

MODEL TRAINS

can bring out the child in anyone

By **TOM KANE**
This Week

Electric train sets and Christmas just go together. The whole family can enjoy a model train set.

Jim C. Kirk, who operates LGB Train Shop at 102 N. Division in Carterville, thinks they are healthier for families than are video games.

"Video games are isolating," said Kirk. "Mom, Dad and the kids can all enjoy a train set. They bring people together like board games do."

Kirk sells only the larger model trains, "O" gauge and "G" gauge. He has a counterpart in Marion who services the smaller train crowd with their "HO" and "N" gauge trains.

"G" gauge is really big, suitable for outdoor use. "O" gauge is the familiar Lionel train gauge.

Kirk has been in business for 28 years. He collected trains before he opened his shop. "It's a passion," he said.

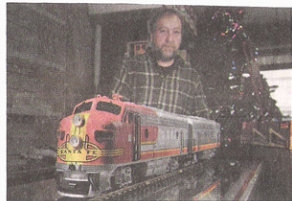
And business is good. "Sales are on a par with last Christmas, dollar for dollar," he said. "As long as you can stay on par you are doing well in this economy."

"It's a lot of fun. You get to experience the enthusiasm of kids and adults. There are a lot of people who couldn't get trains when they were young who can afford them now," he said.

There is a new development in the world of model railroading. The engines can be radio controlled. That means that a setup can have each train rolling in different directions on the same track. It's much more realistic.

Chuck McCabe has been running a train store out of a new building at 1913 Rendleman in Marion for 12 years. It's a two story operation. His most ambitious setup is housed in the basement. It is a train set on a grand scale with factories, a power plant, tunnels, lakes and streams. It is all in HO scale.

Chuck also sells model planes and cars. One of his



ON THE COVER: Jim C. Kirk, owner of LGB Train Shop in Carterville, poses with model of a Santa Fe locomotive in "G" scale. TOM KANE/THIS WEEK

biggest sellers is model helicopters.

"HO" scale is 78 per cent of the model railroad business," said McCabe. "The support for the scale is really great. You can get buildings, people and anything you can imagine for your setup." He also sells "N" gauge which is half the size of "HO."

In "HO" the radio controlled engine is more common to the smaller size and lower cost.

Spectators are welcome at McCabe's shop, both upstairs and downstairs. "We have people from different states who see my ads in national magazines and stop by for a visit."

"I have two pilots who schedule their refueling stops in Marion and rent a car to come visit the shop," said McCabe.

"We sure have a lot of fun here with the customers and the store," he said.

"It's just a barrel of fun," said McCabe.