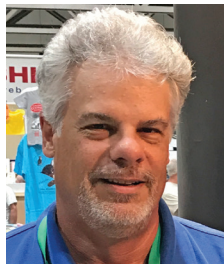


# HMA VIEWPOINT

## One man can make a difference



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**T**he hobby industry continues to battle other consumer interests under a needless black cloud. More tales are told that hint to its demise than pump energy into an experience that millions still enjoy.

The Model Railroad Industry Division/Hobby Manufacturers Association and other organizations are committed to spreading the benefits of model trains, RC cars, gaming, model building and other hobbies. Just recently, a new “Getting Started in Model Railroading” flyer was published to assist retailers.

However, while organizations spread the gospel from up top, the hobby’s survival depends on the village and proof that what one man creates can make a difference. A legacy Texas model train store was on life support well before its founder, Floyd “Buddy” Spraggins, passed away last spring. A favorite of locals for more than 40 years, Model Train Crossing was the premier trains-only hobby shop in Hurst, Texas, an established Dallas/Fort Worth community.

In the 1980s, Spraggins embraced his love for trains and opened a train shop in a loft inside his flooring business. He later expanded into a strip center along a busy thoroughfare near a popular mall. Few knew his first name – he was Buddy to a legion of customers – but Model Train Crossing thrived.

As Buddy’s health worsened in recent years, the store struggled. He was on-site, usually huddled in his jam-packed office because he couldn’t get around as well as he once did, so Model Train Crossing barely held on. The excitement of the big G-scale train that once circled the ceiling in the front of the store had vanished. Shelves were crammed, and product presentation by scale was unorganized.

Longtime friend Russell Duncan worked the front but could do little else under Buddy’s watch other than keep the doors open.

The smell of cigarette smoke from years of Buddy puffing in the office was a turnoff. The dingy green carpet needed a thorough cleaning.

Model Train Crossing was almost gone.

When Buddy died in the spring, at age 76, his son had to decide whether to continue. A firefighter, Avery Spraggins was only involved in the business as necessary, even though Buddy had hoped otherwise.

Avery enjoyed model trains as a kid and played on layouts he built with his father, but life’s progression creates distractions. The store could never offer him a living wage, so he worked elsewhere to support a wife and four daughters.

On those occasions when Buddy was hospitalized, Avery and Russell barely kept Model Train Crossing going. Some days the shop didn’t open.

The store’s fate seemed dismal. A probate judge held the cards, and Avery figured on shutting down when the court granted permission for it to resume normal business.

Soon after the judge ruled, Avery set closure in motion. A fire sale began on the first of November and was to last through Dec. 31.

Then midway through, something happened.

Customers came in to pay their last respects and it hit a chord.

“The stories that people were telling,” Avery recalled. “They were talking about another train store closing and that new owner would get rid of all the trains. They were talking about Dad, how much they liked him.”

Avery had heard enough. It would be a shame to see his father’s work just fade away.

He and Russell vowed to keep the store open and give it a fresh look. On mild winter days, the front and back doors were opened to air out the place. A strong northerly blast one week really helped, Avery said with a laugh.

That was just the start. The carpet was scrubbed and is now bright green, a hue that had been hidden since the ‘90s. A multi-scale working layout greets customers, and shelves are neatly stocked and organized with lots of new products. No more clutter of train sets and trinkets on the floor.

The store is shiny and inviting and beckons visitors to experience the joys of model railroading. Avery has worked Yelp and Google to stir interest. His daughter is letting everyone on Instagram know that the store has turned a new leaf.

As a result, Model Train Crossing experienced a surge in business and is enjoying a new lease on life.

“I’ve already had some customers say they’re coming back,” Avery said. “They said they feel the love in this place.”

That warm glow has brightened the future of Model Train Crossing and the hobby industry is better for it. **HM**



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