

## HUFF AND PUFF INDUSTRIES in Barrington Illinois

By Roy and Linda Bilsbarrow

**NOTE: Open to the public one day in JUNE each year. Check website: [www.trainlady.com](http://www.trainlady.com) for exact date.**

“G” gauge, “O” gauge and “N” gauge trains can be found at Huff and Puff Industries in Barrington, Illinois on the grounds of a 10 acre arboreal property owned by Elaine Silets (Train Lady) and her late husband, Harvey. The property originally was all meadowland. If a special event occurs in this family, a tree is planted on the property.

In 1992 Elaine started Huff and Puff Industries that creates a variety of train layouts either of her own design or special requests from private individuals. She loves to design and build the layouts. With garden railway layouts, she even plots out and creatively selects the plants and trees. She even enjoys making the people and buildings.

Why is Elaine called the Train Lady? In the 1990's she was building a model train layout for Chicago's Children's Museum and she was often seen helping assemble the layout. The children started calling her the Train Lady. She loved it and quickly had it legally trademarked. It is also the name of her website: [www.trainlady.com](http://www.trainlady.com).

At Christmas time, if you visit the Hancock Building in Chicago you can view a huge layout featuring mountains, valleys and even a 7 ½ foot working waterfall. She makes subtle changes to it each year and her regular yearly visitors both young and old look to discover them.

## GARDEN RRs

The Shabui garden railway runs thru her Japanese garden. The train is a D&RGW with a Bumble Bee paint scheme; it is a 2-8-0. Roy is busy taking a photo

Now onto her large garden railroad layout called Glore and Tryumfant and covers 6,000 square feet. Elaine considers it a moving sculpture. It was started 20 years ago and contains both country and city scenes plus a circus. She has small oak and birch trees and creates wonderful flora scenes. When she was planning this railroad, she used a number of garden hoses to help plot out the track.

This railroad features streams, waterfalls plus numerous bridges. She is especially proud of her two 6 foot bridges: one is a red suspension bridge and the other a curved trestle.

Elaine loves running her outdoor trains all year long. Notice the gray building with the large picture window, it is the command center and is heated.

## “O” GAUGE RR

The Great Wandering Tree Railroad built in 2004 is housed in a life size replica of Lionel’s famous Rico Station. Trains run on 3 levels in 2,500 square feet with a City of Chicago theme. It is operated on the same protocol as a regular railroad. Grades are 3% or less which is recognized internationally as the standard.

This railroad took 2 ½ years to build and, at times, had 6 to 8 people working on it at the same time. The layout is 44 square feet by 77 square feet. Elaine built this railroad for her husband, Harvey who collected toy trains. It required 36,000 linear feet of wire and has 64 interactive automations. A complete working signal system is in place.

The view you get upon entering the building is a meticulously detailed miniature version of the City of Chicago. It is truly awesome. A muralist was hired to paint the scenes and everything on the layout matches exactly to the paintings. It is seamless.

Millenium Park located near Lake Michigan looks like it is real with boats seemingly bobbing in the harbor. The Crown Fountains even sprout water every few minutes just as the real ones do. Creativity can be seen with Elaine and Harvey spitting water at each other. Another feature is the billowing steel of the Frank Gehry designed Jay Pritzker Pavilion and, of course, Chicago’s favorite “The Bean.” Wrigley Field can be seen complete with the roof top seating across the street.

With 16 trains, 2 trolleys, 2 “L” trains and 2 subway cars, this layout has lots of action. A section features the oil refineries in South Chicago and Indiana.

Miniature cameras are mounted on 4 engines and the video plays on 4 video screens located near the control panel. Watching the videos, it seems like you are actually riding the train as you are immersed in the scenery. Imagine sitting in your favorite chair with the real time video playing in your living room.

This layout has been featured on the covers of Neiman Marcus Christmas Book and on the cover of Hammacher Schlemmer’s Holiday Gift Catalog.

The Great Wandering Tree layout worth 2 ½ million dollars will be a gift to the City Chicago when an appropriate space open to the public becomes available.

Sorry folks the story ends here as the “N” gauge Railroad was flooded out 2 weeks ago. Perhaps, next year we can visit this train heaven and report back on this railroad.

Keep checking the webpage ([www.trainlady.com](http://www.trainlady.com)) to find out the June date for next year. As it gets very crowded, we suggest visiting in the morning and viewing the Great Wandering Tree building first. This property is located on a small country road, so shuttle buses are used to bring people in and out.