

ARTS & CULTURE

Model citizens

By DAMIEN SHERWOOD
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Shawn Kelley is recruiting anyone interested in building planes, trains or automobiles — but spaceships, robots or mechanized dinosaurs will do as well.

Kelley is part of a small group of model hobbyists in Cottage Grove who gather on Tuesday evenings to arrange plastic, glue and paint into miniature replicas of their favorite crafts and vehicles. And the group is looking to grow.

“We’re just looking to see if we can get some new and some younger people in,” said Kelley.

Kelley is also an aero-volunteer for the Oregon Department of Aviation at the Cottage Grove State Airport and uses the welcome center at the airport as a base of operations.

His love for the hobby started when he was young and served as a practical solution as well.

“They said I was ADD, you know, bouncing off the walls,” he recalled. “And they wanted to put me on all this stuff, these drugs.”

Kelley’s father rejected the prescriptions and instead handed his son a model to work on.

“He said, ‘Here, put this together. Focus. Put it together.’ And since then,

it’s kind of my little Zen thing to keep my mind focused,” said Kelley, who added that he’s also struggled with dyslexia, which has reduced over the years. “So, this helps me with all those problems. It’s just very calming.”

Also at the gathering Tuesday night was Don Hunter, 67, who started working on models when he was 12.

Fellow hobbyist Neil Wexler started when he was around 12 years old, too.

“My first memory (of building a model) was my middle brother, myself and my dad bought three Batmobiles,” Wexler reminisced. “We were sitting there with three of us, making Batmobiles.”

That was enough to get Wexler hooked.

For each of the members, the expression of creativity was also key factor in what’s kept them interested.

“It’s an art form,” Hunter explained.

“There’s a lot to it,” added Wexler. “It’s deciding what you want to model, weathering it, painting it, working out what markings you want to do — then there’s research involved in that because whatever you model, it’s kind of recreating a certain point in time.”

The model club is a space to explore these interests. Making time to create in the presence of

others cures what could otherwise be a somewhat lonesome hobby. The men spend their Tuesday evening casually sanding parts or making adjustments to their miniaturized vehicles, whittling away time with playful banter and exchanging model tips.

“It’s informal,” said Hunter. “There’s no dues, there’s no club membership or anything.”

“We hassle each other, sit back and build models,” Kelley added with a laugh.

The group has been meeting regularly for about five years at the airport.

Each of the hobbyists has their own specialty, Kelley focusing on aircraft (World War II and modern) and science fiction craft, Hunter specializing in pre-1970 cars and Wexler expanding his specializations to include motorcycles, aircraft, cars and trucks.

However, Kelley described the hobbyists as notoriously starting more projects than they finish.

“Yeah, it’s been a while since I finished one,” confessed Wexler.

While most of the models are created for fun, every now and again an opportunity comes around to show off, sparking incentive to get their projects done.

A couple times a year, some of the group mem-

bers like to participate in contests. One of the sporadic attendees to the model club specializes in tanks and makes consistently impressive displays at these competitions, noted the members.

Kelley expressed an interest in renting out the Cottage Grove Armory sometime for such a convention to bring more attention to the hobby locally.

“But, COVID has helped the model hobby,” he added. “It’s picked up a lot.”

Kelley said he’s tried to recruit younger hobbyists into the group, but hasn’t had much luck and is hoping to reach out to anyone in the community who builds or is interested in building.

“So, if you’re just at home doing it, you can come over here and just sit and see what we’re doing and say, ‘Hey, you know, I’d like to get into it,’” he said, adding that it has benefits for all ages. “It’s a great way to learn how to use all those skills that your teachers are talking about because you’ve first got to read the instructions, then you’ve got to learn how to how to interpret the instructions, get how it all works, and then you get to see a physical manifestation of it.”

The group meets at the Cottage Grove Airport on Tuesday nights at 5:30 p.m. For more information, call Shawn Kelley at 541-968-9328.

A Prayer for Relief for Those Suffering

May the mothers and children of Somalia as well as all those who go hungry in Ethiopia, the woman and girls of Afghanistan, the beleaguered folks of Haiti, the Uyghurs of Xinjiang China and indeed, may all the children of Earth who, laden heavy with want and grief, be delivered from their tears finding provision, rest and peace.

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