

BASEMENT VILLAGE: Bill and Carole Kentner shown with model railroad village of Ninga.

Model village intrigues viewers

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The tiny village of Ninga always had a special place in Bill and Carole Kentner's heart.

Now it has a special place in their basement, too.

The couple grew up in the small town east of Boissevain. When Bill was looking for a novel way to show off his next model railroad creation, he said "Why not?" and built a model of the town on a four foot by eight foot sheet of plywood.

"It's a neat little town. There was everything in that town, everything that every town ever had."

Bill and Carole were showing off their model at the Brandon Farm Toy and Collectible Show, held Saturday and Sunday at Harry's Unkranian Kitchen.

The model is based on a 1951 photograph, and includes all the town's amenities at that time. Down the gravel road just recently named Main Street is the Royal Bank, a general store, three grain elevators, and some houses.

Off to the north, a truck is pulling out of a blacksmith's

shop, while a car fills up at an Esso station back on the main drag.

Around the town circles an "O" gauge railroad train, stopping briefly at the Ninga railroad station, located just where it was in 1952.

"It was just a piece of plywood Jan. 3," he explains. "I built all of the buildings. It took me about three or four hours a day."

During the two-day show, Carole said many people would gander casually in the direction of the display, but quickly become riveted when they recognize their former home town.

"That's just the way I remember it," is what some of the people say," she said.

"All of a sudden, they really start to look hard. I'd say, 'Did you grow up there?' and they'd say they did, or they curled there, or something."

The buildings are constructed from styrofoam, and brick surfaces are either pieces of styrofoam etched and painted, or are actually pieces of plastic finish supplied by hobby houses, he said.

"There will always be Ninga, he said.

Now, even more so. Bill says his next project will be a model of the complete run of the Great Northern railroad, a 110 kilometre line that used to run from Brandon to North Dakota and back.

"I'm going to try and do that in 32 feet, if I can."

Other displays at the show included Larry Buhler's display of John Deere tractor models.

Buhler, another Boissevain farmer, also builds models from cast metal parts he gets shipped in from the United States. He sells what he builds by mail order to help subsidize his own collection.

"Every morning, I'll get up at seven o'clock, go downstairs and tinker until everyone else gets up," he said. He also tries to sell other items he's collected, too.

"It's kind of a gamble. If I buy something at a show like this for \$10, I'll try and sell it for a little profit. If I do, that's fine, but if I don't, then I just add it to my collection."

"Some guys basically do it as a second income, mine is basically to support my hobby."

But selling the toys doesn't always pay for the hobby, said Ray Storozuk, a model railroader and farm implement salesman from Regina.

"It was intended to work that way, but it doesn't really. I usually end up buying more than I should. But it helps."

One thing Buhler and Storozuk do agree on is the therapeutic value of their hobby.

"I end up going down to the basement to work for a couple of hours, and it often grows into six or seven. But even though I go to bed late, I don't wake up the next morning tired. I feel refreshed," Storozuk said.

"It's the best thing going."

The farm toy and collectible show, the fourth annual, drew roughly 1,000 spectators, said co-organizer Steve Schuetz.

"We've had it for four years, this is the biggest increase (in attendance and displays) we've ever seen," he said.

"There was a lot of good, real good stuff."