

she described the component parts. “It takes 80 hours to complete — it’s two solid weeks of commitment.”

Lighting is key

Buildings that feature in the Dickens Village Series by Department 56 and those made by the Lemax Co. provide the core exhibits; many pack back into their original padded boxes for safe-keeping. “We have had a lot of gifts,” she said. “They match seamlessly nowadays.”

The base is sturdy enough for the designer to climb on to assemble the village. It features five sections, with residential and commercial predominating, using blue sheets and mirrors to create the effect of a “watery” base for the ferries and fishing boats.

The lighting is the key.

“We have it set on a timer that starts at 8:30 in the morning, then at night, people can enjoy it because we dim the other lights in the evenings,” she said.

Some years back, Roberts added trains — which enthusiasts will recognize as ON30 gauge on three HO tracks. They travel over 14 bridges and through six tunnels, providing noise and movement. There is also a trolley, which isn’t labeled but some say looks remarkably similar to Astoria’s Old 300.

The Hungry Harbor itself has its own building, and the neighboring Long Beach Tavern stands next to it, inevitably complete with a couple of appropriate scale model motorbikes parked outside. Oman and Sons, Cottage Bakery and the Dennis Company are among other familiar names.

Altogether, 32 businesses or local landmarks are labeled, including the Timberland Library, the Chinook Observer newspaper office and the Post Office. In all, there are 121 lighted buildings, 14 lighthouses and four carnival rides. “There are very few duplicates,” Meisner said.


Treasure hunt

To add to the novelty, the Hungry Harbor staff set diners on a treasure hunt, looking for all sorts of unusual items hidden in plain sight. These include a crab pot Christmas tree that is familiar to Ilwaco residents and Santa and eight reindeer going about their business. The only incongruous item is Doctor Who’s TARDIS time machine, which looks remarkably like a blue British police phone box from the 1960s, portrayed in identical scale to the rest of the village.

Once Jan. 31 signals the end of the season, Roberts and Meisner will take one last look at their handiwork. “It takes three days to break down,” Meisner said.

Roberts laughed when asked about where his collection lives the rest of the year. “It has its own storage unit! It sits there all year, except when it is out,” he said.

Future incarnations may be limited by the dimensions in the back of the restaurant.

“People give me stuff, so it is always changing,” Roberts said. “But I don’t know how much bigger I can make it.” 



Patrick Webb photos

Ty's Gas Station is one of the many business names that adorns the exhibits at the Hungry Harbor Grille Christmas village. Some are laid out next to their real-life neighbors, others can be found in unfamiliar locations, according to which person the owner Dennis Roberts selects to put together the annual display.



LEFT: Of course the Hungry Harbor Grille has its own commercial building in a prime position in the display, next to its real-life neighbor, the Long Beach Tavern. Some 32 businesses and institutions are represented. RIGHT: The level of detail captures the attention of visitors. Even this garbage can is to scale and has some authentic-looking rubbish inside it.