

Last April, Henrickson opened Desert Dwellers Express in Apache Junction. Although his business has been open for less than a year, Henrickson says he has been extremely busy loading up his 50-foot train on a 24-foot trailer and driving it to events held all over the Valley.

From birthday parties and grand openings to block parties, homeowners' association parties, charity events and more, Henrickson says his train is a popular addition to a variety of occasions. In addition to giving people rides, Henrickson's train has other more practical uses.

"Once, at a town party in Freestone Park in Gilbert, I hauled people from the far parking lot to the entrance." Henrickson's train includes an engine plus two cars and a caboose. Each car can typically hold four or five adults plus two kids, he says. The cars are all covered, and passengers can enjoy train music as they ride along, plus the sounds of horns, bells and whistles. Everyone who rides gets a boarding pass with a photo of the train as a souvenir.

"The reason it is called Desert Dwellers Express is that each car has a different desert animal on it. There is a coyote car, a bighorn sheep car and a roadrunner car," Henrickson says.

His love of trains goes back to when he was a boy playing with scale model trains and cars, and Henrickson says boys and girls are equally excited to ride his



ALL ABOARD: Tom Henrickson drives his train at a "Bebas" outdoor Christmas festival last month. Submitted photo

trackless train.

"I always tell people 'you are never too old to ride a train.'"

The vast majority of his business comes via word of mouth, Henrickson says, noting his 2013 calendar is filling up quickly.

Watching the reaction of the kids at various events is extremely rewarding, he adds.

"When they see the train coming down and I see how excited everyone is, it is well worth all of the effort it took to get everything going."

For more information, call 480-694-7697 or visit desertdwellersexpress.com.

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